

OUTCOME 11

## Health and medical research

**Australia's health system benefits from high quality health and medical research conducted at the highest ethical standard, well-developed research capabilities and sound evidence-based advice that informs health policy and practice**

### Outcome summary—the year ahead

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is a statutory agency within the Health and Ageing portfolio.

The NHMRC is the key agency for managing the Australian Government's investment in health and medical research, and the sole contributor to this outcome. The NHMRC also disseminates authoritative public health advice, considers and promulgates advice on ethical standards in relation to complex health issues, research involving humans and animals, and regulates sensitive medical research activities.

The NHMRC's strength is built on the diversity of its committee membership which draws upon the resources of all components of the health system, including governments, medical practitioners, nurses and allied health professionals, researchers, community health organisations, social health researchers, business and consumers.

The *National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992* (NHMRC Act) provides four statutory obligations for the NHMRC:

- to raise the standard of individual and public health throughout Australia;
- to foster development of consistent health standards between the states and territories;
- to foster medical research and training and public health research and training throughout Australia; and
- to foster consideration of ethical issues relating to health.

The NHMRC also has statutory obligations under the *Prohibition of Human Cloning Act 2002* (PHC Act) and the *Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002* (RIHE Act).

### Key strategic directions for 2005-06

During 2005-06, the Council will continue to:

- provide oversight of the work of the Research Committee, the Health Advisory Committee (HAC), and the Australian Health Ethics Committee (AHEC);
- shape the NHMRC as an organisation that responds effectively to the needs of government, researchers, health professionals and the Australian community;
- promote a research culture that is positive towards research commercialisation; and
- increase awareness of the outcomes and benefits of medical research and how this facilitates the development of health standards and health policy.

Departmental resources are provided to support the Council's objectives as outlined above and in meeting the statutory requirements of the NHMRC Act, the PHC Act, and the RIHE Act. This includes supporting meetings of Council, its principal committees and various expert working committees and providing advice to governments, researchers and the community.

The operations of the NHMRC are supported by a strategic plan approved by the Minister for Health and Ageing. For the 2003-06 triennium, the NHMRC is:

- creating internationally competitive knowledge;
- developing research capacity and capability within Australia;
- improving the utilisation of research findings in health;
- maintaining and promulgating high ethical standards;
- engaging with the Australian community;
- building and maintaining a comprehensive regulatory framework for the use of excess human embryos and the prohibition of human cloning; and
- improving governance and accountability.

The activities of the NHMRC translate into four major groups: health and medical research; health policy and advice; health ethics; and the regulation of research involving donated IVF embryos, including monitoring compliance with the ban on human cloning and certain other activities.

### **Health and medical research**

The aim of the NHMRC's Research Committee is to ensure that Australia's health and medical research effort provides the information needed to improve the health of all Australians while simultaneously positioning Australia at the forefront of international health and medical research.

The Research Committee will be reviewing its national research plan developed in 2003-04, which addressed major health issues, including those reflected in the national health priority areas and the National Research Priorities.

As part of the review of the Council's triennial Strategic Plan 2003-06, activities for 2005-06 will include:

- funding high impact research and developing a strong research workforce;
- progressing the Government's National Research Priorities;
- increasing research investment in Indigenous health according to the priorities identified in the NHMRC's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Roadmap;
- continuing the review of the *Joint NHMRC/Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (AVCC) Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice (1997)*, which is being reviewed by the NHMRC, AVCC and Australian Research Council and is now referred to as the Draft Australian Code for Conducting Research – 2004;

- implementing a research component of the Government's Strengthening Cancer Care package, through investment of \$5 million seed funding as start-up support for a National Research Centre in Asbestos Related Diseases. The main objective of this initiative is to establish a national focus for research into asbestos related cancers. The NHMRC will support the establishment of the centre through a competitive process. Funding for the centre and its research activities will be administered through the NHMRC Medical Research Endowment Account; and
- improving the reviewing and reporting of the impact of research grants and awards provided by the NHMRC.

