

29 March 2019

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

By email: panderson@hrc.govt.nz

Prioritisation vehicle for New Zealand health research

Dear Patricia

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 note that this is the second round of consultation on health research priorities which is part of action 1 (prioritise investments through an inclusive priority-setting process) in the New Zealand Health Research Strategy. We have a strong interest in the setting of health priorities and provided feedback on the first round of consultation on national health research priorities¹ as well as the New Zealand Health Research Strategy.²

We are very pleased to note that our main concern—the omission of the importance of clinical trials from the previous document—has been addressed. We commend the HRC for explicitly identifying issues relating to clinical trials in this second consultation. Specifically, we welcome the inclusion of the following paragraph in Domain 2 (Enhancing a people-centred health system) under the heading 'Improving diagnostics and treatments and supporting clinical trial infrastructure'.

Research and infrastructure measures in this Domain will help to ensure the integrity of diagnostics and treatments. Well-designed clinical trials will be an important tool in realising the goal of this Domain, particularly multi-centre trials and those that are undertaken as part of international collaborations. Funders will work to improve clinical trial networks through work associated with Action 6 of the NZHRS: Strengthen the clinical research environment and health services research.

¹ NZMA. Submission on National Health Research Priorities. 11 October 2018. Available from http://www.nzma.org.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/85582/NZMA-Submission-on-HRC-draft-national-health-priorities.pdf

² 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

As we have previously pointed out, 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 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. 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 also congratulate the HRC on the choice of the Domains, the first component of the proposed research prioritisation vehicle (we have reproduced the Domains in an appendix to this submission for the benefit of our members). We welcome the holistic understanding of health and the recognition of social and environmental determinants in Domains 1 and 4. We are also pleased to note the focus on equitable access to healthcare in Domain 2, and the focus on sustainability in Domain 3. We commend the HRC for incorporating these important aspects into the Domains which align closely with much of the feedback provided by the NZMA on the Health Research Strategy in 2016.

We have no specific comments on the other components of the prioritisation vehicle but urge the HRC to ensure that the importance of supporting clinical trials continues to be given a high priority as it progresses this work.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "K. Baddock". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Dr Kate Baddock
NZMA Chair

Appendix: The four Domains of the health research landscape

Domain 1: Our people flourish in their whānau, communities and social contexts

Scope

Domain 1 encompasses endeavours to extend our knowledge and mātauranga of health, wellness, and resiliency. This includes research at the level of the individual, as well as the family and whānau, hapū and iwi. This Domain explicitly recognises the biological, social and cultural contexts of physical and mental health and how their influence and interconnection must be considered now, over time and across generations.

Domain 2: We enhance a people-centred health system within our strong and diverse communities

Scope

Domain 2 focuses research on ensuring that all members of society have equitable access to services that are appropriate, deliver to their needs and improve their health outcomes. It includes research that strengthens our health and disability services (including mental health services) and contributes to better and more cost-effective treatments and clinical practices. This Domain explicitly recognises the need to connect research with practice and policy, and to build the research workforce that New Zealand needs, now and in the future.

Domain 3: We meet the challenges of our changing world and promote a healthy environment

Scope

Research and infrastructure measures in this Domain are designed to ensure that we have the knowledge to help prepare for changes in technology, climate, food security, water quality, bacterial resistance, infectious disease risks, and other global and regional factors that will impact on health in New Zealand, as well as those that are already impacting on our populations here and in the Pacific. This Domain recognises that New Zealand is globally connected and has a role in investigating global challenges to the health and well-being of whānau and communities, as well within our wider regional neighbourhoods.

Domain 4: We have effective and accountable government services and systems for well-being and health research

Scope

A key objective under this Domain is to create a rich research base on the role of the Treaty of Waitangi in health, the impact of the Health and Disability Act, and other government legislation and actions on the health of individuals and communities and their environments.