



Mr Sandy Hollway AO  
Chairman, Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness  
c/o AusAID  
GPO Box 887  
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Mr Hollway

I welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Review of Aid Effectiveness, particularly on the future organisational structure for the aid program.

We acknowledge and support the Australian Government's overseas aid objective (delivered through AusAid) of assisting developing countries reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development. We consider that NHMRC can strongly contribute to the future structure of the aid program through a strategic alliance with AusAID around research and training to improve health and well-being of people in developing countries.

Addressing global health issues is a priority for NHMRC. We have a commitment, as shown in our Strategic Plan, to contribute to the improvement of health throughout the world. Our support has focussed on the countries in our region of the world.

### Benefits from an alliance

There can be significant benefits from an alignment of strategies between NHMRC and AusAid.

The NHMRC is Australia's peak body for:

- funding health and medical research
- developing health advice for the community, and
- providing advice on ethical behaviour in health care and in the conduct of health and medical research.

A strong alignment of strategies between AusAID and NHMRC would provide the Australian government with several advantages. Funding research through NHMRC enables high-quality and rigorous peer-review, based on the excellence of the science, the relevance of the research, and the track record of the applicants in being able to successfully undertake the research.

We currently fund, through Australian Universities and institutes, considerable amounts of research outside Australia. We place no restrictions on where our funded research is conducted, provided

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GPO Box 1421, Canberra ACT 2601

16 Marcus Clarke Street, Canberra City ACT 2600

T. 13 000 NHMRC (13 000 64672) or +61 2 6217 9000 F. +61 2 6217 9100 E. [nhmrc@nhmrc.gov.au](mailto:nhmrc@nhmrc.gov.au)

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that the funds are administered under the control of an Australian research institution. NHMRC funding is therefore transportable, flexible and assures quality research as a return on investment.

NHMRC now supports a wide-range of both applied and basic research in all four research 'pillars' of health services research, public health research, clinical research and biomedical research.

#### Rationale for an alignment of NHMRC and AusAid in supporting research and research translational and implementation.

The importance of research on improving the quality of life of people in low to middle-income countries is critical. This is reflected in the AusAID Development Research Strategy 2008-10 which identified the following key goals:

- assurance that quality research continues and is well communicated
- research outcomes have the opportunity to influence policies and programs (both AusAID's and partner countries); and
- capacity building of researchers is inherent to any research program.

In addition, to ensure that high-quality and fruitful research is conducted, AusAID recognises the importance of linkages. This was outlined in the strategy *Leverage Linkages With The Rest Of The Australian Government To Bolster Research Quality*.

#### NHMRC support of health and medical research in our region.

While the majority of NHMRC's activities are Australian-based, NHMRC has actively supported health and medical research in developing countries in our region. In 2010, NHMRC funded 32 grants in global health totaling \$5.2 million in that year - an increase of more than 10-fold compared to a decade ago. Through these grants researchers have established networks both with the local communities and governments in these countries. This means that the outcomes of research can be taken up quickly by the local communities involved. A list of grants may be found at (<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/grants/dataset/issues/global-health>).

We recently held a workshop to enhance networking between funded researchers and to provide us with information on what best works to foster strong outcomes of our funded research. It was also an opportunity to highlight the outcomes of a funding partnership between NHMRC and the Wellcome Trust in public health research in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. An account of this workshop may be found at (<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/media/events/index.htm#4>).

Specific examples of this research are listed below.

1. NHMRC has supported research by Professor Brian Kay AM into innovative options for controlling *Aedes aegypti*, the container-breeding mosquito and carrier of the dengue virus. By controlling mosquito numbers using one of its natural predators, *Mesocyclops*, total eradication of the mosquito and hence, dengue infections has occurred in 32 of 37 communes in Vietnam. This equates to the protection of over 600,000 people from dengue disease.

The use of *Mesocyclops* is now an extremely cost-effective integral part of Vietnam's national dengue control plan. The success of this work is attributable to a multi-sector approach of scientists, local community and government, specifically the General Department of Preventive Medicine and HIV-AIDS Control, Ministry of Health, Vietnam.

2. With funding from the NHMRC to address problems related to poisoning and suicide in Sri Lanka, Professor Andrew Dawson began by establishing an international collaborative research centre in the country. This initiative was called the *South Asian Clinical Toxicology Research Collaboration (SACTRC): Building Sustainable Research Capacity in Asia*.

Research was conducted by 17 postgraduate students supported by a locally trained infrastructure group in epidemiology and clinical trials. This collaboration was extremely successful in building local capacity, producing 11 postgraduate degrees and 101 publications – more than 50% with local senior authorship.

Research by this group has led to major regulatory policy change, with three pesticides responsible for 60% of deaths being withdrawn from use. Changes in national and international educational guidelines were also achieved. SACTRC is now managing the transition to local leadership to support its future goals of independence and primary funding to local collaborators.

#### NHMRC collaboration in global health with other research funding agencies.

NHMRC has built linkages with other international agencies to tackle some of the major health issues facing developing countries worldwide. For example, NHMRC has joined with the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa, China, and Canada to support implementation research in high blood pressure control.

Though effective treatments are available for high blood pressure, few in low and middle-income countries receive this treatment. Our joint research effort will focus on research to inform policies in these countries on effective strategies to target high blood pressure and thereby reduce the costly (in human and economic terms) sequelae that includes premature death and disability from stroke, heart attack and kidney failure.

NHMRC also has close relations with other funding bodies active in global health research, such as the US National Institutes of Health, the UK Medical Research Council, the Pasteur Institute, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and others, through membership of the Heads of International (medical) Research Organisations.

#### International Collaborations between government agencies.

Assisting countries to address their own health issues through research, building their own capacities and skills to undertake research, and helping their research institutions grow, is a wonderful outcome of NHMRC and other organisations' support. AusAid has done much valuable work in this area. Australia's effort would be even more powerful and helpful by having stronger alignment of approaches by the two organisations.

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National collaborations between government agencies achieve the comprehensive, *multisectoral* approach necessary to aid in the prevention, care and treatment of disease and ill health. This type of collaboration is becoming more common internationally. For example,

- Department for International Development (UK) and the UK Medical Research Council

The Department for International Development (DFID) in the United Kingdom has research agreements in place with UK Research Councils including the Medical Research Council (MRC). The agreement between DFID and MRC is the basis of a 'partnership that supports UK-led biomedical and public health research to tackle the priority health problems of poor people in developing countries'.

Under this agreement, DFID provides MRC with £4million per year to augment its own support for projects and programs in line with an agreed strategy relevant to the needs of poorer countries. DFID reviews the MRC's portfolio of research on health in developing countries on an annual basis and these reviews have consistently concluded that this partnership delivers 'high-quality knowledge in a cost effective manner'.

- President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (US)

The United States Government, through support and advice from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), established the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) in 2003. While PEPFAR was initially established to deliver emergency relief strategies, it is now focused on building sustainable programs. One such program is a joint funding agreement between PEPFAR and the NIH which aims to increase the number of clinicians in developing countries (namely Africa) and to generate well trained researchers who are able to apply a multidisciplinary and implementation focused approach to locally relevant scientific questions.

A stronger strategic alliance between NHMRC and AusAID will enhance Australia's capacity and profile in providing effective, valuable aid especially in our region of the world. I would be pleased to provide further details to you and your committee on options to achieve such an alignment.

Yours sincerely



Professor Warwick Anderson, AM  
Chief Executive Officer

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