



Axing the AEA is another blow to Australia's research community

The Albanese Government's decision to axe \$800 million in uncommitted funding from Australia's Economic Accelerator (AEA) is a serious blow to Australian research commercialisation.

It's a profound slap in the face to researchers who have spent up to 18 months navigating a rigorous multi-stage application process, only to be told there's no money for any of them.

Launched in 2023, the AEA was designed to bridge what researchers term the 'valley of death' between world-class academic research and commercial outcomes. Across approximately 400 projects it was already work of real consequence: point-of-care diagnostic devices for dengue and Japanese encephalitis; next-generation lithium ion batteries for electric vehicles; treatments for diabetes, endometriosis and Crohn's disease; and solar-powered hydrogen reactors.

Researchers seeking support from the last, largest stage of the Accelerator have spent months engaging with a detailed application process. Some waited nearly a year for results that were already months overdue, only to receive an email on Friday telling them that the government's priorities had changed.

This decision is utterly disrespectful of Australia's research community. It flies in the face of the Ambitious Australia report — the government's own blueprint for a revitalised research, development and innovation sector. Released barely two months ago after more than a year of nationwide consultation, Ambitious Australia sets out 20 integrated recommendations spanning governance, foundational research, business investment, capital markets and workforce. The government has not yet responded to the report, has announced no implementation plan, and has now pulled \$800 million from the pipeline the report was designed to reform.

We're also still waiting for the finalised National Health and Medical Research Strategy. This ten-year vision for Australia's health and medical research system was due to be finalised by December 2025. It will set national research priorities, strengthen coordination between government, universities, industry, and clinicians, and accelerate translation of research into better health outcomes. Without it, health and medical researchers are left without a clear framework for where national investment is heading. The AEA cancellation only deepens that uncertainty.

At the same time the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) has lost more than 800 jobs over the past eighteen months, with a further 300 to 350 positions soon to go. And in April, the government announced it would not pursue full membership of the European Southern Observatory (ESO) once Australia's current Strategic Partnership expires in 2027. Australia's partnership with ESO has fuelled a thriving astronomy instrumentation program with expanding applications across medicine, defence and mining, has generated millions of dollars in manufacturing contracts and numerous advanced fabrication jobs, and supports more than 100 highly skilled Australian engineers. Stepping away from it now means losing access to the next generation of global research infrastructure, and the talent and industry capability that goes with it.

Australia's research funding as a proportion of GDP now sits at 1.68 per cent — compared to the OECD average of 2.7 per cent and South Korea's 4.9 per cent.

With the Budget due Tuesday, Australia's research and medical community is watching closely for a meaningful commitment to the Medical Research Future Fund. In the face of CSIRO cuts, ESO withdrawal, AEA cancellation, and two major strategies still awaiting government response or finalisation, our scientists and researchers deserve nothing less.

I'm calling on the government to honour its commitment to the MRFF in Tuesday's Budget, to finalise and resource the National Health and Medical Research Strategy without further delay, and to respond to the Ambitious Australia report as a matter of urgency.

Australia's researchers and scientific and medical industries deserve better than this.