

# Australian Medical Research and Innovation Five Year Strategy

**Title:** The role of international conventions in facilitating medical research and development

**Submitted by:** Andrew Hiebl, Chief Executive Officer, Association of Australian Convention Bureaux

**Contact information:** PO Box 6308, O'Connor, ACT 2602. Email: [andrew.hiebl@aacb.org.au](mailto:andrew.hiebl@aacb.org.au)

## Introduction

The Association of Australian Convention Bureaux (AACB) welcomes the opportunity to input into the Australian Government's medical research and innovation five-year strategy. As the peak national business events network representing 16 city and regional convention bureaux, our sector is responsible for attracting international conventions to Australia, a large proportion of which are biomedical conferences.

As such, we are making a submission illustrating how international conventions **reduce the barrier to collaboration**, which in turn **facilitates the translation of research into health outcomes**.

## The gap: Collaboration among Australian medical researchers is in decline

Australia is not very efficient at translating innovation into commercial outcomes<sup>1</sup>. This is partly the result of low funding of research and development (R&D). Currently, R&D accounts for just 2.2 per cent of our gross domestic product, less than half that of leaders such as Finland, Israel Japan, South Korea and Sweden<sup>2</sup>. As a result, our ranking in global innovation indices is low relative to our wealth and international status. In the Global Innovation Index of advanced economies, we sit at number 17<sup>3</sup>, while in the slightly broader Global Competitiveness Index we rank 21st in the world for innovation<sup>4</sup>.

As such, the business events industry welcomed the launch of the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF),<sup>5</sup> which together with the existing appropriation to the National Health and Medical Research Council (MHMRC), will take Australia's public medical research funding to \$20 billion by 2023-24<sup>6</sup>.

However, international scientific collaboration is also in decline among our universities. In 1998 Australia and Japan were the only two Asia-Pacific countries in the main international academic papers co-authorship networks<sup>7</sup>. Today, researchers from institutions in South Korea, Taiwan, India and Singapore are all highly active in the academic paper authorship networks, reducing the share of research collaboration open to Australian universities<sup>8</sup>.

Yet the dilution also presents an opportunity. Scientific research is progressively shifting from single institutions in one country to multiple institutions across many countries<sup>9</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Science & Commercialisation, The Department of Industry and Science, Canberra 2015

<sup>2</sup> *Main science and technology indicators*, Organisation for Economic Coöperation and Development, Paris 2010

<sup>3</sup> Soumitra Dutta, Bruno Lanvin, and Sacha Wunsch-Vincent. *The Global Innovation Index 2015 - Effective Innovation Policies for Development*, Cornell University, Institut européen d'administration des affaires (INSEAD) and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Fontainebleau, Ithaca, and Geneva, 2015

<sup>4</sup> Global Competitiveness and Risks Team, *Global Competitiveness Report 2015-2016*, World Economic Forum, Geneva, 2016

<sup>5</sup> *Opportunity for Business Events in 2015 Federal Budget*, Association of Australian Convention Bureaux, Melbourne, 13 May 2015

<sup>6</sup> *Response by Hon Joe Hockey, Treasurer of Australia*, Question Time, House of Representatives, Parliament of Australia, Canberra, 15 May 2014

<sup>7</sup> Loet Leydesdorff, Caroline Wagner, Han Woo Park and Jonathan Adams, *International Collaboration in Science: The Global Map and the Network*. El Profesional de la Información Barcelona, 2013

<sup>8</sup> The Science, Technology and Industry Scoreboard, Organisation for Economic Coöperation and Development, Paris October 2013

<sup>9</sup> OECD Science, Technology and Industry Scoreboard 2013, 1. Knowledge Economies: Trends and Features, Science and Innovation Today, p.60, Organisation for Economic Coöperation and Development, Paris, 2013

# Australian Medical Research and Innovation Five Year Strategy

## **The solution: Leverage the collaboration power of international medical conventions**

Australian universities' historical academic networks were formed with peers from English-speaking or European academics. In recent years, Australia's Asian neighbours have significantly increased expenditure on medical research. As a result, the United States' share of global medical research has slipped from as high as 80 per cent in the 1990s to 45 per cent today, countries such as Singapore, China, South Korea and India have increased their spend exponentially<sup>10</sup>.

China alone has trebled its public funding for medical research over the past decade<sup>11</sup>.

This provides Australian researchers with an unparalleled opportunity to collaborate with their Asian peers and to ensure that scientific breakthroughs in the field of medicine benefit Australian universities, hospitals, businesses and, ultimately, patients.

This collaboration takes place at the international conventions of specialist medical associations. This collaboration leads to co-publications and increased numbers of citations in medical journals. Further, exhibitions enable opportunities for commercialisation by bringing together scientists and researchers with private enterprise and investors.

