

2009

The Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Tabling Statement

Government Response to the
Standing Committee on Health and Disability
(6th Assembly)
Report No 7

HEALTH SCIENCE IN THE ACT

Presented by
Katy Gallagher MLA
Minister for Health

15 / 10 / 2009

TABLING STATEMENT

Mr Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to table the ACT Government's Response to the *Standing Committee on Health and Disability Report No 7: Health Science in the ACT*.

I would like to commend members of the former Standing Committee for their consideration of this important issue and acknowledge the stakeholders who provided input to the inquiry process.

The Government welcomes the former Committee's report, which highlights a number of issues relating to health and medical research in the ACT.

The ACT has a strong, wide-ranging health and medical research sector concentrated in a relatively small geographic area. This encompasses biomedical and biotechnological research; clinical, community and population health research; health services and health promotion research; and research on social factors contributing to health and illness.

The key institutions are: ACT Health with a burgeoning research effort in bench research, epidemiological surveillance and clinical research, including general practice and nursing and allied health research in partnership with a range of institutions; the Australian National University, notably the John Curtin School of Medical Research; the Centre for Mental Health Research; the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health; the National Institute for Primary Health Care Research; and the University of Canberra. Other health related research institutions include the Defence Science and Technology Organisation, and various CSIRO Divisions

The establishment of the ANU Medical School in 2004 also significantly boosted the ACT health and medical research sector

The Government is committed to supporting health and medical research in the ACT. Under its Research Policy Framework, the Government committed to work with the ACT health and medical research community in the following four endeavours:

1. Supporting the development of the health and medical research community in the ACT and surrounding region in a way that builds on our local advantages; including planning for the coherent development of research facilities, communication technology, training in research and major research collaborations.
2. Ensuring a whole of government approach that coordinates the evolution of the ACT's health and medical research effort with industry development and commercial investment.
3. Pursuing the ACT's interests in the development of national health and medical research policy and playing a strong part in the implementation of that agenda on behalf of the nation.

4. Encouraging policy and practice oriented research by the health and medical researchers; and supporting research and evidence based policy and practice in the provision of health care.

The Government agrees to six and agrees in principle to three of the Standing Committee's twelve recommendations. The Government notes two recommendations and does not agree with one recommendation.

The Government Response to the Standing Committee Report refers to the establishment of an ACT Health Research Office to replace the Canberra Hospital Research Office. This is intended to provide an overarching structure to support health and medical research across the Health portfolio. An ACT Health Research Governance Framework and associated research policy and guidelines for research practice have also been put in place.

This work was undertaken within the context of previous reviews of health and medical research, the Standing Committee Report and accreditation of ACT Health which in 2009, for the first time, included an accreditation standard on research.

The ACT Health Research Office will be primarily responsible for the governance and management of all research undertaken within ACT Health and further develop collaborative partnerships with other research organisations.

The Research Office will:

- approve and register, prior to commencement, all research conducted within ACT Health;
- assume responsibility for the leadership, coordination, governance and promotion of research across ACT Health, including the management of research funding, and oversee the implementation of the ACT Health Research Policy and Guidelines for Research Practice;
- provide advice to ACT Health on health and medical research policy issues; and
- report on research activity within ACT Health to the ACT Health Portfolio Executive quarterly and coordinate reporting on research activity and funding in the ACT Health Annual Report

Research information will continue to be used to assist ACT Health in the development of policies and interventions to improve health outcomes for people living in the Australian Capital Territory and the surrounding region.

I thank the former Standing Committee for its examination of health science in the ACT.

2009

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**Government Response to the
Standing Committee on Health and Disability
(6th Assembly)
Report No 7**

Health Science in the ACT

**Presented by
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Minister for Health**

15/10/2009

INTRODUCTION

On 30 March 2005 the Standing Committee on Health and Disability (6th Assembly) resolved to conduct an inquiry into the relationship between the health and science sectors with a particular emphasis on health and medical research.

The inquiry was first advertised in *The Canberra Times* on 16 April 2005 and in *The Chronicle* on 19 April 2005.

In November 2005, the then Minister for Health, Mr Simon Corbell MLA provided a Government submission to the Inquiry.

On 25 February 2008 the Government was advised that the Inquiry, begun in 2005 had not progressed, and that the Standing Committee was now resuming the Inquiry. The Government was offered the opportunity to update its November 2005 Submission to the Inquiry, given the substantial time lapse since its submission.