### **Health policy and advice**

The NHMRC plays a key role in providing authoritative health advice to the Minister, governments, practitioners and the community.

Major initiatives for the Health Advisory Committee for 2005-06 will include:

- commissioning the development of new health guidelines and information in identified priority areas, including cardiac rehabilitation in Indigenous communities;
- increasing cultural competencies for healthier living through the development and dissemination of strategies for communicating health messages to culturally and linguistically diverse communities;
- improving communication on diagnostic and therapeutic interventions;
- undertaking a systematic review of the NHMRC's existing health advice and information;
- providing authoritative guidance for the use and application of electronic guidelines and decision support systems;
- updating existing NHMRC guidelines including nutrient reference values, recreational water, and drinking water treatment chemicals;
- development of an electronic decision support tool for the management of water quality in rural and remote communities; and
- supporting the Guidelines Assessment Register for the identification, development, review and endorsement of clinical care guidelines and health advice.

### **Health ethics**

The NHMRC, through the Australian Health Ethics Committee (AHEC), builds confidence in the Australian community by considering ethical issues relating to health and the health issues in the conduct of research involving humans.

Major priorities for the AHEC for 2005-06 include:

- finalisation of a major review of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans*, in accordance with Section 8 (2) of the NHMRC Act;
- the development of ethical guidelines on issues surrounding organ donation;
- the development of ethical guidelines on the care and management of patients diagnosed with post coma unresponsiveness (persistent vegetative state); and

- implementation of the recommendations arising from the joint Australian Law Reform Commission/AHEC review of the protection of human genetic information, in particular, consideration of privacy issues associated with human genetic testing.

### **Regulation of the ban on human cloning and licensing of human embryo research**

Reviews of the *Prohibition of Human Cloning Act 2002* (PHC Act) and the *Research Involving Human Cloning Act 2002* (RIHE Act) will be completed during 2005-06. The reviews are a statutory requirement of both Acts. They are required to be independent and the reports are to be tabled in both Houses of Parliament and provided to the Council of Australian Governments by 19 December 2005.

Major priorities for the Embryo Research Licensing Committee of the NHMRC for 2005-06 include:

- considering applications for licences (or variations to existing licences) to use excess assisted reproductive technology embryos in research and, in accordance with the provisions of the RIHE Act, deciding whether or not to issue licences and the conditions to be attached to those licences;
- monitoring activities to ensure compliance with the RIHE Act and the PHC Act and taking necessary enforcement action;
- maintaining a public database containing information about licences issued by the Licensing Committee;
- reporting to Parliament by 30 June and 31 December on the operation of the legislation and the licences issued; and
- implementing the Committee's communication strategy.

In addition to the NHMRC having administrative responsibility for these Acts, the Department of Health and Ageing and the NHMRC jointly advise Ministers on regulatory and health policy on human cloning, the use of embryos in research and related matters.

### **Outcome 11 resourcing**

Table 3.1.11 shows how the 2005-06 Budget appropriations translate to total resourcing for Outcome 11, including administered expenses, revenue from government (appropriation), revenue from other sources (Departmental) and the total price of outputs.

