

Submission to the Department of Health

Review of the MRFF Priorities

7 October 2020



Australian Academy of
Technology & Engineering

GPO Box 4055
Melbourne, 3001
VIC, Australia
T +61 3 9864 0900
F +61 3 9864 0930
E info@atse.org.au

REVIEW OF THE MRFF PRIORITIES

The Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering (ATSE) recommends that the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) focus on the following seven priorities in the next 12 months:

- Global Health and Health Security
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
- Ageing and Aged Care
- Digital Health Intelligence
- Clinical Researcher Capacity
- Drug Repurposing (and Clinical Trials)
- Public Health Interventions

ATSE has based these priorities on research from our recently completed report on technology readiness in the Australian healthcare sector, supported by the Australian Research Council.¹ ATSE's report recommends a shift in focus to prevention and wellness, supported by rapid expansion of electronic health records; improved access through telemedicine and remote technology; retraining and upskilling the healthcare workforce; and targeted translation and commercialisation of research to deliver better patient outcomes.

With this in mind ATSE recommends that the following seven priorities should receive greater emphasis under the MRFF in the next 12 months.

- **Global Health and Health Security:** Preparedness and response planning need to contemplate both identified and emerging (unspecified) threats and have regard to the fact that pandemics and other threats have no respect or regard for national borders. The MRFF should prioritise investment in research and development that advances Australia's manufacturing capability, particularly of active drug ingredients, and that leads to supply chain resilience of health resources. Going forward health security should have stronger focus on national health security and could become a priority in its own right. This priority could also provide a strategic lens for funding decisions made in a number of the other priority areas.
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to experience poorer health outcomes than the rest of the Australian population, particularly during recent pandemics (e.g. the 2009 N1H1 pandemic). Recognising this vulnerability Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander "clinicians, public health practitioners and researchers have been leading the way in public health planning, response, and management for COVID-19".² Greater investment will ensure that learnings from approaches which privilege the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are shared with health agencies, practitioners and researchers to inform responses to public health emergencies.
- **Ageing and Aged Care:** Ageing and Aged Care will continue to require critical attention following outcomes anticipated from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety and the impact of COVID-19 on Australia's aging population.
- **Digital Health Intelligence:** Reporting and monitoring of COVID-19 information would not be possible without digital health intelligence. ATSE's health technology report highlights the

¹ <https://www.atse.org.au/research-and-policy/publications/publication/a-new-prescription-preparing-for-a-healthcare-transformation>

² <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2020/213/4/first-nations-peoples-leading-way-covid-19-pandemic-planning-response-and>

tremendous opportunities for transformation of clinical practice, research and development in healthcare presented by these technologies.

- **Clinical Researcher Capacity:** Women, early-career researchers and recent graduates are disproportionately experiencing negative impacts of COVID-19.³ Supporting these groups should be a critical priority over the next 12 months
- **Drug Repurposing (and Clinical Trials):** Drug re-purposing and clinical trials continue to be essential. In the short term, clinical trials and drug re-purposing will guide our immediate response to COVID-19 prevention and treatment, and in the longer term will be a key mechanism required for future pandemic preparedness.
- **Public Health Interventions:** Remote care through mobile, tele-health and digital health solutions has played a critical role in supporting Australia's response to COVID-19. Greater development of these technologies will benefit equity of access to healthcare as well as assisting with the transition to focus on prevention and wellness.

Summary of priorities

Priority	Status	
Strategic and International Horizons		
One Health - Antimicrobial Resistance	►	Retain
Global Health and Health Security	▲	Emphasise
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health	▲	Emphasise
Ageing and Aged Care	▲	Emphasise
Data and Infrastructure		
Digital Health Intelligence	▲	Emphasise
Health Services and Systems		
Comparative Effectiveness Research	►	Retain
Primary Care Research	►	Retain
Capacity and Collaboration		
Clinical Researcher Capacity	▲	Emphasise
Consumer-Driven Research	►	Retain
Trials and Translation		
Drug Repurposing	▲	Emphasise
Public Health Interventions	▲	Emphasise
Commercialisation		
Translational Research Infrastructure	►	Retain

³ As explored in <https://www.atse.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/rrif-covid19-research-workforce.pdf>