Although government policy remained unchanged, there had been significant changes to a number of local and national research organisations and programs in the intervening time. In addition, the original submission made reference to a number of documents which had since been superseded.

The Standing Committee held public hearings on 21 April 2008 and 23 April 2008 and received a total of five submissions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Government welcomes the Committee's Report.

The Government is committed to supporting health and medical research in the ACT and notes that, in addition to a high quality clinical research, there is considerable activity in relation to research conducted by a range of health professionals, including nurses and allied health practitioners.

Under its Research Policy Framework, the Government committed to work with the ACT health and medical research community in the following four endeavours:

1. Supporting the development of the health and medical research community in the ACT and surrounding region in a way that builds on our local advantages; including planning for the coherent development of research facilities, communication technology, training in research and major research collaborations.
2. Ensuring a whole of government approach that coordinates the evolution of the ACT's health and medical research effort with industry development and commercial investment.
3. Pursuing the ACT's interests in the development of national health and medical research policy and playing a strong part in the implementation of that agenda on behalf of the nation.
4. Encouraging policy and practice oriented research by the health and medical researchers; and supporting research and evidence based policy and practice in the provision of health care.

The Government Response to the Standing Committee Report places considerable emphasis on the establishment of an ACT Health Research Office to replace the Canberra Hospital Research Office to provide an overarching structure to support health and medical research across the Health portfolio. An ACT Health Research Governance Framework and associated research policy and guidelines for research practice has also been put in place.

This work was undertaken within the context of previous reviews of health and medical research, the Standing Committee Report and accreditation of ACT Health which, in 2009 for the first time, included an accreditation standard on research.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INQUIRY

The Government agrees to six and agrees in principle to three of the Standing Committee's twelve recommendations. The Government notes two recommendations and does not agree with one recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 1

That ACT Health report on all ACT Government funded research activities in the ACT Health Annual Report.

Agreed

ACT Health has enhanced the mechanisms to report on health and medical research activities with the establishment of the ACT Health Research Office (ACTHRO) (see response to Recommendation 2).

The ACTHRO will report to the ACT Health Portfolio Executive quarterly and coordinate reporting on research activity and funding in the ACT Health Annual Report.

RECOMMENDATION 2

That the ACT Government support the Director of Research at the Canberra Hospital to establish and overarching research structure to co-ordinate and strengthen research in the ACT, as recommended by the Powell Review.

Agreed

Many of the recommendations of the Powell and other reviews referred to in the Government Submission to the Inquiry have been implemented.

In December 2008, the ACT Health Portfolio Executive approved a research governance structure and associated ACT Health research policy and guidelines for research practice.

An overarching research governance structure has been established with the creation of an ACT Health wide research office (the ACTHRO). As of 1 July 2009 it is proposed that the ACTHRO will form a branch of an expanded Population Health Division, to be renamed the Population Health and Research Division. Formal consultation on this proposal concluded on 3 April 2009.

The ACTHRO will be primarily responsible for the governance and management of research, both human and animal, undertaken within ACT Health.

The ACTHRO will provide a focal point for research both within ACT Health and in collaboration with other institutions within the Territory, nationally and internationally. This will include building on established partnership arrangements with the Australian National University Medical School, the University of Canberra, the Australian Catholic University and the Canberra Institute of Technology to ensure the continued development of a growing base of collaborative research.

Under the leadership of a Research Director, ACTHRO will:

- approve and register, prior to commencement, all research conducted within ACT Health;
- coordinate all research activities carried out within ACT Health;
- assume responsibility for the leadership, coordination, governance and promotion of research across ACT Health, including the management of research funding, and oversee the implementation of the ACT Health Research Policy and Guidelines for Research Practice;
- provide advice to ACT Health on health and medical research policy issues; and
- report on research activity within ACT Health to the ACT Health Portfolio Executive quarterly and to coordinate reporting on research activity and funding in the ACT Health Annual Report

Research information will be used to assist ACT Health in the development of policies and interventions to improve health outcomes for people living in the Australian Capital Territory and the surrounding region.

RECOMMENDATION 3

That the ACT Government investigate the 'contract research' model with a view to possible implementation

Agreed

The Government notes that the ACT Health and Medical Research Council supports in principle the "contract model" developed by the British Medical Research Council. It is intended that, should topics for contract research be identified through ACT Health processes, the issue be investigated and progressed further through the ACTHRO which will provide a point of central co-ordination for both investigator initiated and contract research.

