

Australian Medical Research and Innovation Two Year Priorities

Title: Using Psychological Science to Facilitate Change

Submitted by: Australian Psychological Society

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1. What is the gap in Australia's health system to be addressed by this priority?

Australia has an outstanding record in medical and health innovation, but there is a gap in attention to the need for psychological science, as many of these innovations require behaviour change to be implemented so as to achieve maximum outcomes for consumers, health practitioners and health services in a cost-effective and cost-efficient manner.

2. How does your area of priority address either an existing or a new health or health system challenge?

As a diverse and strongly evidence-based discipline, behavioural and psychological science can make significant contributions to the MRFF strategic priority areas, specifically in relation to health technology, e-health, chronic disease, mental health, substance abuse, learning and development, and to health challenges for children, women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and residents of rural and remote regions, by (i) determining the most effective manner in which to alter behaviour and ensuring efficient delivery of the strategies, (ii) filling gaps in clinical and translational research from the laboratory to clinical settings and to policy and (iii) informing evidence-based policy and its evaluation.

3. Comment on which aims and objectives your priority is likely to meet.

As a behavioural science discipline with explicit focus and outstanding expertise in behaviour change, psychological science can help to meet the aims and objectives outlined in Figure 1. Specific examples include:

- **Prevention:** psychological science provides expertise in helping understand and establish the behaviours needed for Australians to live healthy lives and experience high levels of social and emotional well-being and community connectedness. Pre-school and school-based programmes such as Kidsmatter are based on psychological research and provide these building blocks from early life. Other examples are the Sun Smart Program and anti-smoking campaigns
- **Sustainable, high-quality, cost-effective health care:** e-psychology and e-mental health approaches to the high burden of mental illness; management strategies for chronic disease, obesity, sleep disturbance, pain, substance abuse all build on behavioural and cognitive psychology principles
- **Leveraging and enhancing collaboration and integration:** Psychologists frequently work in multidisciplinary teams in order to deliver health outcomes. Psychological science-based research into team effectiveness and the best sequencing of the delivery of team skills will enhance efficiency of service delivery
- **Translation pathway that maximises opportunity for success:** All new programmes of health service delivery and disease prevention require study of the most effective methods for implementing the changes. Psychological science incorporates research into implementation of system change, organisational efficiency and job design, and is therefore ideally placed to facilitate end-stage translation of delivery of programmes

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- **Strong evidence base for healthcare policy and delivery:**

Psychological science embraces a commitment to deliver a strong evidence base, and psychological scientists can draw from, and are experts in, such diverse methodologies as basic, laboratory-based research, randomised controlled trial intervention studies, qualitative methodologies and policy research

- **Balanced and appropriately skilled workforce:** The psychology workforce obtains high quality training in research and discovery skills, is trained to value and engage in evidence-based practice, and through higher education and continuing professional development fosters and retains unique competence in behaviour change across a wide range of medical and health priority areas

- **Research engaged workforce:** Psychologists are trained as scientist-practitioners and are expected to use continuous evaluation of their work practises. Many psychologists who are working outside traditional research settings also contribute to research programs or report practice-based evidence.

4. **Mandatory considerations – which of the mandatory considerations set out in the *Medical Research Future Fund Act (2015)* does your priority proposal address?**

- ☒ Burden of disease on the Australian Community
- ☒ How to deliver practical benefits from medical research and medical innovation to as many Australians as possible
- ☐ How to ensure that financial assistance provides that greatest value for all Australians
- ☐ How to ensure that disbursements complement and enhance other assistance provided to the sector

5. **Outline of priority proposal:**

Compared with other health sciences, psychological science is significantly underfunded. As stated in sections 1 to 4, psychological science provides the evidence base for behaviour change required across the medical and health spectrum. Adequate funding of psychological science will allow it to address strategically the nation's health and medical challenges and the national priorities in a cohesive and coordinated manner. Adequate funding for psychological science will help to support partnerships between health and medical researchers, the healthcare workforce, consumers, and provide guidance for Federal, State and Territory health initiatives.

6. **What measures of success do you propose and what will be the impact on health care consumers?**

Impact on health care consumers will be overall improved physical and mental health, specific knowledge of disease management, access to best, evidence-based approaches, and ultimately, more cost-effective and cost-efficient service delivery and containment of health care costs.

7. **Please outline any linkages your proposal has with stakeholders, policy agendas and other health and medical research funding agencies.**

The aims and objectives listed in Figure 1 go across all the key interactions and stakeholders listed. Psychological science has different linkages with stakeholders, policy agendas and other funding agencies, depending on whether the aim is principally preventative, focuses on health care quality and effectiveness, enhancing collaboration, research translation and implementing the evidence base in health care policy and delivery with the help of the relevant workforce. For example, State and Territory health authorities and local hospitals could become a "validation" site for one of the Academic Centres of Health Excellence.