National Health Genomics Policy Framework 2018-2021

Fact Sheet

The National Health Genomics Policy Framework (the Framework) was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Health Council in November 2017. It will harness the health benefits of genomic knowledge and technology into the Australian health system in an efficient, effective, ethical and equitable way to improve individual and population health.

The Framework recognises the increasing potential of genomics¹ in helping people live longer and better through appropriate access to genomic knowledge and technology to prevent, diagnose, treat and monitor disease.

The timeframe of the Framework is three years, with a review anticipated in 2020 to inform the next iteration. As such, the Framework prioritises particular issues for initial consideration and indicates where further work is needed, while also recognising that stakeholders have a role in addressing issues independently. The Framework is not intended to address all issues related to genomics and health.

Development of the Framework

In March 2016, the Australian Health Ministers’ Advisory Council (AHMAC) directed the Commonwealth to lead, in partnership with states and territories, the development of a whole-of-governments high level policy framework to improve coordination and consistency in approach to integrating genomics in health care. The Framework has been informed by extensive national, public and targeted stakeholder consultation.

Strategic Priorities

The Framework identifies five Strategic Priorities:
1. Person-centred approach: delivering high quality care for people through a person-centred approach to integrating genomics into health care;
2. Workforce: building a skilled workforce that is literate in genomics;
3. Financing: ensuring sustainable and strategic investment in cost-effective genomics;
4. Services: maximising quality, safety and clinical utility of genomics in health care; and
5. Data: responsible collection, storage, use and management of genomic data.

The following three principles underpin the Strategic Priorities of the Framework:
- The application of genomic knowledge is ethically, legally and socially responsible and community trust is promoted.
- Access and equity are promoted for vulnerable populations.
- The application of genomic knowledge to health care is supported and informed by evidence and research.

To help guide decision and policy makers in successfully implementing the Framework, three key enablers have been identified:

¹ The term ‘genomics’ is used to refer to both the study of single genes (genetics) and the study of an individual’s entire genetic makeup (genome) and how it interacts with environmental and non-genetic factors.
• collaborative governance and leadership;
• stakeholder engagement; and
• national and international partners.

Next Steps
The Framework provides a shared direction and commitment between all governments in Australia to consistently and strategically integrate genomics into the Australian health system through an agreed high-level national approach to policy, regulatory and investment decision-making for genomics.

The Framework will be supported by a joint Commonwealth and state and territory Implementation Plan. The Commonwealth is currently developing the Implementation Plan with input from a jurisdictional Project Reference Group under the auspice of AHMAC’s Clinical Principal Committee.

The Implementation Plan, which is expected to be considered by Health Ministers in 2018, will focus on priority actions for the first three years, and will allow governments to address current and emerging priorities as resources permit.

Recognising the importance of promoting community trust and confidence is fundamental to realising the full potential of genomics in the health system, Health Ministers’ agreed a first priority for implementing the Framework is to address the key related ethical, legal and social issues of most concern to the community.

The Implementation Plan will also build on the considerable body of work in genomics already being progressed across Australia.

The COAG Health Council is to consider options for monitoring and reporting progress and performance of the implementation of the Framework alongside the Implementation Plan.

For more information
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