The Government notes that there is value in accessing both models to facilitate the development of research in the ACT

RECOMMENDATION 4

That ACT Health consult with the ACT Government Skilled and Business Migration Program to boost the national and international migration of medical professionals to the ACT and to look to streamline the process for successful applicants.

Agreed

ACT Health currently recruits and employs medical professionals both nationally and internationally and will work, as appropriate, with the ACT Government Skilled and Business Migration Program with the recruitment and employment of medical staff with to streamline the process for successful applicants within the constraints of nationally-established policy and processes.

An internal review of the ACT Health Workforce Plan (2005-2010) indicated significant progress against the identified strategies to respond to the workforce implications of service growth and the ageing population.

A Medical Appointment & Training Unit (MATU) has been set up at The Canberra Hospital and manages the employment process for both senior and junior medical staff appointments. The 2007/2008 ACT Health Annual Report indicates that, in its first two years of operation, MATU appointed 84 consultant-level specialists to the ACT system, of which 43 of were newly created positions. Over the same period there was an increase of 30 per cent increase in junior medical officer appointments.

The ACT is participating in the establishment of a national registration and accreditation scheme agreed by the Council of Australian Governments. The scheme will remove inter-jurisdictional barriers to health professionals practising throughout Australia. The ACT is also participating in the National Health Workforce Taskforce's national work program, including in the national allocation of 50,000 new vocational education and training places for health professionals.

ACT Health has also commenced a joint project with the ACT Department of Education and Training and the Regional Office of the Australian Bureau of Statistics to develop a methodology to map the health education and health workforce pipeline for podiatrists, radiation therapists, psychologists, enrolled nurses, emergency physicians and geriatricians.

ACT Health is committed to ensuring a supply of suitably qualified medical practitioners to meet the requirements of the ACT community and has introduced the *Area of Need – Vacant Medical Positions – Public and Private Sector Policy* to ensure that appropriate recruitment action is taken to attract medical practitioners. The Policy applies to all medical positions in the ACT (except general practitioners) – including private specialists in District of Workforce Shortage locations as determined by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

RECOMMENDATION 5

That the ACT Government develop a new entry-level program for new-career researchers.

RECOMMENDATION 6

That the ACT Government invest a minimum of \$50,000 annually to the new program to support new-career researchers.

Agreed in principle

The Government is committed to supporting new-career researchers.

A function of the new ACTHRO will be to provide advocacy advice, assistance and encouragement to all staff, including new researchers, wishing to pursue research activities. It is envisaged that the establishment of the ACTHRO will further strengthen opportunities for early-career researchers. These recommendations will be considered further by the ACTRHO in parallel with recommendation 8.

The Government notes that the current Research Support Program administered on the advice of the ACT Health and Medical Research Council already provides \$200,000 annually to support new researchers.

An internal evaluation of the program is currently being undertaken to ensure its objectives are being met and to assist in formulating the ideal quantum of funds for the program.

RECOMMENDATION 7

That the ACT Government continue to support the Research Centre for Nursing and Midwifery Practice and in particular, the Practice Development Grants for nurses with an increase in the annual investment from \$20,000 to \$50,000 to increase the research capacity of nurses.

Agreed in principle

The Government is committed to supporting and developing the research capacity of nurses. The Government notes that nursing and allied health professionals are well placed to conduct meaningful research particularly in relation to improving service delivery and integration of care in response to the evolving changes in health care delivery and patient demographics.

A formal evaluation of the Nursing and Midwifery and Allied Health Scholarship Schemes was completed in 2007. The evaluation indicated that the scholarship schemes provide effective incentives for increased recruitment

and retention of the nursing and midwifery and allied health professional workforce and have increased the learning culture, including research.

As part of ACT Health's commitment to promote and support the application of evidence into clinical practice, the Practice Development Grants Program was introduced in March 2007. The aim of the program is to provide a funded opportunity for beginners or less experienced clinicians and researchers to undertake practice improvement projects within their clinical area. The grants aim to: increase the evidence base of nursing and midwifery practice; develop the research capacity of nurses and midwives within ACT Health; and improve patient outcomes through research. Four successful applications were announced in November 2008.

