Australia’s medical research community unites to champion the Medical Research Future Fund

New campaign launches in Melbourne today

SEPTEMBER 16: Australians are being urged to imagine a healthier future as the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) Action Group launches its campaign in support of enhanced public investment in health and medical research.

Medical research advances national prosperity and wellbeing and it does this by making individual lives better and more productive; that’s the unambiguous message of the campaign launched today to ensure the proposed Medical Research Future Fund is fully realised.

The Imagine a Healthier Future campaign urges us to consider the importance of maintaining Australia as a global centre of excellence in medical research and the translation of that research into better and more efficient healthcare delivery.

Alastair Lucas AM, Founding Chairman of the MRFF Action Group, noted that: "Medical research is an integral part of a high quality healthcare system. They are inseparable. It is no coincidence that Australia has one of the best healthcare systems in the world, because it has been underpinned by excellent research. The potential to do much more for the health and economic wellbeing of Australians is truly exciting."

“This country is already home to some amazing advances,” said MRFF Action Group Chairman Peter Scott.

“Think about breakthroughs such as spray-on skin, the cochlear ear implant, the peptic ulcer cure and the vaccine against cervical cancer,” said Mr Scott, who is also a Vice Chairman of UBS Australia.

“These and many other home-grown discoveries and developments have greatly improved longevity and quality of life for many Australians and others around the world. They were made possible by the commitment and vision of previous governments to funding medical research, thereby establishing many of Australia’s medical research institutes, universities, clinics and companies as significant contributors to our economic wellbeing as well as to our quality of life.”

The MRFF Action Group welcomes the current proposal to increase the government's commitment through a publicly owned, perpetual endowment fund that will, over the next decade, reach $20 billion and provide an additional $1 billion of annual disbursements for health and medical research.

"The time is right for this investment to be made at the size and pace proposed for the MRFF," said Professor Bruce Robinson AM, Chair of the Group of Eight Universities Deans of Medicine Committee.

"If we want more major medical advances to be made in this country, we need this big, bold step in research funding. Importantly, we need it in view of the growing healthcare need that arises from an ageing population and the increasing prevalence of age- and lifestyle-related diseases and disabilities.

“Presently the Australian Government invests 0.075 per cent of our GDP on health and medical research, just 64 per cent of the OECD average. While our scientists are dedicated and talented, Australia has fallen behind the pace when it comes to research funding. We are behind countries such as the UK, Canada and Korea, who have
recognised the potential for both health and wealth from medical research. It is vital that we bring Australia back to an internationally comparable level of government support,” Professor Robinson said.

“A perpetual fund endures,” said Professor Doug Hilton, Director of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute.

“We have seen how funds like this have become defining bodies for health and medical research in the UK with the Wellcome Trust, and in the US with the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

"The MRFF is Australia’s chance to have the same secure and sustainable investment in health and medical research. This would put medical research funding on a secure footing in a decadal - 10, 20, 30-year way. It says to kids who are going through primary school that if they’re good at science, there will be an opportunity to have a career in medical research here in Australia,” Professor Hilton said.

Increased research will also help us tame spiralling costs in our healthcare system.

“Medical research is key to health system efficiency,” said Simon McKeon AO, Chairman of the Federal Government Strategic Review of Health & Medical Research, which last year finalised its 300 page report.

"In fact, decades of sustained investment will create an exceptional – and sustainable – health system, given that the investment in the past decade is projected to save more than $960 million in costs to the health system and deliver a further $6 billion in gains linked to increased wellbeing,” said Mr McKeon, who is Chairman of CSIRO and AMP.

“The MRFF will be nation defining, with ramifications extending far beyond the nation’s health. Indeed, it will support a growing health industry with continuing strong export performance and associated skilled employment opportunities.”

"The MRFF is in line with the Australian community’s strong support for more research funding,” said Professor Christine Bennett AO, Chair of Research Australia.

"Health and medical research is a cause for national pride and has been supported across the political spectrum. It is about the health, hopes and prosperity of Australians.

“Making the MRFF a reality at the scope and pace proposed will guarantee that we can build on our strong track record in discovery and invention and secure Australia’s position as a leading research nation into the future.”

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For more information, please contact:
- Rachel Stanton / (02) 8281 3268 / 0402 463 764 / rachel.stanton@ogilvyprhealth.com
- Emma Pearson / (02) 8281 3280 / 0421 429 584 / emma@ogilvyprhealth.com

On behalf of:
Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes
AusBiotech
Australian Society for Medical Research
Group of Eight Universities Australia
Group of Eight Deans of Medicine Committee
Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand
Research Australia
Members of the MRFF Action Group:

- Founding Chair: Mr Alastair Lucas, Chairman, Burnet Institute
- Chair: Mr Peter Scott, Chairman, Baker IDI Heart & Diabetes Institute
- Deputy Chair: Mr Matthew Grounds, Chairman, Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute
- Deputy Chair: Mr Ian Smith, Board Member, Baker IDI Heart & Diabetes Institute
- Professor Christine Bennett, Chair, Research Australia
- Professor Brendan Crabb, President, Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes
- Professor Les Field, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), University of New South Wales
- Professor Nicholas Fisk, Executive Dean (Medicine & Biomedical Sciences), University of Queensland
- Professor Doug Hilton, Director, Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research
- Professor Jim McCluskey, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), University of Melbourne
- Dr Chris Roberts, CEO & President, Cochlear Limited
- Professor Bruce Robinson, Chair, Group of Eight Universities Deans of Medicine Committee
- Professor Peter Smith, President, Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand

MEDICAL RESEARCH FACTS:

- An estimated 75 per cent of Australians have a long-term health condition. [AIHW]
- More than 7 million Australians live with a chronic illness. [AIHW]
- More than half of potentially preventable hospitalisations arise from chronic conditions. [AIHW]
- Health and aged care costs, as a proportion of Federal Government expenditure, are expected to almost double by 2050, from 18.5 per cent to 33 per cent of Government expenditure. [Treasury]
- The Australian Government invests 0.075 per cent of GDP in health and medical research, 64 per cent of the OECD average. [OECD]
- Every dollar invested in Australian health and medical research returns on average $2.17 in health benefits. [Access Economics, ASMR]
- Investment in the NHMRC between 2000-2010 is projected to save $966 million in costs to the health system, with a further $6 billion in projected gains linked to increased wellbeing. [Deloitte Access Economics, ASMR]
- The health and medical research sector employs around 23,000 research professionals, and helps support a medicines industry of more than 40,000 people. [ASMR; Medicines Australia]
- Australia produces 3 per cent of the world’s medical research outputs (publications) from just 1.1 per cent of global health research dollars. [NHMRC; Burke & Monot]
- Australia’s medicines industry has an annual turnover of around $22 billion and annual exports worth $4 billion; it is Australia’s most valuable high technology export industry, with almost four times the exports of electronics. [Medicines Australia; ABS; OECD]