

Abridged WAHTN Executive Board Minutes for the WAHTN Website Meeting No. 01/2021 held on Monday 8 February 2021, 8.00am - 9:30am

Attendees:

Mr Malcolm McCusker AC CVO QC, Chair
Ms Pip Brennan, Consumer Advocate
Dr Darren Gibson, representing the WA Department of Health
Professor Peter Leedman AO, representing the Medical Research Institute members
Professor Eeva Leinonen, representing the member Universities
Mr Paul Forden, representing the WA Area Health Services
Professor Gary Geelhoed, Executive Director WAHTN, ex officio

Executive Officer: Ms Lauren White, WAHTN

By Invitation:

Dr Debbie Turner, Chief Operating Officer, WAHTN

Apologies

Dr James Williamson, Professor Shirley Bowen and Associate Professor Dan McAullay.

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of 2021.

This meeting was held entirely online via Zoom.

2. Declarations of potential or perceived Conflicts of Interest (COI)

None declared.

3. Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Board 23 September 2020

It was RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the WAHTN Executive Board held on 23 November 2020 were a true and correct record of that meeting.

4. Minutes of the Meeting of the Management Committee

The Minutes of the Management Committee meetings held on 24 November 2020 and 2 February 2021 were noted.

5. Australian Health Research Alliance (AHRA) and Medical Health Research Future Fund (MRFF)

Professor Gary Geelhoed provided background to MRFF funding and noted that in late December 2020 WAHTN was informed that there is a change in the eligibility criteria for the upcoming release of MRFF Rapid Applied Research Translation (RART) funds. Disappointingly, this round precludes WAHTN applying directly for funding with the call open to all eligible organisations across Australia.

Professor Geelhoed noted that whilst the process to be awarded as an NHMRC Advanced Health Research Translation Centre (AHRTC) is a competitive and rigorous process, it was seen by some that providing RART funding exclusively (equally divided) to the AHRA Translation Centres was not viewed as a competitive process. He also noted that WAHTN distributed funding received through a competitive process via Early Career Fellowships, Biostatistician Fellowships and RART projects.

The funding changes have been discussed at length throughout recent AHRA Council meetings, of which Professor Geelhoed is currently Chair. There may be opportunities for the AHRA established

National System Level Initiatives (currently WAHTN co-leads CCI and Wounds projects with AHRA partners) to apply for funding through a variety of alternative independent funding streams, for example NHMRC partnership grants and Centres of Research Excellence. This could include new projects that are currently in discussion amongst the AHRA partner members, such as, the Women's Network and health research data hubs. These changes have been communicated to WAHTN partners with an offer to help with any proposed application.

6. Governance and Operations

6.1 Executive Director Recruitment

The Chair informed Board Members that the Executive Director role will be advertised.

6.2 2021 Board Members

Board members resolved to formally appoint Mr Paul Forden to the WAHTN Executive Board, as the representative for the WA Area Health Services.

At the last meeting of the WAHTN Executive Board, the Chair informed Board Members that he will step down from the position of Chair. He noted that it is still his intention to do so and asked Board Members to give consideration to independent individuals who could be approached to discuss the honorary position of Chair. He will then formalise the Chair appointment with the Minister for Health and Director General of the WA Department of Health.

It was noted that several Board members have exceeded their appointment term of two years. As per the Terms of Reference, the position/s will rotate to a representative from another organisation within that particular sector. The Chair asked those affected members to discuss their replacements with their relevant sector representatives.

6.3 2021 Partnership Payments

As ratified at the last meeting of the WAHTN Executive Board, a letter was sent to each Partner Organisation seeking an 18% increase in partnership payments for 2021.

6.4 Proposed Governance Structure

The proposed Governance Structure of WAHTN was circulated out of session to Board members for consideration. Feedback was provided by four Board Members, collated into a summary document and included within the Agenda.

Board members agreed that given the substantial governance changes taking place at present, including the recruitment of a Chair and Executive Director, as well as Board members rotation amongst sectors, it was resolved that the Governance Structure of the WAHTN will remain unchanged at this point in time.

Board Members noted that the Executive Board of WAHTN could consider revisiting the Governance Structure at a later date, once the above mentioned changes have come into effect and as such, the feedback provided by Board Members throughout this process will be re-submitted for consideration.

6.5 Joint Venture Agreement, Centre Agent Services Agreement

The process to negotiate a new Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) has been underway for 18 months.

