

**WA Health Translation Network
Management Committee Subgroup Meeting 05/2021
Minutes
Wednesday 17 November 2021, 10 am – 11 am
Location: Room 634, Harry Perkins Institute, and via MS Teams**

Present

Chair: Professor Gary Geelhoed, Executive Director WAHTN
Edith Cowan University: Professor John Olynyk
North Metropolitan Health Service: Dr Aron Chakera
Perron Institute for Neurological and Translational Science: Professor Steve Wilton AO
The University of Western Australia: Professor Anna Nowak
WAHTN Consumer and Community Involvement Program: Ms Debra Langridge
WAHTN Manager: Ms Lauren White

Apologies

Busselton Population Medical Research Institute: Ms Jennie Hui
Harry Perkins Institute and the University of Western Australia: Professor Kevin Pflieger
Murdoch University: Professor David Morrison
St John of God Hospital: Professor Steve Webb
The University of Notre Dame Australia: Professor Jim Codde
Telethon Kids Institute: Professor Catherine Elliott
WAHTN Clinical Trials and Data Management Centre: Professor Chris Reid
WAHTN Chief Operating Officer: Dr Debbie Turner

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomes members to this meeting.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2021

The Minutes of the Meeting of the WAHTN Subgroup held on 20 October 2021 were noted.

3. Governance

WAHTN Re-accreditation as NHMRC Research Translation Centre

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

A Working Group has been established and met on 1 November 2021. The group includes nominees from WAHTN Partner Organisations. WAHTN has requested individual Partner information via the Working Group for data that highlights the excellence translation research being conducted in WA. A good response has been received to date.

It is intended that the first draft of WAHTN's Submission to NHMRC for Re-accreditation as a Research Translation Centre will be completed in early December 2021 and provided to this Committee and the WAHTN Executive Board for review and comments.

WAHTN Executive Board Meeting

The Chair provided a brief update which included the following:

- The next meeting of the WAHTN Executive Board is scheduled on 13 December 2021.
- We are still awaiting the outcome of the WAHTN Executive Board Chair appointment, all Partners will be informed, once confirmed.
- Recruitment will shortly commence for the role of WAHTN Executive Director and will be circulated widely across networks. It is anticipated that the successful applicant will commence in April 2022.
- A review of the WAHTN partnership fee structure is underway to provide equity and accountability to the fee process. Executive Board member Paul Forden (SMHS Chief Executive) is assisting WAHTN to develop an appropriate model.

4. Funding Opportunities

WA Future Health Research and Innovation Fund (FHRI)

Gary Geelhoed attended the FHRI Fund Advisory Council Chair event on 15 November 2021, which shared the achievements of the FHRI Fund to-date and provided insights into the State's future direction for health and medical research and innovation.

The event showcased a few of the research and innovation initiatives the FHRI Fund Advisory Council has supported over the last 12 months which includes Merrilee Needham's TRANSFORM project and Fred Chen's preventing blindness from retinal degeneration: from clinic to bench to trials project.

WA Grant Outcomes Discussion

In response to calls from the sector to address the continuing decline in grant success rates for WA, the Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes WA (AAMRI WA), Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences WA (AAHMS WA) and WAHTN convened a meeting to start the conversation about potential strategies for improving success rates. The meeting was held on 25 October 2021 and the outcomes from this meeting are attached (Attachment 1).

5. Activities

Promotion of Clinician Researchers

Gary Geelhoed held a meeting with key stakeholders on 15 November 2021. Attendees agreed that WAHTN would coordinate the clinician researcher's initiative. Lindy Fitzgerald has been appointed Chair of a Working Party, given her involvement from Curtin University's perspective.

Area Health Services Workshop

In collaboration with Paul Forden (SMHS), the Area Health Services Workshop has been rescheduled to 15 December 2021. WAHTN and the Directors of Research will meet prior. The WAHTN Management Committee Sub Group will be updated as this initiative progresses.

Clinical Trials and Data Management Centre

Despite a positive Clinical Trials Stakeholder Forum, held on 9 September 2021, the application co-written with the WA Department of Health, which would enable future support to the Clinical Trials and Data Management Centre was not submitted to the FHRI Advisory Council by the Health Dept.

This is disappointing and Gary Geelhoed, along with Chris Reid are following up with the WA Department of Health to ascertain future funding opportunities.

