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Australian Medical Research Advisory Board
Medical Research Future Fund Secretariat
By email: MRFF@haealth.gov.au

Dear Medical Research Advisory Board

Consultation for the development of the Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy and related Priorities

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) welcomes the opportunity to provide advice on funding disbursements to the Australian Medical Research Advisory Board (AMRAB) in the consultation process for the development of the *Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy and related Priorities*. We note that the Medical Research Future Fund will be dispersed through a variety of mechanisms and request that AMRAB influence strategies for an equitable disbursement across the health and medical research sector.

The ANMF is the largest professional and industrial organisation in Australia for the nursing and midwifery professions, with a membership of over 250,000 nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing. The core business of the ANMF is the professional and industrial representation of our members and the professions of nursing and midwifery.

With Branches in each State and Territory of Australia, our members are employed in a wide range of activities at tertiary and primary health care levels, in urban, rural and remote locations, and in both the public and private health and aged care sectors. We, therefore, have a genuine concern for all matters relating to research and innovation to improve the health and well-being of the Australian community, the translation of research into clinical outcomes, and, the funding sources for that research.

As the largest single component of the health workforce, nurses and midwives are the most geographically dispersed health professionals in this country, providing health care to people across their lifespan. They work in homes, schools, communities, general practice, local councils, industry, offshore territories, aged care, retrieval services, rural and remote communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services, acute care, the armed forces, universities, mental health facilities, statutory authorities, general businesses, jails and detention centres, and professional and industrial organisations.

Robust research is critical to the development and implementation of health and aged care policy, to drive the provision of care to achieve optimal and sustainable health outcomes for individuals and the community. Given the integral contribution of nurses and midwives in health and aged care it is

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imperative that they be able to access funding to be involved in all aspects of research in these areas.

While there has been an impressive amount of health related research undertaken in Australia, the ANMF contends government funded activities have tended to focus on 'medical' and 'clinical trials' framed research. This research has not generally engaged with nurses and midwives – the greatest cohort of the health and aged care workforce and frontline care delivery. Essentially, research has more often been 'done on' nurses and midwives, rather than studies including nurses and midwives as research partners (from academics to clinicians) within the team to design, implement, evaluate and disseminate study findings.

Nurse and midwife clinicians should also be enabled to participate in research design, conduct, policy formulation and implementation of findings, for streamlined translation into practice. A greater working together between researchers and clinicians, and a focus on 'future workforce development and capacity building initiatives' can only strengthen research work and subsequent outcomes to improve the community's health. This investment in research capacity building will provide a strong evidence base for innovative and varying models of health and aged care.

It is the view of the ANMF that involvement of nurses and midwives in all aspects of health and aged care research provides the greatest potential for enhancing the translation of research into practice in health and aged care delivery. It is this current gap in health and aged care of engagement with the nursing and midwifery professions in government funded research that the ANMF urges be addressed by the Medical Research Future Fund, to strengthen future directions for research in this country.

Twenty years ago nursing and midwifery researchers were not conspicuous and thus largely overlooked in research activities in Australia. What was perhaps forgivable in former times is not forgivable now. The nursing and midwifery professions now boast eminent researchers in health and aged care, including Professorial Chairs between many universities and operational settings.

Specifically, the ANMF proposes the gap we've identified in health and aged care research funding should be addressed with the following strategies embedded in the requirements for research under the Future Fund, for a pathway forward:

- re-name the fund to 'Health Research Future Fund' to reflect an encompassing of all research related to health and aged care;
- nurse and/or midwife researchers be funded to be engaged in health and aged care research studies (as Chief investigators or as partners, through their universities);
- nurse and/or midwife clinicians be funded to be involved in health and aged care research (with the twofold purpose of gaining commitment to the process and outcomes of the study, and contributing to their professional development);

- development of nurse and/or midwife researchers be funded, for example, enabling nursing and/or midwifery PhD students to participate in multidisciplinary research teams;
- greater involvement of consumers of health and aged care services, and the broader community, in health and aged care research, be facilitated and funded;
- inter-professional research into innovative models of care to promote collegiality and recognise imperatives for team based care, be fostered and funded;
- designated positions be provided on the governance body for the new Medical Research Future Fund, for nursing and midwifery academics, and, for the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM). CATSINaM can provide invaluable advice on priority areas for research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

One measure of the success of the AMRAB's strategy will therefore be an increase in funding to research on clinical outcomes lead by, or involving as co-investigators, nurses and midwives.