The Agreement has been held up by the WA Department of Health, as each of the Area Health Services independent Legal teams requested that they review the JVA.

7. Financial Reports

The WAHTN Financial Report was circulated. Expenditure is within budget.

8. Enabling Platforms

In addition to the attachments tabled, the following items were discussed in further detail:

8.1 Consumer and Community Involvement Program (CCIProgram)

Discussions with the WA Department of Health's Research Innovation Office late December 2020 resulted in a short term funding agreement to ensure the CCIProgram remains in place with the current reduced number of staff until 30 June 2021.

The CCIProgram continues to evolve and new discussions are currently underway to align long-term CCIProgram funds with the renewal of the WA Department of Health's contract with Health Consumers Council WA. The contract would assist in the delivery of a state-wide CCIProgram that supports the FHRI Fund Strategy. The CCIProgram would remain part of the WAHTN, with funds coming via HCCWA as a potential Centre Agent. Partner Agreements and Fee for Service delivery would continue in parallel with this contract.

Board members reviewed and endorsed the CCIProgram Year in Review document which was included as an attachment within the Agenda. The report demonstrates the progress and synergies the CCIProgram have made in the past year. The Chair complimented CCIProgram on the report.

8.2 Research Education and Training Program (RETProgram)

The independent external review of the RETProgram is close to being finalised, a draft report was received in December 2020 and indicates positive support of the RETProgram. Given the positive preliminary report, Professor Gary Geelhoed informed Board Members that he is hopeful the RETProgram will be funded for a three year period by the WA Department of Health.

The statistics included within the RETProgram report, attached to the Agenda reveals that 10% of RETProgram participants are external to Western Australia and whilst this provides a small amount of income, it is not self-sustaining. The RETProgram are continuing to grow and increase uptake across Australia via various means including regular promotional strategies.

Discussions with regards to university student access have been ongoing with the five Western Australian universities; however, many have indicated an inability to progress with a 2021 agreement given the current financial climate. In light of this, the RETProgram, with approval from the WA Department of Health, has waived student access fees for all WA Universities for a period of 6 months (January to June 2021). This reprieve will allow the RETProgram to actively promote courses across all WA Universities and the experience will highlight the benefits of the courses as a suitable education and training tool. This should better place the RETProgram to re-negotiate and enter into paid agreements in the near future.

The following RETProgram online training courses were released in the latter half of 2020:

- Paediatric Aboriginal Lung Health: Asthma diagnosis and interpretation of spirometry
- Health Economics: Cost Effectiveness for Clinical Trials
- GCP in Australia (Good Clinical Practice)

The following RETProgram online training courses are currently under development:

- Good Clinical Practice (GCP) Refresher

- Consumer and Community Involvement
- Navigating Data Linkage
- Biostatistics Repository

The need to progress the development of a State-wide Education and Training Platform, governed by a Steering Committee, has been discussed at length. Rather than two separate Steering Committees, it was agreed that the RETProgram Steering Committee would be combined into the all-encompassing and broader State-wide Education and Training Platform Steering Committee.

This Committee will adapt the Terms of Reference of the current RETProgram Steering Committee and, given the overlap with the current Committee, the membership will remain as it is presently and will be reviewed as the agenda and working brief of the Steering Committee progresses. RETProgram issues will be dealt with under a standing Agenda item at the State-wide Education and Training Platform Steering Committee meetings.

8.3 Clinical Trials and Data Management Centre (CTDMC)

The WA Department of Health have agreed in principle to continue providing funding support to the CTDMC for the next three years.

9. Executive Director's Quarterly Report

The Executive Director's Quarterly Report was spoken to by Professor Gary Geelhoed utilising the attachment tabled. The following item was discussed in further detail:

- *Operational Plan*

The WAHTN Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025 was endorsed by Board members at the November 2020 meeting, noting that an Operational Plan will be developed outlining key performance metrics. Due to funding uncertainty, it was not possible to proceed with the development of an Operational Plan, however, now that the uncertainty has subsided in the short term, WAHTN will shortly commence development of the Operational Plan. It will be provided to Board Members once drafted.

- *Science on the Swan*

Science on the Swan 2021 is scheduled for 16 – 18 May. The program will focus on showcasing top WA health research, particularly in the hospital clinical setting with the last day focusing on COVID-19.