



■ Better Giving Hub (<https://philanthropy-portal.force.com/members/portalPage?p=a0z90000008BmqpAAC&s=a1090000009oltMAAQ>)

Our Voices (/blog/)

[Archives \(/blog/archives/\)](/blog/archives/)

The Great Debate - philanthropy and scientific research: Where to now?

In this Great Debate, we ponder what has become an increasingly pressing issue in our post-pandemic future: What role can philanthropy play in supporting scientific research in a world changed by COVID-19? Professor Elizabeth Hartland, CEO of The Hudson Institute, sees a vital role for philanthropy in providing targeted funding schemes, while Michael Hornby OAM, CEO of The Common Good, highlights a new funding model that could provide on-going job security for scientists so they can create sustainable research programs.

What role can philanthropy play in supporting scientific research in a world changed by COVID-19?

**By Professor Elizabeth Hartland , Director and CEO, [Hudson Institute of Medical Research](https://www.hudson.org.au/) (<https://www.hudson.org.au/>).
(<http://www.hudson.org.au/>)**

Australia's health and medical research sector has the potential to be one of the most innovative and commercially successful in the world – employing thousands of people and creating the preventive therapies, vaccines and treatments that we need to respond to an ageing population, escalating rates of chronic disease and even another pandemic.

However, morale within one of our most innovative and impactful industry sectors is at an all-time low. Australian medical researchers, particularly early and mid-career scientists, have never faced such a constrained funding environment that is being driven by low success rates from our national grant funding bodies. The new reality is that research proposals assessed as “outstanding” by peer review no longer necessarily receive funding.

In a post-COVID environment, the move to emphasise highly translational and commercially mature research is coming at the expense of fundamental discovery research, to the detriment of the innovation ecosystem. Ideally, our national funding bodies, in partnership with industry, would sustain a of pipeline of opportunities from discovery-based research through to translational, commercial endpoints and clinical trials.



In 2012, it was estimated that Australian scientists cumulatively spent more than 500 years of time preparing research funding applications for the country's largest grant scheme in a single year¹. What this means in real terms is that many of our leading scientists are spending at least a third of their time applying for scarce grants, rather than working in the lab, where their next discoveries could be the answer to a debilitating or deadly disease.

For the approx. 90% of medical researchers who fail to secure national competitive funding, this means disruptions to research continuity, delays in breakthroughs for many diseases, loss of confidence in medical research as a career and the loss of highly trained and talented scientists that leave the sector or the country for better security and support.

This costs every Australian in lost productivity and missed opportunities, and puts Australia's health and medical innovation future at risk. We urgently need a richer and more consistent approach to the risk of these multiple "valleys of funding death".

Without a strong health and medical research workforce, Australians will miss out on access to the latest breakthroughs and clinical trials and the economy will miss out on the benefits of translating commercially valuable research. The key to these successes is the people driving the work.

How could philanthropy help? Providing workforce support and continuity through targeted funding schemes such as near miss grants to fund research already assessed as "outstanding" and fellowships to retain the best and brightest scientists in Australia is a critical first step. Without the workers behind the discoveries, there can be no medical research response to the health challenges ahead for Australians.

Prof Hartland is currently leading the establishment of the National Centre for Inflammation Research, which will focus on research and commercial development of new anti-inflammatory therapies.

1 <https://www.smh.com.au/national/scientists-spent-500-years-grant-chasing-20130322-2gjpe.html>
(<https://www.smh.com.au/national/scientists-spent-500-years-grant-chasing-20130322-2gjpe.html>)

By Michael Hornby OAM, CEO, The Common Good (<http://www.thecommongood.org.au/>)
(<https://www.thecommongood.org.au/>)

As COVID-19 spread rapidly across the world, there was global recognition and acknowledgment that a vaccine needed to be created. Governments, academic institutions, scientists, philanthropists, and funding bodies came together, collaborated, and expedited scientific research to develop a vaccine within a year. A vaccine that, had it not been for a united sense of urgency, may have otherwise taken years, if not decades, to create.

