

**Division 21: WA Health, Medical Research, \$64 775 000 —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms H.M. Beazley, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Medical Research.

Ms A. Kelly, Acting Director General.

Mr R. Anderson, Acting Deputy Director General.

Mr O. Pincott, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**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 those details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall be examined only 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, 2 June 2023. 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 Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Vasse.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 302 and the \$222 million available in the fund for medical research across the forward estimates. How much of this is new funding and how much is existing research-related funding, as outlined in footnote (a), that has been added to this amount?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** For the future health research and innovation fund, which I will call the FHRI fund, for 2022–23, it is projected that \$17.2 million will be expended on future health research and innovation and medical research and innovation funding programs and initiatives. For further information regarding time frames of the FHRI fund, I divert to the acting director general.

**Ms A. Kelly:** The additional funding is \$84.2 million. That is what is being added this year. Spread over the forward estimates, \$64 million has been spent through the FHRI fund, with 364 grant applicants received over that period.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I see it is noted here, but can the parliamentary secretary clarify the other medical research budgeted expenditure that makes up the \$64 million?

**Ms A. Kelly:** That amount is made up of four key areas. The WA Child Research Fund of \$4 million is co-funded by the state government and Channel Seven's Telethon Trust. It supports research aimed at improving outcomes for child and adolescent health across the state. There is \$4.887 million for activities to support WA Health. That is largely in innovation. We support the WA Health translation network and the Human Research Ethics Committee and we have a range of sponsorships and grants. An amount of \$2.8 million for research and innovation operational costs is largely the salaries of the team within the Department of Health for the office of medical research and innovation. There is still \$925 000 in past grant payments that we are paying out.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can the parliamentary secretary provide who decides and what the process is for which projects will receive funding each year?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Is that in terms of eligibility for the fund or the assessment of applications?

**Ms L. METTAM:** It is on eligibility and how they are selected. What is the process? Is the decision made by the Department of Health?

**Ms A. Kelly:** The Future Health Research and Innovation Advisory Council is a panel of eminent experts to whom a series of options for programs and initiatives are provided. The members are canvassed from a range of stakeholders, including the department and health service providers. They also come out of open days. We now have medical research and innovation open days with some of our key stakeholders. The initiatives come through that. We have had a range of initiatives, including fellowships, the clinical entrepreneur program, Near-miss Awards, research translation projects, implementation for science fellowships and translation fellowships. There is a range of programs.

[4.40 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can the parliamentary secretary provide the make-up of that selection panel? I assume who sits on the selection panel for research grants for these projects is publicly available.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will again divert the question to the acting director general.

**Ms A. Kelly:** We will call a round of applications for grant funding and separate panels will be set up. They will not be the same, and they are not run by the Department of Health. We take advice from individuals throughout the research sector or associated with it, and that includes the medical life sciences sector as well. A range of individuals will rate and score applications that come in, and that is done quite independently. Those ratings will then be brought together and the grants determined from that.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Who leads that independent process?

**Ms A. Kelly:** The Department of Health oversees the independent process and provides support and guidance through that process.

**Ms L. METTAM:** It is an independent process, so is there a selection body or a board that is outside the Department of Health or is it within the department? I am trying to get an understanding of the workings.

**Ms A. Kelly:** There is no discrete board. The Future Health Research and Innovation Fund Advisory Council sits well and truly above it and oversees the allocation of the future health research and innovation fund to a series of programs and initiatives. There are then the panels, or those independents. They come through into the department, and the department provides that advice to the advisory council and the minister.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Do the members of the advisory panel come from outside the Department of Health? Do they come from industry?

**Ms A. Kelly:** The advisory council is chaired by John Van Der Wielen and has—hopefully I will get all the members right—Dale Fisher, Glenn Begley, Kane Blackman and there is another member I cannot recall. The names are public and are on the website. They are very independent, both within the state and external to it.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can the parliamentary secretary provide, perhaps by way of supplementary information, a list of projects that received funding in 2021–22 and 2022–23, as well as the amount provided?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Yes, member, I can. I can provide the programs and initiatives that were supported by the FHRI fund from 2020–21 to May 2023.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Great; I thank the parliamentary secretary. Since its inception, has any particular research group received successive grants? I imagine that might be the case in WA.

