

Abridged Executive Board Minutes for the WAHTN Website Meeting No. 05/2021 held on Monday 13 December 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
*Mr Paul Forden, 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
Ms Wendy Murray representing the Medical Research Institute sector
Dr James Williamson, representing the WA Department of Health

Professor Gary Geelhoed, Executive Director WAHTN, ex officio

Executive Officer: Ms Lauren White, WAHTN

By Invitation:

Dr Debbie Turner, Chief Operating Officer, WAHTN

(Those marked with asterisk attended by Zoom or Phone)

Apologies

Professor Bill Morgan

Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Board 15 September 2021

It was RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the WAHTN Executive Board held on 15 September 2021 were a true and correct record of that meeting.

Management Committee

The Minutes of the Management Committee meetings held on 15 September, 20 October and 17 November 2021 were noted.

NHMRC Research Translation Centre Re-accreditation Submission

The NHMRC has announced a 'Call for Submissions for Accreditation (2021)' as a Research Translation Centre (RCT). Submissions are due 21 January 2022.

Letters were circulated to WAHTN Partner Organisations advising them of the process; requesting assistance to collate data that highlights the excellence translation research being conducted in WA; and a Working Group was established.

Action Item: The first draft of WAHTN's Submission to NHMRC for Re-accreditation as a Research Translation Centre is being prepared and will be provided to Board members no later than 17 December 2021. It was requested that Board members provide feedback and comments on the draft submission by 24 December 2021.

Dr James Williamson asked whether the WA Country Health Service and Curtin University Research & Innovation Alliance intend submitting an application as an accredited NHMRC RTC (Regional, Rural and Remote). Professor Geelhoed was unaware of the Alliance's intention and had not been contacted. During the meeting, Professor Hayne followed up with her staff and confirmed that a submission was currently being drafted for the Alliance.

Governance and Operations

WAHTN Chair Position

Dr Williamson recently sought and received approval from the members of the WAHTN Executive Board of another candidate and that nominee's name has been submitted to the Minister for endorsement.

The WA Department of Health is awaiting a formal response from the Minister.

WAHTN Executive Director Position Recruitment

A recruitment strategy has now commenced for the role of WAHTN Executive Director.

A link to the advertisement can be found here:

<https://www.seek.com.au/job/55269410?type=standard#searchRequestToken=670db218-ebaa-4a35-9fe0-1725ec3146b1>

Closing date for applications is midday 31 January 2022.

Joint Venture Agreement, Centre Agent Services Agreement

The Chair and Executive Director circulated the final version of the Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) to the WAHTN Partner Organisations for signing and execution on 11 August 2021. To date, seventeen Partner Organisations have signed the Agreement. The three outstanding are being followed up as a priority to enable the JVA to be finalised.

Dr James Williamson advised that the execution of the JVA by the WA Department of Health and WA Area Health Services requires the approval of the State Minister for Health and is presently before him for that purpose. The Department will follow up.

WAHTN's Membership and Fee Structure

There was considerable discussion regarding the WAHTN Partner Membership and Fee Structure Discussion Paper, attached to the Agenda.

Professor Gary Geelhoed provided background information: The WAHTN Partner members pay annual membership fees as stated in the JVA. The fees are set, reviewed and adjusted from time to time by the WAHTN Executive Board.

In late 2020, WAHTN did not have sufficient funds to support its core operations, and needed 36% of additional funds to continue operating effectively. At a meeting of the Board, the WA Department of Health agreed to provide 50% of the required increase in core funding, if this was matched from the other Partners, thus effectively reducing the increased amount needed from each Partner to 18%. Eighteen of the nineteen Partner Organisations agreed to the increase, which was matched by the Department, as a "one off" to meet salary and operational costs. This was on the understanding that the WAHTN Executive Board would review the WAHTN Partner membership fee structure.

A review of the WAHTN partnership fee structure is required both to meet WAHTN core operating expense and to provide equity and accountability in the fee process. Five Options for establishing a fee structure were tabled in the Discussion Paper. Board members agreed that for a variety of reasons Options one, three, and five were not viable at this stage, leaving Options two and four as the favoured Options. It was noted that a combination of both Options would be considered, with minor adjustments.

Option two is for a fixed 18% increase for all Partners above the 2020 fees.

Option 4 is a fixed fee, with tiers within sectors. This option is similar to the current fee structure but more aligned to an organisation's size within each of the tiers. The fees could be altered by discussion

with the Executive Board. This solution would result in an increase in fees for some Partners but a reduction in fees for others.

It was agreed by Board members that Partners' fees should not decrease.

Dr Williamson reminded the Board that the contribution by DOH of "matched funds" in 2021 was a "one-off" contribution and it would not be in a position to repeat this for the next budget year.

It was noted that there is a disparity between the contributions made by the Universities. The University of Western Australia pays a disproportionately greater fee than any of the other four University members as well as "in kind" support. Professor Harlene Hayne said that she will discuss this and consult with the University sector Vice Chancellors to ascertain the value add of WAHTN and the relativities, when they meet this week.