ACT Health continues to support the Research Centre for Nursing and Midwifery Practice and will consider increasing resources for the Practice Development Grants.

RECOMMENDTION 8

That ACT Health give due consideration to extending the mentoring program for allied health professionals, to include nursing and medical disciplines, pending the outcome of the evaluation.

Agreed

The Pilot Mentoring Program for Early Career Researchers in the Allied Health Professions (Feb 2007 - Nov 2007) has now been fully evaluated.

The pilot program was supported by the ACT Health and Medical Research Council, ACT Health (Allied Health Adviser's Office, Workforce Planning and Human Resources), the University of Canberra and the Australian Catholic University.

In summary, the evaluation has concluded that mentoring can contribute significantly to overcoming many barriers to participation for new researchers.

A proposal to create a conjoint position within the University of Canberra and ACT Health to co-ordinate a mentoring program to include allied health professionals and other disciplines is being considered.

The Government notes that funds given to inexperienced researches may not be effective, unless those researchers are well supported by a mentor. In addition, a robust mentoring program may assist such researchers to achieve greater success in grant applications.

RECOMMENDATION 9

That the ACT Department of Education and Training work with the University of Canberra to introduce the Tall Poppy Campaign into ACT Primary and Secondary Schools.

Agreed

The Government supports the idea of collaboration between the ACT Department of Education and Training and University of Canberra to further support the availability of the Tall Poppy campaign into ACT primary and secondary schools.

Under school-based management, individual schools make decisions about programs in consultation with their school communities and ACT schools are already able to register in the Tall Poppies Reaching Kids Program at their school by emailing info@aips.net.au.

The Department also supports the idea of including other relevant academic institutions in the Tall Poppy program, such as the Australian National University, Australian Catholic University and CSIRO.

The Tall Poppy program complements other school science programs involving external agencies. ACT primary and secondary schools have access to scientists through the Scientists in Schools project (a federally funded project managed by CSIRO Education) and the Researching with Scientists project, collaboration between the Department and CSIRO that brings international visiting scientists into ACT schools.

ACT teachers have also been working with the University of Canberra's Science Faculty through an Australian Schools Innovation in Science, Technology and Mathematics grant, which aims to bring about lasting improvements to how science, technology and mathematics are taught in schools.

RECOMMENDATION 10

That the ACT Government take a more active role in promoting medical research through Medical Research Week, by resourcing and partnering with the University of Canberra and the Australian National University.

Noted

As part of Medical Research Week the local branch of the Australian Society for Medical Research (ASMR) organises the Canberra Region Annual Scientific Meeting.

ACT Health is a sponsor of Medical Research Week in the ACT and also provides in-kind organisational, administrative and promotional support to the Annual Scientific Meeting.

The ACTHRO already has strong links with the University of Canberra and the Australian National University and will further explore its capacity to promote the Week.

RECOMMENDATION 11

That the ACT Government fast track the establishment of the Research Foundation to be located at the Canberra Hospital.

Noted

Response

The *Our Wellness Foundation* has been formally established and met on Thursday, 30 October 2008 to confirm a Charter. The Foundation is currently examining its vision, mission, operational procedures, investment strategy and fundraising strategy. It is intended to develop a communications strategy, branding, marketing and a launch.

The Foundation's current mission is "To work closely with the ACT community to increase the amount of donated money to assist in the provision of better healthcare services for the people of the ACT and surrounding regions". Whilst research may be one of the causes the Foundation supports, it is not specifically a research foundation.

The viability of the establishment of a specific Research Foundation will be further explored by the ACTHRO.

RECOMMENDATION 12

That ACT Health develop a new website for the Canberra Hospital to better reflect its role as a major regional and teaching hospital.

Not agreed

Response

The Government notes that since the 2002 Reid Review, Canberra Hospital is no longer a stand-alone facility but forms a significant service delivery arm of ACT Health within its Clinical Operations Division.

Through an ongoing program of continuous review, refinement and improvement of web information, managed by ACT Health Communications and Marketing, the current ACT Health website reflects that structure and it is not intended to create a stand-alone web site for Canberra Hospital.

The ACT Health website - with its new design to be released shortly - is already independently benchmarked as the second best health website in Australia.

The web-presence of the new ACTHRO, to be housed within the ACT Health website structure, will be developed, under the guidance of the ACT Health Web Manager, by ACT Health Library and Multimedia Services, which will form a unit within ACTHRO,