The development of this vaccine gave the general population a tangible example of how scientific research can be translated into an outcome that improves people's lives. It showed that research can have impacts of global significance, in a relatively short period of time, if there is the right focus, and more importantly the right funding.

This speedy path to a medical outcome provides hope and opportunity for medical research now and into the future. In a world changed by COVID-19, there is a shift in perception about research impacts and a recognition that philanthropy is critical to uncovering discoveries, finding cures, developing vaccines, and ultimately seeing the research project through to completion.

In Australia, however, medical research is largely unsustainable. Less than 10 per cent of medical researchers receive funding through any sort of federal funding scheme. Researchers spend up to 30 per cent of their time filling out application forms for no return. That's precious time that could be spent on finding a solution to health challenges impacting so many of the people we know and love.

Most alarming is that a lack of funding is the reason why around 90 per cent of medical research projects in Australia are abandoned before they're finished.

Our goal is to provide certainty and job security for scientists so they can focus on the important job at hand and reach results and outcomes quicker. Through our models we've seen three significant breakthroughs in patient care – a redesigned Intensive Care Unit, revolutionised heart transplantation in Australia, and a treatment for mild forms of silicosis.



We also need to acknowledge that whether directly or indirectly, everyone has been touched by a health condition in their own lives and given the opportunity, would like to support that area of health research specifically. To respond to this, we have created a new platform that will change the face of corporate philanthropy in Australia – Buying Time.

Through The Common Good, an hour of medical research can be supported for just \$48, and every hour goes directly to the researchers carrying out life-changing and internationally significant research into lung disease, heart disease, dementia, and mental health.

Buying Time enables organisations and philanthropists to purchase bulk amounts of medical research time (called Time Tokens) and distribute these to their customers, employees, and stakeholders. These people can then allocate their Time Token to an area of research that is meaningful to them. Importantly, we will notify them when their hour of time is being used by our researchers.

Through this shared value model, the organisation can engage in corporate social responsibility in a tangible and trackable way, the person receiving a Time Token is able to feel deeply connected to the research area they've chosen to support and to the organisation that gifted them the time, and above all, our researchers are able to continue life-changing work to ultimately help people live healthier for longer.

The COVID-19 vaccine has shown us what is possible when funding and focus converge. The challenge now is to replicate this united sense of urgency to the many other critical health areas that are in need to support.

📅 Nov. 18, 2022

Philanthropy Weekly Newsletter

Sign up to our weekly e-newsletter for sector news, expert opinion and resources.

Sign up here ➤ (<https://confirmsubscription.com/h/d/869FB84029B1A432>)

Join us (/membership)

(<https://www.facebook.com/PhilanthropyAustralia>)

(<https://twitter.com/PhilanthropyAus>) ▶

(<https://www.youtube.com/philanthropyaus>)

(<https://www.linkedin.com/company/philanthropy-australia>)

Quicklinks

Events
(<http://www.philanthropy.org.au/events>)

Membership
(<http://www.philanthropy.org.au/membership/>)
Policy & Advocacy (/tools-resources/policy-advocacy/)

Philanthropy Weekly
(<https://www.philanthropy.org.au/about-us/philanthropy-weekly-newsletter/>)

Sector Opportunities
(<https://www.philanthropy.org.au/tools-resources/job-vacancies/>)

Privacy Policy (/about-us/privacy-policy1/)

About PA

What we do (/about-us/what-we-do/)

Board

(<http://www.philanthropy.org.au/about-us/Board/>)

Staff

(<http://www.philanthropy.org.au/about-us/staff/>)

Members

(<http://www.philanthropy.org.au/about-us/philanthropy-australia-members/>)

Partners (/about-us/our-partners/)

Strategic Plan

(<https://www.philanthropy.org.au/about-us/strategic-plan-2022-2025/>)

Contact PA

Contact us (/about-us/contact-us/)

Philanthropy Australia acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first inhabitants of the nation and the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we live, learn and work. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

ABN: 79 578 875 531 **ACN:** 070 104 255