



Australian Academy
of Health and
Medical Sciences

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The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency
Level 7, 111 Bourke Street
Melbourne, VIC 3000

Via email: AhpraConsultation@ahpra.gov.au

To whom it may concern

I am writing as President of the Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences regarding the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) consultation on its draft data strategy.

AAHMS is Australia's Learned Academy for health and medicine. We are the impartial, authoritative, cross-sector voice for the sector. We advance research and innovation in Australia to improve everyone's health.

We are an independent, interdisciplinary body of Fellows – elected by their peers for their outstanding achievements and exceptional contributions to health and medical science in Australia. Collectively, they are a representative and independent voice, through which we engage with the community, industry and governments.

The Academy welcome AHPRA's work to develop a data strategy that will guide how it uses the data it collects and holds, and we are grateful for the opportunity to provide input.

In October 2022, the Academy a report, *'Research and innovation as core functions of the health system: A vision for the future of health in Australia'*.¹ In developing this report, we spoke to more than 260 individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds, disciplines and sectors including healthcare professionals across medicine, nursing and midwifery and allied health, researchers, healthcare administrators, consumers and others. We sought their expertise and insights to investigate how Australia can better embed research and innovation in the health system to improve the nation's health outcomes.

The report found that clinician researchers lie at the heart of a research-rich health system that values and promotes evidence-based care. Clinician researchers (which we note are also known as clinician scientists, physician scientists or clinical academics), hold posts across both clinical services and research institutions. This workforce is fundamental to a system that delivers the best, most up to date care. International evidence tells us that when allowed to thrive, clinician researchers can drive a culture of research and innovation within health systems leading to better health outcomes for the public.

¹ The Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences. 2022. Research and innovation as core functions of the health system: A vision for the future of health in Australia. www.ahms.org/vision

At present, there is no clear picture of how many clinician researchers there are in Australia, the training pathways they have taken, the settings in which they work, or their employment arrangements. These data gaps have impacted on Australia's ability to grow and nurture this workforce. Given the important role this group plays in embedding research and innovation in the health system, the consequence is that Australia cannot fully reap the associated benefits.

The Academy welcomes the draft data strategy objective to '**support workforce planning for a sustainable health workforce**'. As AHPRA considers how it uses and shares its existing data as part of this objective, we would urge that it also consider reviewing its processes to ensure it can collect the highest quality data related to the Australian clinician researcher workforce. We acknowledge there is no one organisation that is responsible for collecting and sharing this type of data, however, AHPRA is well-placed to fill some of the existing gaps.

We are aware that AHPRA does collect some data on the research component of clinicians' work, and we welcome this inclusion. However, the data collected at present do not provide enough information to support the development of this part of the workforce. In 2021, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) used data from the AHPRA annual workforce surveys to assess the percentage of health professionals that spend time on research. While this data provided important background for the NHMRC's analysis, the final report stressed the limitations of the available data stating the NHMRC was not able to develop a clear picture of the workforce. The NHMRC recommended that:²

"AHPRA standardise the annual survey for registered health professionals to capture and report data on relevant postgraduate research qualifications and the category of clinician researcher".

The Academy supports this recommendation and would urge AHPRA to consider refining its data collection process to better enable thorough, high-quality collection and analyses of the clinician researcher workforce in the future. This could go towards advancing Australia's ability to:

- define the clinician researcher workforce.
- understand what attracts individuals to enter and remain in this career path.
- understand this cohort's experiences and how they can be better supported.
- provide more targeted support, based on experiences in the local context.
- facilitate more strategic decisions about where clinician researchers are needed.

We would be delighted to assist AHPRA in developing its data collection processes for this workforce. Our Fellowship is made up of a wide variety of experts across a range of disciplines and we can convene this expertise should it be helpful. We would also be delighted to meet with you to discuss this letter further. I can be contacted via email at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Professor Steve Wesselingh PresAHMS
President

² The National Health and Medical Research Council. 2021. Investigating clinician researcher career pathways: Summary report to the NHMRC Chief Executive Officer. <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/investigating-clinician-researcher-career-pathways#block-views-block-file-attachments-content-block-1>