

## **Abridged WAHTN Executive Board Minutes for the WAHTN Website**

### **Meeting No. 04/2021 held on Wednesday 15 September 2021, 8.00am - 9:30am**

#### **Attendees:**

Mr Malcolm McCusker AC CVO QC, Chair  
Dr Terry Bayliss, representing the Private Hospital sector  
Ms Pip Brennan, Consumer Advocate  
Ms Kate Gatti, representing the WA Area Health Services  
\*Professor Harlene Hayne, representing the University sector  
\*Associate Professor Dan McAullay, representing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people  
Professor Bill Morgan, representing the Medical Research Institute sector  
Dr James Williamson, representing the WA Department of Health

#### **By Invitation:**

Dr Debbie Turner, Chief Operating Officer, WAHTN

(Those marked with asterisk attended by Zoom)

#### **Apologies**

Mr Paul Forden

#### **Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Board 21 July 2021**

It was RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the WAHTN Executive Board held on 21 July 2021 were a true and correct record of that meeting.

#### **Management Committee**

The Minutes of the Management Committee meeting held on 11 August 2021 were noted.

Board members discussed the item relating to Systematic Reviews, from the Minutes of the WAHTN Management Committee Subgroup. Professor Gary Geelhoed advised that WAHTN has been coordinating meetings with key stakeholders to discuss Systematic Reviews in Western Australia, the group have discussed options that will develop healthcare professionals' skills in performing systematic reviews. A software package called "Research Screener" has been developed at Curtin University. A link to Research Screener can be found here: <https://researchscreener.com/>

Dr James Williamson advised that the WA Department of Health is contributing to Living Guidelines developed by Monash University, with the aim to establish fellowships and develop expertise across WA in conducting systemic reviews. Dr Williamson said there is potential that this could lead to further funding opportunity and that if there was interest amongst members in being part of this initiative, to contact him directly.

#### **Governance and Operations**

##### **Chair and Executive Director Positions**

Dr James Williamson informed the Board Members that the nominees for the position of WAHTN Executive Board Chair have been submitted to the State Minister for Health, the Hon. Roger Cook for consideration and endorsement.

Professor Gary Geelhoed's current contract as WAHTN Executive Director is concluding in April 2022 and as such, Board members RESOLVED that a comprehensive recruitment strategy would commence.

#### *Joint Venture Agreement, Centre Agent Services Agreement*

Professor Geelhoed informed Board members that the Joint Venture Agreement has been circulated to the WAHTN Partner Organisations for signing and execution.

To date, nine Partners have submitted their signed Agreements, with eleven outstanding. Professor Geelhoed is following up with these Partners accordingly.

#### *Partner Membership Nomination*

Silver Chain Group and Perth Radiological Clinic have requested to join the WAHTN as Partner Members. Board members were referred to the proposals from Silver Chain Group and Perth Radiological Clinic attached to the Agenda.

With regards to the Silver Chain Group proposal, Board members RESOLVED to endorse the Silver Chain Group as a WAHTN Partner Organisation, acknowledging that they will become a signed Partner to the Joint Venture Agreement.

With regards to the proposal from the Perth Radiological Clinic, Board members RESOLVED to endorse the Perth Radiological Clinic as a WAHTN Partner Organisation, acknowledging that they will become a signed Partner to the Joint Venture Agreement.

The WAHTN Board members requested that Professor Geelhoed discuss Perth Radiological Clinic's annual financial contribution with them directly and suggested that the contribution should be in line with WAHTN Partners that are of a similar organisational size and generate similar income. Noting that future financial contributions will be reviewed.

#### *WAHTN's Partner Membership and Fee Structure*

As per the Action Item at the last meeting of the Executive Board, a preliminary discussion paper relating to WAHTN's Partner Membership and Fee Structure has been drafted and provided to Mr Paul Forden for his review. This activity will be reported on at the next meeting of the Executive Board.

#### **Financial Reports**

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

#### *COVID-19 Research Funding Program*

Professor Gary Geelhoed provided background with regards to the COVID-9 Research Funding Program, of the \$3million awarded to WAHTN for the Program, \$2,127,479 research projects have been paid, with \$454,084 remaining in final payments for committed projects. As some projects were unable to commence due to a number of COVID-19 factors, \$418,437 remains. Dr James Williamson advised that he will discuss the project options with consideration to repurposing the remaining funds with the Director General, WA Department of Health. New proposals will be tabled for consideration by the WAHTN Executive Board.