Medical and scientific conventions, conferences, meetings and exhibitions are crucial to greater collaboration<sup>12</sup>. In a recent study, over 90% of delegates said knowledge gained at international conferences enhanced their professional career<sup>13</sup>. This knowledge gained is not restricted to the topic of the speeches delivered (although hearing the views of preeminent experts is a major draw card in attracting international delegates), but rather it is the connections forged between leading thinkers over coffee or during study tours that spark future collaboration<sup>14</sup>.

The international gatherings of scientists and medical experts that generate the most collaboration are often the international association conventions. These events bring together up to 10,000 delegates for around a week. The host city becomes the hotbed for idea generation of a particular field of medical research.

Medical science is the largest industry sector for conventions by subject matter, accounting for over 17 per cent of international conventions in the five years to 2012<sup>15</sup>. By this measure Australia fares well, with confirmed forward bookings showing that almost one third of international conferences scheduled to take place here over the next eight years are medical-related<sup>16</sup>.

---

<sup>10</sup> Justin Chakma, Gordon Sun, Jeffrey Steinberg, Stephen Sammut & Reshma Jagsi, *Asia's Ascent — Global Trends in Biomedical R&D Expenditures* (10.1056/NEJMp1311068), *New England Journal of Medicine*, Waltham, Massachusetts, 2 January 2014

<sup>11</sup> *Will Australia's new medical research fund be the biggest in the world?* Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sydney, 21 May 2014

<sup>12</sup> Prof. Leo Jago and Prof Margaret Deery, *Delivering innovation, Knowledge and Performance: The Role of Business Events*. Business Events Council of Australia, Sydney March 2010

<sup>13</sup> Dr Carmel Foley, Dr Deborah Edwards, Dr Katie Schlenker, Ms Anja Hergesell, *Beyond Tourism Benefits - Building and International Profile*. University of Technology, Sydney for the Future Convention Cities Initiative, Sydney May 2014

<sup>14</sup> Prof Mary O'Kane AC, *The importance of conferences to a knowledge-intense economy and society*, address to the IMEX Joint Meetings Industry Council, International Meetings Expo, Frankfurt May 2015

<sup>15</sup> Anja Wagner, *A Modern History of International Association Meetings* - International Congress and Conventions Association, Amsterdam, 2012

<sup>16</sup> *Australian Convention Forward Calendar*, Association of Australian Convention Bureaux, Canberra May 2016

# Australian Medical Research and Innovation Five Year Strategy

## **How to ensure that financial assistance provides the greatest value for all Australians**

Australia's share of such major conferences is slipping. If Australian investment in the MRFF is to be maximised and deliver the greatest value to the government, parallel investment in attracting international conventions needs also to be considered.

Today, Australia faces intense competition from other countries keen to stage such conventions and harness the collaboration benefits that accrue as a result. Ten years ago Australia featured in the top ten of international association conference host countries. But the 2015 rankings show Australia has slipped to number 15<sup>17</sup>.

Around the world, conventions have been recognised as strategic tools for attracting investment and global talent. As a result, governments invest in the attraction of such international conventions. The international associations report ever growing costs in staging such huge gatherings and seek assistance from governments in reducing costs.

In our recent pre-budget submission (2016/17) to the Treasurer we outlined five measures we believe are necessary to bring more international association conventions to Australia.

In summary, we submitted that the federal government must now join our Asian rivals in dedicating funding to help attract international conventions to Australia. We also believe a delegate bursary fund is required assist scientists and academics from less developed countries in attending major conventions in Australia, ensuring we can leave a legacy of knowledge transfer in our region. We also call for easier visa access for conference delegates, a dedicated knowledge economy marketing campaign and a reform to the export marketing development grant scheme.

If we do not reverse our decline, Australian scientists, researchers, academics and doctors could be further marginalised in the race to discover new medicines, scientific breakthroughs and technology.

If we do not reverse this decline, the additional funding made available to medical research through the MRFF will be less effective that it should be.

As you consider Australia's medical research and innovation strategy, we urge you to also consider the role international conventions have in the collaborative workflows essential for effective research.

Without parallel investment in attracting international conventions, Australia will not maximise its medical research investment.

## **A measure of success - back in the top ten**

Australia needs to reclaim its position as one of the top ten international convention destinations. To do so will require investment from the federal and state governments in securing the largest and most prestigious international conventions. This will also greatly benefit the medical community and lead to better health outcomes for ordinary Australians as collaboration leads to greater research.

---

<sup>17</sup> ICCA 2015 rankings, International Congress and Convention Association. Amsterdam, April 2016