

11 October 2018

Dr Patricia Anderson
Chief Advisor, Policy and Strategy
Health Research Council

By email: panderson@hrc.govt.nz

National health research priorities

Dear Dr Anderson,

The New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) wishes to provide feedback on the above consultation. The NZMA is New Zealand's largest medical organisation, with more than 5,000 members from all areas of medicine. The NZMA aims to provide leadership of the medical profession, and to promote professional unity and values, and the health of all New Zealanders.

We welcome the development of draft national health research priorities which we note is part of action 1 (prioritise investments through an inclusive priority-setting process) in the New Zealand Health Research Strategy. The NZMA provided substantive feedback on the draft New Zealand Health Research Strategy¹ and we have a strong interest in the setting of health research priorities.

We are broadly supportive of the overarching framework that is being proposed, including the following draft strategic investment areas:

1. Strong foundations of health and wellbeing in children and youth
2. Sustaining health and wellbeing throughout adulthood and ageing
3. Fostering the health and disability system New Zealand needs
4. Innovating for health and wealth
5. Meeting the challenges of our changing world.

Our major concern relates to the document's omission of the importance of clinical trials. Clinical trials—both those that are clinician-led and those that are industry-initiated—are vitally important for several reasons. Many such trials often have the potential to save lives and/or answer very important questions and/or involve cutting edge technology. Often, large international clinical trials enable New Zealanders to access free or partially-funded new drugs. New Zealand's participation in international clinical trials increases the recognition of New Zealand on the international stage and leads to various other benefits including ensuring that New Zealand is

¹ NZMA. Submission on the New Zealand Health Research Strategy. 18 July 2016. Available from http://www.nzma.org.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/50471/Health-Research-Strategy.pdf

more likely to be offered follow-up pharmaceutical- funded trials. There is good data to show that patients treated in clinical trials have better outcomes.

At present, it can be very difficult for clinicians to be able to offer patients the chance to take part in international investigator-led trials as many DHBs charge large amounts for overheads, data collation, pharmacy fees, start-up fees, etc. While these fees may be an appropriate revenue source for industry-led trials, this should not be the case for investigator-led trials, as the latter trials do not attract industry funding. Nevertheless, investigator-led trials contribute a good deal towards patient care by ensuring patients receive internationally recognised, up-to-date treatment protocols.

Beyond directly improving health outcomes, the opportunity to participate in clinical research is a significant workforce issue for senior clinicians, both for professional development and job satisfaction. We draw attention to the following recommendations from a report commissioned by the Health Select Committee into improving the environment in New Zealand to support innovation through clinical trials:²

- Specialist clinicians involved in clinical trials have increased education and the opportunity to have a global presence in their specialist field.
- Top clinicians seek to engage in clinical research and are likely to stay within New Zealand if offered the opportunity to conduct clinical research as an integral part of their employment.
- Junior doctors who are involved in clinical trials often go on to be leaders in their field of medicine.
- Recognising clinical trial activity would assist in retaining New Zealand clinical researchers and scientists.
- A culture of cutting edge medicine and innovative practice allows New Zealand to retain the most able and creative doctors.
- Clinical trials are important for the retention and recruitment of senior clinicians.

We contend that a document that sets New Zealand's health research priorities needs to identify the importance of supporting clinical trials and ensure that funding to support these trials is available, accessible and timely. We suggest that these points be added as a standalone section in the document or incorporated under the relevant draft strategic investment areas that have been identified.

We look forward to being kept informed of this important work as it progresses.

Yours sincerely



Dr Kate Baddock
NZMA Chair

² http://www.parliament.nz/resource/en-nz/49DBSCH_SCR5154_1/19f143ece9bbafc1f5970397e5d92a582e003faa