Science on the Swan 2022 topic focussing on Innovation and Commercialisation

The establishment of the Organising Committee is well underway for SOTS 2022, focussing on Showcasing Western Australian Innovation and Commercialisation in Health.

The Organising Committee has met and is represented by all interested WAHTN Partner Organisations.

Biobanking

Gary Geelhoed acknowledged Prof Jeff Keelan, who has written a business case for biobanking, submitted to the FHRI Fund. The WA Department of Health is supportive of this sector wide application. A Biobanking Steering Committee meeting is scheduled on 3 November 2021.

CCI Handbook

The CCI Handbook will officially be launched on 19 November 2021.

7. Other Business

Committee members raised the issue of Technology Transfer as UWA are currently restructuring this section within the Research Development and Innovation office. It was discussed whether there would be an opportunity to consolidate Tech Transfer across the WA University sector. Anna Nowak advised that she will raise this at the next meeting of the WA Deputy Vice Chancellors (Research).

8. Next Meeting

The Chair discussed the timing of these meetings and whether they are convenient to the majority of members. It was noted that some clinician members might find the current timing challenging to fit around clinician commitments. It was agreed that the WAHTN would circulate a Doodle Poll asking all members to select the most convenient time for meetings in 2022.

Additionally, the WAHTN would arrange a full Management Committee meeting at the in the early part of 2022. It is intended that two meetings would be held each year, with the Subgroup meeting on a monthly basis.

WA GRANT OUTCOMES – AN INITIAL DISCUSSION

Convened by AAMRI WA and AAHMS WA

Date: Monday 25th October

Time: 11:00 – 12:00

Location: Telethon Kids Institute, Level 6, Founders Room

Attendees: 45 (28 in person, 17 via TEAMS)

Including representatives from Universities, MRIs, MRFs, WAHTN, DoH, EMHS, SMHS, CAHS, WACHS, Pathwest

Meeting notes

Item	
1.	<p>Welcome, Acknowledgement of Country and opening comments Professor Jonathon Carapetis AM <i>Telethon Kids Institute Executive Director AAMRI WA Chair AAHMS WA Fellow</i></p>
2.	<p>WA Grant Outcomes data Professor David Mackey AO <i>AAHMS WA Chair AAHMS WA Fellow</i></p>
3.	<p>Case study Telethon Kids Institute has done well in recent grant rounds. What is working? <i>Dr Tegan McNab</i> <i>Grants and Research Development Manager</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Telethon Kids has an extensive review process starting with an assessment of scheme competitiveness and significant research development-type support for applicants in the lead up to submission.• This covers all aspects of the application and is complemented by additional support from affiliated universities (UWA and Curtin).• The Institute also requires applicants to undergo 2 peer reviews to be eligible for fellowship top-up.• Applicants are further supported by a number of internal awards, travel funding, prizes, etc to bolster track records.• Looking at now strengthening the pipeline for applicants in rounds that are due to close in the next 2-3 years.
4.	<p>Open discussion Possible reasons for WA's low grant \$ and success rates</p> <p>Structural/ institutional issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of critical mass and scale reduces WA's competitiveness

- Continual funding cuts for research staff
- Teaching commitments at universities reduce opportunities for research success
- Insufficient support for emerging leaders
- Lack of collaboration. Not enough clinician-scientist partnerships, siloed research.
- Lack of collaboration when accessing biobanked samples. Multidisciplinary approach required. Researchers also need better/more streamlined access to biobank facilities.
- Lack of strategic investment at state government level limits activity and leverage
- Slow ethics and governance processes reduce agility for clinical research
- Lack of health service support for applications
- Lack of University co-investment (WA-wide) as an attractive proposition for funders
- Lack of appeal of Perth to external researchers – expensive housing, lack of jobs for skilled accompanying partners
- WA in a downward spiral of diminishing funding success

Capacity gaps

- Lack of local capacity in important fields – health economics, big data, biostatistics, AI, computational biology

Lack of track record and quality

- Fewer stellar researchers compared to East Coast
- Applicants not sufficiently competitive compared to those from well-resourced institutions elsewhere
- Non-competitive applicants lack insight

East-West divide

- Lack of WA representation in peer review
- Schemes such as MRFF not equitable,
- Large collaborations centred on East Coast
- Researcher profile suffers from distance
- Time zone barriers to collaboration
- Geographical bias and assumption WA researchers are lower quality
- Lack of confidence and motivation when success rate is so low

Brain drain

- Pipeline for working on NHMRC fellowship requires 5-10 years work, many WA researchers lost to the system or to the East Coast before that

5.

