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Association of Australian
Medical Research Institutes

SUBMISSION TO THE

DRAFT 2016 NATIONAL RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE ROADMAP

16 JANUARY 2017

Contact:

Professor Tony Cunnigham AO
President
Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes
ABN 12 144 783 728

PO Box 2097
Royal Melbourne Hospital VIC 3050 president@aamri.org.au
www.aamri.org.au

Name of Submitter:

Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes

Draft 2016 National Research Infrastructure Roadmap Submission Template

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The Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes (AAMRI) welcomes the opportunity to comment of the Draft 2016 National Research Infrastructure Roadmap.

Key recommendation 1 – Adopt Nine Focus Areas and their priorities to address future needs, fulfil our national interests and build on our existing national capabilities.

AAMRI supports the nine identified focus areas and related priorities, and believes they appropriately cover research infrastructure needs for health and medical research.

Key recommendation 2 – Establish a Research Infrastructure Advisory Group

AAMRI supports the establishment of a Research Infrastructure Advisory Group.

Key recommendation 3 – Develop a Roadmap Investment Plan

AAMRI supports the development of a Roadmap Investment Plan. The Plan should identify sources of funding for research infrastructure, and where appropriate sustainable mechanisms that will ensure long-term stable research infrastructure funding. Where feasable funding should be used to leverage additional investment into science and research from other portfolios, state and territory governments, industry and the non-government sector.

It would assist the sector if the Roadmap could outline the anticipated timeframe in which the individual focus area strategy plans will be developed.

Key recommendation 4 – Address the Needs of Complementary Initiatives

AAMRI agrees with the draft Roadmap that the research infrastructure needs of complementary government intitiatives such as the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) and the Biomedical Translation Fund (BTF) need to be considered and assessed. Once fully capitalised the MRFF will

provide the single largest boost to research funding in Australia's history. The net earnings from the $20 billion fund are expected to disburse around $1 billion per annum, effectively doubling the Australian Government's investment in health and medical research and innovation. The BTF will be responsible for an additional $500m to fund translational research over seven years. Together, these initiatives will significantly increase the demand for access to research infrastructure. It is important to acknowledge the objectives of both of these funds will not be met if we do not have the research infrastructure capacity and capability to maximise their potential social and economic benefits.

As the Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy 2016-2021 states very clearly, the MRFF cannot fund all of the broader research infrastructure required for it to succeed, and the best immediate use of its funds will be through measures that harness existing infrastructure and human capital[1]. The impact of the MRFF would be severely diminished if its funds were diverted away to provide ongoing support for existing or new landmark national research infrastructure facilities. Funding for the underlying national and landmark research infrastructure needed to support health and medical research should continue to be supported through the same mechanisms that will support national and landmark research infrastructure in other areas of science (for example, through NCRISS or successor programs).

AAMRI stresses that in order to preserve the integrity of the strategy and objectives of the MRFF it should not be seen as a primary or replacement funding mechanism for ongoing or future investment in national and landmark health and medical research infrastructure.

This Government has targeted the health and medical research sector as an area for growth and increased investment in coming years. Having the right level of infrastructure in place will ensure maximum value is gained from future investment.

AAMRI recommends that the final Roadmap and the Roadmap Investment Plan consider the level of increased research infrastructure investment needed for expanding health and medical research sector.

Key recommendation 5 – recognise that a skilled workforce is critical to national research infrastructure.

AAMRI supports this recommendation and recognises that people are the core of the national research infrastructure system.

An internationally competitive recruitment market and can make it difficult to recruit people with the technical and scientific skills needed to operate equipment at research infrastructure facilities. Providing long-term and stable financial support to facilities will assist, allowing facilities to provide greater career certainty and investment in people.

To ensure the next generation of researchers have the skills needed to utilise national research infrastructure facilities, where feasible, these facilities should be integrated into broader research training programs. National infrastructure facilities will also need to continue to provide research access for doctoral and post-doctoral researchers.

[1] Australian Government (2016) Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy 2016-2021

Key recommendation 6 – note that existing landmark facilities will require ongoing investment

AAMRI agrees that facilities such as the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL), Australian Synchrotron, and the OPAL Nuclear Research Reactor will all require ongoing investment. This might also prove to be the case for other national landmark facilities that are commissioned as a result of this roadmap. However, the ongoing investment in these facilities should not come at the expense of funding the research that will utilise them. As outlined in AAMRI's response to key recommendation 4, it would be inappropriate to utilise new funding streams such as the MRFF to support continued investment in these facilities, particularly given that these facilities are used to support research from all disciplines and not just health and medical research. Instead a separate funding stream for national landmark facilities needs to be identified.

Key recommendation 7 – Implement a coordinated approach to international engagement

AAMRI agrees with this recommendation, and sees international engagement as a smart investment that provides Australia with access to a much greater range of world class high quality research infrastructure. This is infrastructure that Australia alone cannot build but is essential to the research needs of the nation. Gaining access to world class facilities overseas requires Australia to have world class facilities to offer in return.

The roadmap has identified the range of existing global research infrastructure initiatives that Australia currently participates, and the benefits this delivers. As the Roadmap states, there would be great benefit in coordinating a national approach to international engagement.

AAMRI recommends that as part of the development of the Roadmap Investment Plan consideration is given to how to strategically resource international engagement to ensure maximum benefit. This should include providing support for ongoing intiatives, and identifying where new strategic collaborations would deliver benefits.

Key recommendation 8 – Raise awareness of national research infrastructure

AAMRI supports this recommendation.

Key recommendation 9 – Urgently Address National High Performance Computing

AAMRI supports this recommendation.