



Crossbench shines a light on Australia’s medical research crisis: Underfunded, underdelivered, and overdue for change

Independent crossbench MPs Dr Monique Ryan, Dr Helen Haines, Kate Chaney, Dr Sophie Scamps, Allegra Spender, Zali Steggall, Nicolette Boele and Senator David Pocock warn that a chronic lack of public funding is suffocating Australia’s medical research sector – risking jobs, lives, and Australia’s economic prosperity.

The Albanese Government shortlists medical research as one of Australia’s top science and research priorities. Medical research drives economic growth and health outcomes, and saves lives every day, but it remains chronically underfunded.

This year, 91.9% of NHMRC Ideas Grants applications have been rejected, an exceptionally poor strike rate, despite many projects being deemed “outstanding” when assessed (having scored 6 out of 7).

The crossbench parliamentarians are calling on the government to immediately release more funds for medical research from the Medical Research Future Fund, to supplement NHMRC funding while the long-awaited National Health and Medical Research Strategy is finalised.

Dr Monique Ryan, Independent for Kooyong:

“Australia’s leading researchers are missing out on government support for world-class proposals, leaving exceptional talent uncertain about their future. The government cannot claim medical research is a priority while failing to treat it as one.

“There’s precedent for using the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) to supplement NHMRC allocations. We have hundreds of millions of unspent dollars in the MRFF, while researchers are unable to secure their careers, cement their futures, and improve Australians’ health.

“Preparing a grant application takes months of work, but I understand that more than half the projects rated “outstanding” in the most recent grant round were unsuccessful—they received no funding. What are we telling our researchers when we say their work is outstanding, but we don’t value it enough to support it?

“This is so short-sighted. We need vision and innovation from our government. Our medical research sector has unlimited potential, if we allow it to flourish and support our researchers to succeed.”

Dr Helen Haines, Independent for Indi:

“When world-class projects are falling through the cracks, it’s not just researchers who miss out - it’s patients, families and our health. We can’t afford to let medical breakthroughs stall.

“Medical research strengthens our health system and drives innovation. Investing in it isn’t a burden, it’s an investment in our health.”

Kate Chaney, Independent for Curtin:

“Withholding funding from world-class researchers delays medical breakthroughs and stifles innovation. Across WA’s four research universities, only five out of 130 research proposals received NHMRC funding – a success rate of less than four percent.

“With a large number of high quality submissions, the Government needs to release the full quota of MRFF funding. Every family is touched by illness – whether it's cancer, dementia, diabetes, or rare genetic conditions. Continued investment in medical research is vital to saving and improving lives.”

Dr Sophie Scamps, Independent for Mackellar:

“Australia’s health and medical research sector is being held back by chronic underfunding. Increased funding means more medical breakthroughs that will support prevention, save lives, and reduce pressure on our hospitals. It’s time for the federal government to act boldly and deliver a National Health and Medical Research Strategy that enables smarter, more strategic investment in health and medical research to secure Australia’s future as a global leader in health innovation.”

David Pocock, Independent Senator for the ACT, questioned the NHMRC at Senate estimates on Wednesday night:

“Australia’s investment in research and development is at historic lows at the same time as the cost of doing research is increasing. We need to be attracting and retaining world-class researchers, funding research infrastructure and the indirect costs of research, and ensuring they can spend their time doing life-changing study rather than filling out endless forms or spending hours on grant applications that are ultimately unsuccessful despite being assessed as meritorious.”

Allegra Spender, Independent for Wentworth:

“At a time when international shifts have created uncertainty in the research community Australia should take advantage of the opportunity to lean in to R&D.

“We have an amazing track record of world leading medical research and it’s crazy that outstanding research proposals go unfunded, at the same time as the MRFF is now able to make substantially greater grants while still building its endowment.

“The government can’t claim to support innovation and productivity while it leaves our best researchers spending around 25% of their working lives, by some reports, writing grant applications that are recognised as outstanding, but left unfunded. It needs to consolidate the NHMRC and MRFF into one fund, and step up its grant allocations to the levels that they can collectively sustainably support.”

Zali Steggall, Independent for Warringah:

"Australia can't build an innovative, healthy nation if our medical researchers are denied the resources they need. When outstanding proposals go unfunded, we don't just lose the chance of potentially life-saving discoveries, we risk the jobs of our brightest medical minds. If the Albanese government says medical research is a priority, then it must fund it accordingly."

Nicolette Boele, Independent for Bradfield:

"When research goes underfunded, health challenges go unaddressed. A thriving and effective research sector doesn't appear by luck; it grows when investment meets talent.

"Investing in medical research is one of the smartest budget decisions we can make. If preventive care had been properly supported five years ago, we could have saved at least \$5 billion in health costs. Research drives the treatments that make prevention effective, easing pressure on hospitals and our budget.

"It's simple - if we want breakthroughs and the savings that flow from healthier people needing less acute care, we have to invest in the people who make them possible."

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