

AUSTRALIAN CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION ALLIANCE



ACDPA submission – MRFF consultation on strategy and priorities

11 October 2021

The Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (ACDPA) brings together Cancer Council Australia, Heart Foundation, Diabetes Australia, Stroke Foundation and Kidney Health Australia to promote prevention, risk assessment and early detection of chronic disease.

Strategy

1. Could the current Strategy be altered to better meet the purpose set out in the MRFF Act? If so, how?

No response

2. What are the most critical current and future issues and factors impacting on the health system, including primary prevention, and on the health and medical research sector that the next Strategy needs to address?

Chronic conditions are the leading cause of death and disability in Australia. Chronic diseases are responsible for half of all hospitalisations and account for around one-third of national health spending. Yet 38 percent of chronic disease burden could be prevented by addressing modifiable risk factors.

There are vast **inequities** in access and health outcomes across Australia, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, people from rural and remote areas, and lower socioeconomic areas. These inequities relate to prevalence in risk factors and disease, as well as poorer access and outcomes.

It is also important to acknowledge the significant role **sex and gender** play in the experience of chronic disease. Both Australian and international evidence point to the disparities in treatment and care that exist between women and men, and the poorer health outcomes women often experience as a result.

Only with dedicated research funding and requirements to do sub-analysis, can investigators unravel the fundamental biological and behavioural differences that exist in disease initiation and progression and in doing so, help address the sex-specific issues needed to inform clinical care, prevention and delivery.

3. Suggest options for how the next Strategy could address these critical issues and factors?

The Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (ACDPA) supports the objective to '**Embed research evidence in healthcare policy and in practice improvement.**' This is crucial to ensure public health and primary care research informs health system and policy changes to benefit the long-term health and wellbeing of Australians.

ACDPA supports retaining '**Health services and systems**' and '**Trials and translation**' as strategic platforms. We recommend embedding public health research and translation in the Strategy to build the evidence base for prevention and create a sustainable health system that is not overburdened by preventable chronic disease.

The MRFF Strategy and investment activities should align with current health system reform, including the Primary Health Care 10-Year Plan, MBS Review, National Preventive Health Strategy, and National Obesity Strategy.

ACDPA supports a continued focus on impact being measured through better patient outcomes, beneficial change to health practices, and increased efficiency in the health system.

4. Given the new and significant impact of COVID-19 on health services and health research, how should the new Strategy address COVID-19 related topics and impacts?

No response

Priorities

1. Could the current Priorities be improved to better address the requirements under the MRFF Act? If so, how?

ACDPA supports a continued consideration of burden of disease and practical benefits of research when determining priorities.

2. What are the most critical current and future issues for the health system and the health and medical research sector that the next Priorities need to address through research translation/implementation?

Chronic conditions are the leading cause of death and disability in Australia. One in two Australians have a chronic condition and one in five Australians have multiple conditions. Yet 38 percent of chronic disease burden could be prevented by addressing modifiable risk factors.

Millions of Australians are living with high risk of cardiovascular disease and/or with undiagnosed conditions like type 2 diabetes or chronic kidney disease. Many chronic conditions share risk factors like unhealthy diets, overweight and obesity, smoking, high blood pressure, and physical inactivity.

Timely risk assessment, management of risk and early detection have the potential to slow or halt progression of disease through lifestyle changes and/or medication, improve treatment outcomes, and reduce avoidable complications and hospitalisations. Yet, evidence-based improvements are inconsistently integrated into the health system.

3. Suggest options for how the next Priorities could address these critical issues?

ACDPA strongly supports the priority '**Public health interventions**' and the explicit recognition of modifiable risk factors for chronic disease. There is a vital need to build the evidence base and demonstrate the value of public health solutions for policymakers.

ACDPA strongly supports the priority '**Primary care research**,' including the recognition of multiple comorbidities. Many chronic conditions share risk factors and interact with existing conditions to increase risk. Research needs to consider whole-person prevention and care.

Primary care research and translation is crucial to reorient the health system towards preventive care and keep people well in the community.

Priorities should align with current government initiatives and policies, including the Primary Health Care 10-Year Plan, MBS Review, National Preventive Health Strategy, National Obesity Strategy, and complement existing work in this area, such as the recent Productivity Commission report *Innovations in care for chronic conditions*.

4. Given the new and significant impact of COVID-19 on health services and health research, how should the new priorities address COVID-19 related topics?

COVID-19 has had an enormous impact on people living with chronic disease. ACDPA is concerned about future ill-health due to the long-term effects of COVID-19 (including on cardiovascular, kidney and mental ill-health), delayed diagnoses, and changes in risk factors during the pandemic.

There is an increased need for public health and health systems research and translation to understand and manage the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on chronic disease.