#### **Executive Director's Quarterly Report**

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

#### Consumer and Community Involvement Program (CCIProgram)

Discussions are progressing with the WA Department of Health regarding funding for the CCIProgram for the period 1 January – 30 June 2022. The Department is currently awaiting their budget allocation to be confirmed. Regular meetings are being held with the Health Consumers’ Council WA to discuss joint deliverables for both organisations.

#### Research Education and Training Program (RETProgram)

A business case/funding proposal has been submitted to the WA Department of Health related to the establishment of a Western Australian Research and Education Platform (WAREP) Knowledge Hub, managed by the WAHTN.

The current RETProgram Funding Agreement with the WA Department of Health ceases on 15 November 2021. Future funding for the RETProgram has been built into the WAREP proposal and is pending whilst the Department awaits delivery of its 2021/22 budget.

#### Australian Health Research Alliance (AHRA) – Consumer and Community Involvement (CCI) Handbook

The CCI Handbook was tabled, with its embargoed status brought to the attention of Board members. We believe the CCI Handbook is the first ever ‘how-to’ guide for embedding CCI in research. It is designed for researchers, consumers, organisations, and funders, and incorporates templates and useful resources. A copy of the CCI Handbook was attached to the Agenda.

WAHTN has sent a request to the Federal Health Minister, the Hon Greg Hunt, asking him (or his representative) to officially launch the CCI Handbook in the latter half of 2021.

WAHTN is also considering a formal presentation of the CCI Handbook to the State Health Minister, the Hon Roger Cook, with the WAHTN Partner Organisations.

The WAHTN Executive Board will be advised of the launch timeframes, once confirmed.

#### AHRA - Women’s Health Research Translation and Impact Network

As part of the grant awarded to WAHTN from the AHRA Women’s Health Research Translation and Impact Network (WHRTN), WAHTN is in the process of appointing a Project Officer (0.1FTE). The Project Officer will assist the WAHTN project leads, Dr Jacqueline Frayne and A/Prof Jennifer Stone, to build a WA network of women researchers with a focus on the nine key priority areas identified by the WHRTN.

WAHTN has also released an expression of interest for the WHRTN Emerging Leaders Fellowship, which offers early and mid-career researchers an opportunity for leadership development and practical experience in a high-profile national leadership committee.

#### Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF)

The Final Activity Report for the MRFF Rapid Applied Research Translation Grant (Round 2.1) was attached to the Agenda for Board members information.

Board members remarked that the document contained comprehensive information on the activities, and impressive publications have resulted from the funding.

Round 2.2 of the MRFF Rapid Applied Research Translation funding received is still underway and due to be completed by June 2022.

#### Implementation Science

Professor Gary Geelhoed mentioned a recent grant initiated by AHRA Translation Centre, Sydney Health Partners as part of their implementation science. A link can be found here:

<https://sydneyhealthpartners.org.au/transl-imp/implementation-science/>

There could be an opportunity for WAHTN to initiate a similar grant program with MRFF Round 2.2 Funding, if matched funding was received through the WAHTN Partner network.

WAHTN will circulate information out of session seeking Board members comments on the Implementation Science program at Sydney Health Partners.

Board members discussed the tool developed by the Telethon Kids Institute, titled “Grow Impact” which tracks the progress of research towards real-world impacts over time.

There are various software packages available, an institutional licence fee is approx. \$50,000.

Dr James Williamson indicated the WA Department of Health have met with the Grow Impact team as the Department is interested in a mechanism which captures research productivity, specifically from a funder’s point of view, to ensure research funded by the Department has a societal impact.

A link to the Grow Impact website can be found here: <https://www.growimpact.com.au/>

#### *Area Health Services Workshop*

Minister Roger Cook’s office advised that he has availability to open the workshop with the Chief Executive’s and Directors of Research of the Area Health Services and PathWest on Tuesday 5 October at 3pm.

