

Division 21: WA Health — Medical Research —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms J.L. Hanns, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Medical Research.

Dr S. Bowen, Director General.

Ms A. Kelly, Deputy Director General.

Ms S. Webb, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

[9.40 pm]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 310 and the significant issue at paragraph 25. It states —

The Government is committed to advancing Western Australia as a leader in medical research and innovation, with a dedicated focus on leveraging research findings ...

Can the parliamentary secretary explain what the government is doing to address the ongoing challenge of what has been called the “brain drain” that is occurring as medical researchers are going interstate and overseas?

Ms J.L. HANNS: The government is absolutely committed to making sure that we not only train the best and brightest of academics around medical research in Western Australia, but also attract those people and make Western Australia an attractive destination to work and study. The government has undertaken a range of initiatives. The best example that I can probably provide to the member is the future health research and innovation fund. There are a range of programs and initiatives around the expenditure. The member will see those as line items in the budget.

The government has supported a significant number of programs over a period of time. The future health research and innovation fund particularly has a program to support early and mid-career researchers called the WA near-miss awards emerging leaders program. Since 2020–21, there have been a number of opportunities right through to this current budget cycle to support those people. The program is designed to support Western Australian researchers who narrowly missed out on a highly competitive National Health and Medical Research Council investigators grant. It increases their chance of winning a grant in a future selection round.

I will probably refer through the director general to Ms Kelly to outline some of those opportunities in Western Australia and to expand on the information I have provided.

Ms A. Kelly: The future health research and innovation fund has a number of programs and initiatives, as the parliamentary secretary has indicated. One of our key areas is to not only retain, but also bring back home some of our researchers who are international. We have a number of programs that assist with that. The parliamentary secretary has advised of some of them. Some of those funding arrangements are multi-year and involve grants to assist researchers at various stages of their careers to ensure that we can be competitive throughout the world and that we can increase the health and wellbeing of all Western Australians.

Ms L. METTAM: This question relates to the significant issue at paragraph 28 and the future health research and innovation fund. How many applicants applied for funding in the most recent round and how many of those applicants were successful or unsuccessful?

Ms J.L. HANNS: I am very happy to provide the member with a couple of examples of successful programs. I will refer the member’s question about the specific numbers she is seeking. For example, seven grants were awarded under the WA cohort studies–operational support program in 2023–24. I will have to defer to Ms Kelly to get the acronym for Co-FPP.

Ms A. Kelly: It is the co-funding partnership program.

Ms J.L. HANNS: Thank you.

The cancer research projects grant scheme received \$2.5 million worth of funding in 2023–24. The FHRI fund enabling scheme awarded 11 grants, the research infrastructure support program awarded 19 in 2024 and the WA near-miss awards emerging leaders fellowships and grants program awarded 25. The member can see it is a significant number. I will refer to Ms Kelly for the specifics of the member's question.

Ms A. Kelly: I will have to take that question on notice. I do not have the total number of applicants. They will vary from program to program. In some of our programs our grants are competitive and some are formula-based. The research infrastructure support program is a formula-based grant.

Ms L. METTAM: Can that be provided by way of supplementary information?

Ms J.L. HANNS: Probably, if the member would like to provide it as a question on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: How much has been allocated to the innovation seed fund? Did the parliamentary secretary mention that? How many grants have been awarded since its inception?

Ms J.L. HANNS: In 2021–22, there were two separate grant processes—sorry, one was the seed innovation fund. In 2021–22, 17 grants were awarded; in 2022–23, nine grants were awarded; and in 2023–24, 11 grants were awarded.

Ms L. METTAM: We are running out of time. We will now go to the ChemCentre.

The CHAIR: The member for Scarborough had a question. Did the parliamentary secretary want to take it or are we getting a bit tight for time?

Mr S.N. AUBREY: I can ask a further question on that particular line item, unless the parliamentary secretary wants to give —

Ms J.L. HANNS: Sorry, member; I am happy for the opposition to have the opportunity.

The appropriation was recommended.

[9.50 pm]