

## Improving alignment and coordination between the Medical Research Future Fund and Medical Research Endowment Account

14 July 2023

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Department of Health and Aged Care on improving alignment and coordination between the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) and Medical Research Endowment Account (MREA).

ATN supports the streamlining of the governance, management and operation of the system that supports Australia's health and medical research.

Consolidating this system under the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) will build on its successful track record and existing structures and be a first step in developing a national research strategy and a consistent and coordinated approach across all Government research funding.

As the ATN recommended in the Review of the Australian Research Council Act, this should be paired with a whole-of-Government, cross-agency review of the administrative and regulatory burden on universities and research institutes and possible backend efficiencies with other agencies. There is substantial opportunity to free up resources and our research talent, by simplifying and aligning the myriad and overlapping regulatory frameworks that research operates under.

This review of the administration and regulation should be part of a wider review of the national research and innovation ecosystem, covering all directly funded Commonwealth research and agencies, including CSIRO and others, as recommended in ATN's submission on the Universities Accord. The intent of this review should be to drive balanced growth of health and medical research and other research across the discovery to translation and impact pipeline.

This is a valuable opportunity to align Government, university and industry investment in research and education across a range of programs, innovations, and high-value and strategic industries. This will help to deliver outcomes for Australia in key priorities like healthcare, aged care, childcare, and disability care.

### Recommendation

**ATN recommends that Option 2 outlined in the discussion be adopted – the NHMRC administers grants under the MREA and MRFF as two distinct programs drawing upon separate funds to maintain their distinct focuses investigator-driven research and priority-driven research.**

Consideration should be given to one fund exclusively or primarily supporting foundational discovery research and the other supporting translational, clinically led, and high Technology Readiness Level (TRL) opportunities.

Option 2 should allow for better coordination of the timing of calls and tightening up eligibility for the different calls to avoid applicants sending the same application to multiple schemes. This would reduce workload for both applicants and reviewers

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## Additional recommendations

Developing and diversifying Australia's economy and workforce will require ongoing investment in skills, research and people. Universities that combine excellence in teaching and impact in research with a focus on enterprise are in an ideal position partner with the Government and community. We can develop and make the most of our own skilled workforce, deliver on national priorities, and build our national knowledge and innovation base.

To coordinate its investment in research across all of its strategies and priorities, the Government should plan and invest in a comprehensive research strategy and a wider review of the national research and innovation ecosystem.

This strategy and review should encompass a whole of Government approach and coordinates existing and future investments in research through all programs including the:

- Research block grants
- Australian Research Council
- National Health and Medical Research Council
- Medical Research Future Fund
- Trailblazer Universities Program
- National Reconstruction Fund
- Cooperative Research Centres.

The broader review can focus attention on how to develop and support the attributes we want for Australia's research and workforce, taking into account:

- Research and workforce diversity
- Supporting research careers and exchange with industry
- ARC's interactions with the NHMRC, MRFF and relevant Government departments.

Further enquiries should be addressed to:

**Executive Director**

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