While this submission is heavily weighted to funding greater inclusion of nurses and midwives in health and aged care research, the ANMF wishes to stress our support for inter-disciplinary research into innovative models of care. The ANMF considers this approach promotes collegiality and recognises imperatives for team based health and aged care. The aim is to provide seamless, comprehensive, unambiguous and evidence-based care to the community. This approach enables integration of health and aged care services and partnerships between the researchers, consumers, nurses, midwives, allied health professionals, medical practitioners and other providers in private and State/Territory funded public, tertiary, community and primary health care settings.

An additional gap identified in the building blocks (page 6) 'Key Interactions and Stakeholders', is primary health care. The health system is much broader than the medical workforce and hospitals. As indicated earlier, nurses and midwives provide care across a wide range of community and aged care settings. Our professions are in fact the majority of the workforce in these sectors and are well placed to not only lead research, but especially lead in the translation of research into practice.

Nurse Practitioners and midwives with scheduled medicines endorsement are expert nurse and midwife clinicians who are working collaboratively within the health professional team to address primary health care needs across geographical and socio-economic settings. These nurses and midwives can lead and support priority-driven research into primary health care to embed a research culture within both primary care (general practice) and the broader primary health care settings (for example, community health care). Research in these areas will enhance practice innovation and improve access by the community to primary health care.

The following excerpts, taken from a report by Professor Warwick Anderson AM, former CEO of the National Health and Medical Research Council¹, are pertinent to this discussion:

The clinicians of tomorrow will face many challenges, not the least will be the need to provide care based on knowledge and evidence, not tradition. There is a special need to make sure that university students in medicine, nursing, [midwifery], allied health, biomedical and life sciences and the social sciences are taught by researchers and introduced to the concepts and practices of scientific research. This is especially crucial if we are to be able to have an agile, efficient and cost effective health system, meeting tomorrow's health and funding challenges.

In the rapidly changing world of research, identification and prediction of the sets of skills needed for the future will always be difficult. It will be reliant on wise and knowledgeable leadership, cognisant of the changes and trends in research internationally. National strategies should be broad and the means must be flexible.

... we need to work out how best to build our capacity in policy and decision making research in health, and to build our numbers of Indigenous Australians undertaking research.

In concluding, the ANMF stresses the integral role of nurses and midwives in health and aged care in this country. Research is vital for ensuring evidence-based care and on-going innovation so that care delivery meets ever-changing population health needs – for prevention, intervention, and illness and chronic disease management.

It is our contention that robust research and success in implementation of study findings can really only be achieved through collaboration of stakeholders from academia, policy decision makers, health professionals, consumer and community groups (especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders). As nurses and midwives form the largest component of the health and aged care workforce, it is strategically sound that future research funding strategies enable full engagement of the nursing and midwifery professions in all governance and operational aspects of clinically focused research.

Should you require further information on this matter, please contact Julianne Bryce, Senior Federal Professional Officer, ANMF Federal Office, Melbourne on 03 96028500 or julianne@anmf.org.au.

Yours sincerely



Lee Thomas
Federal Secretary

¹ Anderson, W. CEO Report. *Health and medical researchers for the future - what does Australia need?* NHMRC Research Tracker Friday 20 February 2015.

Cc Adjunct Professor Debra Thoms, Commonwealth Chief Nurse and Midwifery Officer