The way forward

Possible actions

Overarching

- Identify and focus efforts on WA's competitive/comparative advantages and strengths in health and medical research.
- Build on those strengths to establish excellence.
- Address Critical Mass issue.

Funding

- Better support to develop and retain EMCRs / star researchers of the future (including existing Fellowship and Investigator Grant holders)
- Genuine and timely safety-net support for "near miss" researchers. More local seed funding/ near miss funding. Near miss funding for two years rather than one
- Teaching buy-out (universities)
- Combine resources for one "WA Medical Research Foundation" rather than multiple individual foundations
- Create ambitious parallel fund (corporate/philanthropy) with the goal of being wildly innovative and creating post-resource med research industries for WA
- Bigger/more targeted investment via the FHRIF. Suggestion that at full maturity, FHRIF's \$40m is a drop in the ocean and not enough when compared to Vic.
- Bold funding scheme equivalent of Snow Fellowships (\$8m over 8 years) for exceptional mid-career researchers working in one of our identified strengths. Bring exceptional researchers to WA and have the sector build up around them.

Collaboration

- Create opportunities for networking, connection and collaboration statewide, including between Universities and MRIs
- Reward collaboration with East Coast researchers.
- Alternatively, look within WA first for collaborators
- Encourage, facilitate and support development of larger teams, expertise hubs/centres that can facilitate research themes and provide support towards projects/grants across disciplines/research topics.
- Develop a global WA health agenda as a springboard for collaboration and access to external funding

State government/health department:

- Academic and MRI sector must work with government to enable FHRI fund to fulfil its brief and potential
- Strengthen working relationships between Health Dept, Universities and MRIs
- Parliamentary inquiry or ministerial taskforce to gather data on grant outcomes, make recommendations for action

Research development

- Greater investment in research development services.
- Better communication of research opportunities (statewide events and networking around specific large funding opportunities?)
- Education and support around building a strong team.
- Better strategy to optimise grant quality before submission
- Administrative support for grant applications

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Pitch your project' workshops • Structured peer review of grant applications <p>Lobbying, publicity and awareness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise profile of WA health and medical research nationally • Canberra – lobbying, professional lobbyist, connections – strengthen for WA • Strategies to gain advance warning of MRFF rounds/topics • Travel grants to enhance exposure for WA researchers <p>Retaining/attracting/developing talent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State schemes to attract and retain high quality researchers in WA • Developing talent – culture change around long-term planning for success, CV competitiveness • Mentoring and development of near-miss applicants; structured mentoring for potential leaders • Local prizes and awards (CV development) • Health service support for clinical research – quarantined time • Attraction program to bring Fellowship/Investigator Grant holders from East to WA (see also Snow Fellowships reference under “Funding”) • Support for career opportunities for 'trailing spouse' of excellent recruits • Seek insight from successful researchers/teams on the East Coast
6.	<p>Review of action items/ final comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AAMRI WA and AAHMS WA to seek expressions of interest from those willing to be part of a taskforce/working group • AAMRI WA and AAHMS WA to meet with WATHN in November to discuss formation and structure of taskforce and relevant support • Further discussions with WA government on their level of involvement
7.	<p>Meeting close</p>

APPENDIX

Expressions of Interest in working group/ taskforce

Name	Organisation
Dr Gina Ravenscroft	Harry Perkins Institute
Professor Nigel Laing	Harry Perkins Institute
Ron Jones	Harry Perkins Institute
Dr Stephen Stick	Telethon Kids Institute
Dr Chris Blyth	Telethon Kids Institute
Merrilee Needham	South Metropolitan Health Service
Professor Anna Nowak	University of Western Australia
Dr Ylva Olsen	University of Western Australia
Professor John Olynyk	Edith Cowan University
Professor Steve Webb	George Institute/UWA/Monash
Dr Rebekah Puls	Perron Institute
Wendy Murray	Lions Eye Institute
Dr Jim Tiao	Perth Blood Institute