16 November 2011

Peter J Wills, AC
Review Committee Chair
NSW Health and Medical Research Strategic Review
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Dear Mr Wills,

**NSW Health and Medical Research Strategic Review – Phase 3, Discussion Paper Response**

The New South Wales Deputy and Pro Vice-Chancellors’ (Research) Committee (NSW D/PVC(RC)) welcomes the Discussion Paper recently released by the NSW Health and Medical Research Strategic Review Committee. The Discussion Paper outlines the components of a strong and comprehensive plan to restructure and align many strands of current schemes, and suggests a framework which, if adopted in full, will underpin the growth of medical and health research in NSW over the next ten years.

Responses from individual universities on issues particularly relevant to those institutions will be submitted to the Review separately. However, as the NSW sector peak body, the Committee is pleased to note that many of the issues raised in previous submissions have been incorporated into the Discussion Paper, for example the inclusion of related fields of research, such as the social sciences, information technology and health economics; the proposal to extend funding rounds to a four year cycle; the recognition of various external funding sources which could be leveraged into the State; and the proposed central coordination of research funding programs to enable clarity and timeliness in accessing available grants.

There are some issues which the Committee considers may require further consideration or clarification:

- The discussion paper seems to limit funding to research that aligns purely with specific NSW Government priorities and localised health issues. While it is understood that the State should have a focus on areas of immediate
concern, this limited approach could see the rich texture of world-class research currently undertaken in our institutions becoming limited and/or lost. We would encourage the Review to provide space in the Ten Year Strategy for funding and support to be allocated to ‘blue sky’ research in pure sciences and related emerging fields. Maintaining world-class involvement in such research often informs responses to unforeseen crises, such as the H1N1 virus outbreak or the Hendra virus alert in northern NSW, and also allows research into fields that have global implications. This broader approach would also ensure that NSW is not limited in attracting or leveraging Commonwealth and other funding for research not specifically prioritised by the State.

- Some clarification for support of clinician researchers for 1. Mechanisms for porosity between universities, Medical Research Institutes and Local Health Districts (such researchers typically require support and positions from all three types of organizations); and 2. Structures for recognition through distinct career paths, and allocation of time for both clinical and research obligations.

- Reciprocity between NSW Health Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs) and University HRECs would benefit from clear guidelines and time frames, and stronger administrative support. Delays in processing applications are often severe and can significantly impede research activity.

- With the split of the Office of Science and Medical Research into two bodies, reporting to different ministries, it is essential that we retain and hopefully expand the activities support by the Science Leveraging Fund (SLF) across both fields. The SLF is a current mechanism for leveraging investment in to NSW, and sits within the Department of Trade and Investment. Coordination between the Department of Trade and Investment and other State departments, such as the Department of Health, is essential to ensure that where there is overlap between those departments and health and medical research issues that a mechanism is in place to allow for a coordinated effort. This will maximise benefits in leveraging funding for those research issues.

- The State Government and universities have co-funded NSW-based INTERSECT Pty Ltd, a peak e-research, not-for-profit organisation which has been successful in providing e-research services and solutions for universities, government and private agencies. This organisation presents tools to assist with the coordination of e-health data and other data sets, and may be a vehicle to address some of the issues around e-health raised in the Review’s Discussion Paper.

The Committee strongly supports the proposal for an over-arching structure to oversee the implementation of the recommendations which will flow from this Review. The Review Committee has outlined deep structural changes across a number of different fields of expertise, and across a number of different institutions and localities. Coordinated implementation will require a high level of expertise,
considerable resources and a brief that will allow cross-sectoral support and authority. Such a body will enable the vision indicated in this Discussion Paper to be brought to fruition, and enable NSW to benefit more fully from the expertise which already exists, and to build a strong foundation for the future of the health and medical sector.

The Committee commends the work of the Review Committee, and looks forward to continued engagement in what will be a landmark change in health and medical research strategy for the State of NSW.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Professor Mike Calford
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Chair, NSW Deputy and Pro Vice-Chancellor s’ Committee

Cc: NSW D/PVC (Research) Committee