Section 3—Department outcomes—11 Health and medical research

**Table 3.1.11: Total resources for Outcome 11**

	Estimated actual 2004-05 \$'000	Budget estimate 2005-06 \$'000
<b>Administered appropriations</b>		
<b>Program 11.1: Medical Research</b>		
To Department of Health and Ageing	22,159	16,289
To Medical Research Endowment Special Account - <i>National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992 and FMA Act 1997, s21</i> <sup>(1)(3)</sup>	411,011	430,376
Total Bill 1	433,170	446,665
	<b>433,170</b>	<b>446,665</b>
<b>Total Administered Appropriations</b>	<b>433,170</b>	<b>446,665</b>
<b>from Special Accounts (estimated payments from Special Account balances)</b> <sup>(2)(3)</sup>		
Medical Research Endowment Special Account - <i>National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992 and FMA Act 1997, s21</i>	405,793	503,341
	405,793	503,341
<b>Departmental appropriations</b>		
<b>Health and Ageing</b>		
Output Group 1 - Policy Advice	6,296	6,550
Output Group 2 - Program Management	14,690	15,284
<b>Total price of departmental outputs</b> <i>(Total revenue from government and from other sources)</i>	20,985	21,834
Total revenue from government (appropriations) contributing to price of departmental outputs	20,303	21,401
Total revenue from other sources	682	433
<b>Total price of departmental outputs</b> <i>(Total revenue from government and from other sources)</i>	20,985	21,834
<b>Total Price of Outputs for Outcome 11</b> <i>Revenue from Government and from other sources</i>	<i>(Total)</i> 20,985	21,834
<b>Total estimated resourcing for Outcome 11</b> <i>(Total price of outputs and administered appropriations)</i>	<b>454,155</b>	<b>468,499</b>
	2004-05	2005-06
<b>Average staffing level (number)</b>		
Department	181	189

1. Flows into Special Accounts are also shown in the receipts column of the Special Accounts table in Table 2.6.

2. Special Account outflows are shown in the payments column of the Special Account table in Table 2.6. The estimated payments from special account balances are provided by way of note only and do not form part of the total estimated resourcing.

3. Where names of Acts have been abbreviated, the full name of the Act can be found in the Acts Glossary at the end of Table 2.6.

**Measures affecting Outcome 11<sup>1</sup>**

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
	\$m	\$m	\$m	\$m
Human Genetics Advisory Committee - establishment	1.196	1.921	2.493	2.030
Radiofrequency Electromagnetic Energy Program - maintain funding	- 0.229	- 0.240	- 0.247	- 0.258
Regulation of research involving embryos and prohibition of human cloning - maintain funding	-	-	-	-
Strengthening Cancer Care - National Research Centre for Asbestos Related Diseases	0.280	1.705	1.731	1.767

**Performance information for Outcome 11**

**Table 3.2.11: Performance information for Outcome 11**

**Performance information for administered items**

Administered funding—Health and medical research programs	
Medical Research.	<p><i>Quality:</i> Increased research effort in the National Research Priority areas, the national health priority areas, and other priority areas as identified in the NHMRC’s Strategic Plan 2003-06.</p> <p><i>Quality:</i> Compliance with the <i>National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans</i> by registered Human Research Ethics Committees.</p> <p><i>Quality:</i> Compliance with the requirements of the <i>Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002</i> and the <i>Prohibition of Human Cloning Act 2002</i>.</p>
<b>Cost: \$446.665m</b>	

**Performance information for departmental outputs**

Output group 1—Policy advice	
<p>Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical Research; and</li> <li>• 2005-06 Budget measures.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Quality:</i> Ministers’ satisfaction with the quality, relevance and timeliness of our advice for Australian Government decision making.</p> <p><i>Quality:</i> Timely production of evidence-based advice.</p>

<sup>1</sup> This relates to measures disclosed in the 2005-06 Budget context (that is, measures agreed since the *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2004-05* (MYEFO)).

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<b>Output group 1—Policy advice</b>	
	<p><i>Quality:</i> Provision of opportunity for relevant stakeholders to participate in the development of evidenced-based advice.</p> <p><i>Quality:</i> Timely production of ethics advice.</p>
<b>Price: \$6.550m</b>	

<b>Output group 2—Program management</b>	
<p>Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• financial management and reporting;</li> <li>• development and management of grants and contracts; and</li> <li>• administration and revision of legislation as required.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Quality:</i> Administered budget predictions are met and actual expenses vary less than 0.5% from budgeted expenses.</p> <p><i>Quality:</i> Opportunity for stakeholders to participate in program development.</p> <p><i>Quality:</i> Development and management of contracts comply with procurement and accountability guidelines.</p> <p><i>Quality:</i> Effective implementation of legislative reviews and compliance with legislation.</p>
<b>Price: \$15.284m</b>	

**Evaluations for Outcome 11**

There are no evaluations reported under Outcome 11.

