

SA Health
Government of South Australia

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Incorporated in NSW
ABN 88 987 046 089

www.hsraanz.org

To whom it may concern

Re: SA Health – Research Focus 2020

The Health Services Research Association of Australia & New Zealand (HSRAANZ) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on SA Health's draft strategic framework – Research Focus 2020.

The HSRAANZ supports and promotes the conduct and dissemination of applied research to improve the delivery and organisation of health services in Australia and New Zealand. We have 250 individual members and 23 corporate members, covering universities, research centres, government departments, independent government agencies, and consumer groups. The Association bridges the gap between research and policy, as well as reflecting consumer issues.

The following sections outline our responses to the questions posed on the strategic framework:

To what extent should SA health prioritise:

- basic and biomedical research? (e.g. laboratory based research)
- clinical research? (e.g. research into treatments or interventions)
- population health research? (e.g. population-based studies)
- health systems and services research? (e.g. research into the effectiveness of health services)

The NHMRC mostly supports basic and clinical research. Such research is generalisable across jurisdictions. Population health and health services research are less well-supported by the NHMRC and the results of such research are also more specific to local jurisdictions and so results from other geographical areas are less transferable. This is particularly the case for health services research given variation in population and institution size and in the form and configuration of local services.

There is ever growing evidence on the existence of unwarranted variation in the delivery and quality of health care, better data are available to identify improvement opportunities and technology and a growing evidence base on effective approaches to supporting change provides a stronger basis to act to reduce waste and improve healthcare services. Massive investments have been made in health services research overseas (in Europe in particular) and interstate (Queensland and NSW are leading the way, but other states are also doing more than SA). SA can learn from the experiences of these early adopters, but SA Health needs to support a critical mass of health services researchers who can work with SA Health and clinicians to continually improve the safety, quality and efficiency of the healthcare system in SA. Such activities will carry forward and build on the ideals and achievements of the Transforming Health initiative.

What feedback do you have on the following goals, e.g. is it an important goal, and why?

- Streamline and standardise research ethics and governance requirements.

The process of obtaining ethical approval for research can be time consuming, but more important are the restrictions placed on research designs that can compromise the validity and value of approved research. That said, this is not a priority area for SA Health as it probably requires co-ordination at a national level through the NHMRC and ARC.

- Support timely access to SA Health data.

This goal is critical to the conduct of high-value health services research that improves the safety, quality and efficiency of health care in South Australia. SANT Datalink provides a gold standard services in terms of linking datasets across government departments and technical expertise in data linkage. However, there are limitations to the health systems data currently available through SANT Datalink:

- Only administrative data on ED and inpatient separations are available Other relevant data include costing data and clinical data linked to the OACIS data system within metropolitan public hospitals,
- There is a significant time delay in SANT Datalink receiving and linking health systems data. The data are often over 12 months old by the time they are available through SANT Datalink. Such data are useful for some research purposes but they have limited value for research that aims to inform continuous improvement within the healthcare system.

Data and Reporting Services within SA Health have the access and ability to generate contemporary datasets, matching data from a range of health systems datasets but the Reporting component of their role takes precedence and they have limited resources to support the Data access component of their role.

- Build research capacity across SA Health.

Increased health services research capacity is vital to maximise and maintain the potential benefits of the Transforming Health initiative. Capacity will be needed to maximise the value of improved access to SA Health data, but capacity is also required to collect new, qualitative data and to work with clinicians to use these data to inform and evaluate improved services and care pathways. A few super dedicated clinicians may have the skills and extra capacity to review and analyse service data to inform quality improvement, but the literature suggests that clinicians need research support to identify and implement quality improvement initiatives [Bohmer RMJ. The Hard Work of Health Care Transformation. NEJM 2016; 375:709-11].

SA seems to be lagging behind other states in its capacity to undertake high quality health services research. Queensland has led the way with the funding of the Australian Centre For Health Services Innovation (AusHSI) and a \$35 million Health Innovation Fund. NSW has significant infrastructure through its Agency for Clinical Innovation to support improvement in the NSW healthcare system. VicHealth has an Innovation research grants program and invites applications for NHMRC partnership and ARC linkage applications and WA Health fosters close links with academics in the state. There appear to be no funding opportunities for university-based health services researchers through SA Health.

The Transforming Health evaluation working group is developing a broad research agenda to evaluate the early stages of the Transforming Health initiative and to support ongoing improvement. The logic model and the research agenda developed by this group, the expertise within the group and its reporting lines to the SA Translation Centre might provide a useful base for an expansion of health services research capacity across SA Health.

- Exploit the competitive potential of SA as a centre for health and medical research.
- Support staff to use research evidence to inform their work.
- Support the translation of research outcomes.
- Improve partnerships with research organisations.
- Provide guidance and support for researchers.

There is potential to create stronger links between health services researchers and researchers undertaking the wide range of lab-based and clinical research in SA. Health services researchers can support the process of implementation including evaluation of fidelity, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness.

SA has some strong health services researchers, but they are struggling to maintain a critical mass because most health services researchers are living on short-term contracts. Greater stability is required to attract researchers to SA as well as to keep our brightest and best researchers in SA. The joint appointment of health services researchers between SA Health and the universities in SA would provide greater stability and a critical mass to develop a research training program for clinicians as well developing and applying research studies across SA Health.

- Ensure SA public health system research is aligned with SA Health and SA Government objectives.

To the extent that activity within the healthcare system will reflect SA Health and SA Government objectives, a significant proportion of the research funded by SA Health should inform and evaluate such activity. However, research should also be forward looking, aiming to identify future priorities and objectives.

- Develop systems for effective knowledge management and reporting on research activity.

Research funding and outcomes should be transparent to support collaboration and prevent duplication of effort. Health services research should always be undertaken with an objective to improve some aspect of policy or practice, but that impact can be broadened through effective knowledge management and reporting.

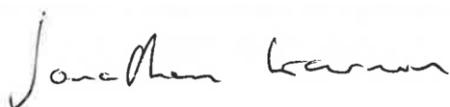
Do you agree with the proposed reporting:

- Number of health and medical projects undertaken across SA Health by specialty/discipline.
- High-impact publications derived from research undertaken across SA Health.
- Approval timeframes for SA public health sector research ethics and governance applications.
- Research funding won by SA Health researchers and distribution of funding.
- Clinical trial activity across SA Health hospitals, including numbers of new clinical trials commenced.
- Clinical trial participation rates across SA Health.
- Significant outcomes of research, including successful translation of research into clinical service delivery, health policy and health systems management as well as commercialisation of intellectual property by SA Health researchers.

This section might be titled “Embedding research metrics into SA health systems”. As noted above in reference to knowledge management, the results of all research conducted within SA Health should be reported, not just those with significant outcomes. In addition to the proposed reporting, measures of health services research activity include:

- Health service collection and analysis and use of data on patient reported outcome measures (PROMs) or patient reported experience measures (PREMs).
- Numbers of funded and unfunded health services research projects (or improvement projects) being undertaken within different hospitals or across hospitals.
- The evaluated impacts of such improvement projects reported in terms of health gains, reduced waiting times, etc.
- Other reported health services research might be targeted at policy, such as the design and implementation of prioritisation or commissioning frameworks or incentive programs.
- If a health services research training program is initiated numbers of participants and subsequent research activity could be reported.

Yours sincerely



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