There was some hesitancy as the nominated time conflicted with a regular meeting held by the Area Health Services (AHS). However, Ms Kate Gatti suggested that the Chief Executives and Researchers Directors are generally adaptable and recommended that WAHTN should proceed with the date.

The purpose of the workshop is to inform the AHSs of key activities being undertaken by WAHTN, outlining areas in which further involvement from this sector could be achieved, and how WAHTN can assist the AHSs drive translational research in the hospital setting.

Board members will be updated on the outcomes, once the meeting has been held.

#### *Science on the Swan (SOTS) 2022*

Preliminary discussions and the establishment of the Organising Committee are underway for SOTS 2022, which will focus on Western Australian Innovation and Commercialisation in Health Research. Professor Gary Geelhoed has discussed the conference ideas with Life Science WA, Professor Kevin Pfleger, Dr Kath Giles, Dr Liz Dallimore and Dr Samantha South. The event will be held in May 2022.

#### *Clinical Trials Stakeholder Forum*

The Clinical Trials Stakeholder Forum was held on 9 September 2021. The Future Health Research and Innovation Fund event was organised in collaboration with the WAHTN and MTPConnect WA Life Science Innovation Hub.

The event was attended by key stakeholders across the clinical trials sector. The Forum consisted of two streams, the first focusing on commercial clinical trials and the second, on investigator-initiated clinical trials. The WA Department of Health will summarise the outcomes from the Forum and this will be circulated to all participants.

WAHTN will circulate the summary document to members of the WAHTN Executive Board.

#### *Clinician Researchers*

Professor Gary Geelhoed has discussed the implementation of a clinician researchers model in Western Australia with the four Hospital Foundations, Raine Medical Research Foundation, Professor Lindy Fitzgerald (Curtin University) and Dr Greg Sweetman from the Postgraduate Medical Council of WA, who were all supportive of the initiative.

Professor Geelhoed is in the process of arranging a meeting with key stakeholders to progress this initiative.

#### **Other Business**

Throughout the discussion of Agenda items, Board members raised a number of concerns with regards to future funding opportunities. The conversation is summarised as follows:

#### NHMRC Investigator Grant Awards

Professor Gary Geelhoed noted that there were five successful projects awarded to Western Australian researchers during the latest round of Investigator Grant awards from the NHMRC. Two researchers are key collaborators with WAHTN. Professor Anna Nowak's project is titled "Leading the way in mesothelioma – a program of immunotherapy translational research nested within novel clinical trials", and Professor Steve Stick with his project that focuses on "priority driven childhood respiratory research". Three were awarded to emerging leaders affiliated with the Telethon Kids Institute for projects related to child health research, and the Harry Perkins Institute for a project related to genetics.

Board members theorised the reasons why Western Australian researchers did not receive a higher rate of successful grants awarded in comparison to other States. Dr James Williamson noted that the WA Department of Health are monitoring these concerns and suggested one issue could be related to researchers being hesitant in applying for NHMRC Investigator Grants, given there is a high probability they will not succeed.

Professor Harlene Hayne raised the concerns that it costs the University sector approximately \$1.60 per \$1.00 received from Commonwealth funding bodies such as NHMRC and Australian Research Council. She remarked that pre COVID-19, universities secured funding through international students. However, in the current environment and in the absence of this funding, the university sector needs to cautiously approach ongoing competitive funding that is not full cost recovery and consider how the sector can continue to make commitments to research when there is uncertainty. Dr James Williamson suggested that a key way forward could be with the Medical Research Future Fund as they have reasonable mechanisms in place to fund research.

#### State Government Funding

Professor Hayne stated it was disappointing that the WA State Government has not granted further funding to the health and medical research sector given the State recently announced a \$5.6 billion surplus, on the back of a stronger economy and increased revenue.

Additionally, if the State Government Border continues to remain closed to all international students, the university sector will continue to experience significant income funding distress.

#### WA Future Health Research & Innovation (FHCI) Fund

Dr James Williamson informed the Board members that the FHRI Fund recently released their programs and initiatives for the 2021/22 and 2023/24 period. A link to the page can be found here: <https://fhrifund.health.wa.gov.au/About-us/FHRI-Fund-Programs-and-Initiatives>

Dr Williamson stated there are great opportunities for early career researchers, and market led proposals, as well as mental health and Aboriginal health initiatives.