Board members said that they would support an increase in the contributions from Private Hospital / Health Care sector. However, Dr Terry Bayliss asked Board members to remember that both Ramsay Health Care and St John of God Health Care are nationally based organisations and the State based benefit would need to be considered.

Ms Pip Brennan asked whether the WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA) had been approached to become a fee paying Partner member. Professor Gary Geelhoed advised that he has met with WAPHA on several occasions. At its most recent meeting, WAPHA said that it would consider becoming a member of WAHTN as it is moving towards a research focus. Professor Geelhoed is yet to receive a response from WAPHA and will follow up with it accordingly. Ms Brennan noted that from a community perspective, it is valuable to have an independent network, separate from Government.

The Chairman commented that the establishment of WAHTN was promoted by WA Department of Health which saw value in having an independent body. Dr Williamson agreed. He said that another option for funding from the Department could be a total annual sum towards the WAHTN Core and the Platforms (including the Departments contribution as a Partner member), be provided to WAHTN to distribute accordingly to the Core and Platforms, at the discretion of the Executive Director. Professor Geelhoed observed that this funding model had been suggested by the Department in 2020, and in response, WAHTN had developed a submission outlining the costings for the Core and Platforms. The proposal was submitted to the Department for consideration, but was not accepted by the Department.

Action Items:

The action items related to the discussion of WAHTN's Membership and Fee Structure are summarised as follows:

- Board members resolved that a combination of Options two and four (as per the attachment tabled), with minor adjustments were the preferred Options. WAHTN will progress discussion on this basis, noting that this would be dependent on the outcome of the consultation Professor Hayne will have with the University Vice Chancellors regarding the University sector's annual fees.
- Dr Williamson will ascertain whether the WA Department of Health will consider a minor annual increase.
- Professor Geelhoed will follow up with WAPHA to determine if it is interested in becoming a Partner member of WAHTN.

Financial Reports

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

The Chairman and Executive Director had met with Dr David Russell-Weisz and Dr James Williamson from the WA Department of Health on 9 December 2021 to discuss the funding of the WAHTN Platforms, including the Clinical Trials and Data Management Centre (CTDMC), Consumer and Community Involvement Program (CCIProgram), and the Research Education and Training Program (RETProgram).

Dr James Williamson advised that there has been a significant delay in the Department receiving its budget, but said that there would be some funding available for the Platforms. He was unable to advise the amounts but said that the Executive Director will receive a letter confirming the allocation by 15 December 2021.

Dr Williamson discussed the funds allocated to the WAHTN COVID-19 Research Funding Program and confirmed that the research project titled *Australasian COVID - 19 Trial (ASCOT)* will be proceeding.

Professor Gary Geelhoed remarked that he had been requesting an update from the Department on repurposing the funds for over a year, particularly as the ASCOT project relies on a significant number of COVID-19 patients, which WA does not have at present. There are infrastructure challenges in the State and Dr Williamson had previously suggested that the repurposed funds might be allocated to other areas of need such as biobanking.

Dr Williamson said that the Department predicts there may be COVID patients able and willing to take part in the trial in the new year, and wish the funds to be retained for that purpose. He said that the Executive Director was welcome to discuss the project with the ASCOT Chief Investigator to see whether the surplus might be released to WAHTN.

As resolved at previous meetings of the WAHTN Executive Board, all new COVID-19 Research Funding Program Project proposals produced will be tabled for consideration by the WAHTN Executive Board.

Executive Director's Quarterly Report

The Executive Director's Quarterly Report was tabled by Professor Gary Geelhoed, however due to time constraints, he was unable to verbally discuss all items in detail and directed Board members to the attachment tabled. He noted the following:

- Professor Geelhoed advised that the Australian Health Research Alliance (AHRA) – Consumer and Community Involvement (CCI) Handbook is the first 'how-to' guide for embedding CCI in research. It is designed for researchers, consumers, organisations, and funders, and incorporates templates and useful resources.
The CCI Handbook was successfully launched on Friday 19 November 2021. The event was well attended and received extremely positive feedback locally, nationally and internally. The Handbook is now available on the [WAHTN website](#) and has been promoted by our AHRA colleagues Australia-wide. It is hoped that WAHTN Partners will also promote this valuable resource on their respective websites and throughout their networks. Copies were distributed to Board members.
- The current Funding Agreement with the WA Department of Health for the RETProgram has now ceased. To date, we have not received any further funding from the Department and WAHTN had to reduce the RETProgram staff members from three employees to one. This decision was not taken lightly. The WAHTN has sufficient funds to retain the remaining staff member to continue RETProgram operations until 31 December 2021. By then, if the

RETProgram is not funded for a further funding period, discussions will need to take place with the WAHTN Executive Board, WA Department of Health and WAHTN Partner Organisations in relation to next steps beyond December 2021, specifically, options for maintaining the current suite of courses that are available on the RETProgram website.