**Ms A. Kelly:** Yes, they have. I do not have a list of those available, but some groups have, as have some individuals. Some of the grants are awarded to individuals as well. Yes, there have been.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Is the parliamentary secretary able to provide that by way of supplementary information as well?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Yes, it will be captured in the list that we will give to the member. We will make sure that it is comprehensive.

**Ms C.M. TONKIN:** I refer to page 302 of budget paper No 2 and paragraph 46, which highlights funding of \$222 million over the forward estimates for investment in our local health and medical research ecosystem through the future health research and innovation fund. Given Western Australia's unique geographical landscape and the future health and research innovation fund's focus on Aboriginal, rural and remote health, can the parliamentary secretary please provide an update on initiatives funded in the 2023–24 budget to address these challenges?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** That is a great question. Back in October 2022, the Minister for Medical Research issued a global challenge for a world-leading medical research and innovation solution to resolve the pressing problem of health services delivery in the Pilbara. Applicants were encouraged to think outside the box, with the best solution to win a \$5 million prize funded by the FHRI fund and partners BHP and Rio Tinto.

There have been 93 applications received from a mix of innovators, researchers, start-ups and established companies from across the globe, including Australia, India, the United States of America, parts of South-East Asia and Europe. The 10 finalists, who are yet to be announced, will each be provided with a \$100 000 grant to support a 12-month proof-of-concept stage commencing in August 2023 and concluding in July 2024. We are looking for an outcome that harnesses new technology, employs digital health to its full potential and ensures that all Western Australians can access the health services they need and deserve.

I look forward to seeing what innovations and technologies the challenge reveals to improve health care and support thriving communities in the Pilbara.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Given the significant benefits for medical research and the significant surplus the state is receiving, was any consideration given to increasing the future health research and innovation fund?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** The FHRI fund is well resourced, which is shown by the number of programs and initiatives it has been able to support since its inception. I am just seeing whether there is any further information I can provide the member. It is all good news stories! I will divert to the acting director general for any further information.

**Ms A. Kelly:** The increase that has come through in this budget is largely due to the interest rates allocated to the fund. It is a sovereign fund, so interest from that fund comes into health and medical research. That is why there is the significant increase for this year and over the forward estimates.

**Ms L. METTAM:** My question was really about whether, given the extraordinary boom the state is experiencing and the opportunity to diversify the economy, there had been any discussion about expanding the investment in this fund, given the significant return on investment?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** The amount for the FHRI fund is determined by its governing act. It is a percentage of another set of figures. That is where the FHRI fund amount comes from, as per legislation.

[4.50 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer again to page 296 and the future health research and innovation fund. The 2026–27 forward estimate is roughly double that of previous years. Why is that the case?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will divert to the acting director general.

**Ms A. Kelly:** When we had last year's budget, that 2026–27 amount was not shown. That is the full year's amount. The spending change is the full year.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What percentage of the current funding supports projects in the WA public health system and the wider WA Health and medical research innovation sectors?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** When we provide the member with the table of all the grants, programs and initiatives that the future health research and innovation fund is supporting, she will be able to determine that from that table. I do not think we have the percentages between private and public readily available. All that information will be in that table and the member will be able to determine the program initiatives that are being supported.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Are research projects undertaken by individuals working in health service providers eligible? Are individual employees of the Department of Health who work in various HSPs eligible for this fund?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will divert to the acting director general.

**Ms A. Kelly:** Thank you. Yes, researchers from the WA Health sector can apply, and some have been awarded grants, across a range of our health service providers.

**Ms L. METTAM:** In those circumstances, are there issues with intellectual property? I understand that there have been some recent issues involving individuals, or an individual in particular who has been working within an HSP who has developed their own intellectual property. Has that issue of who owns that research capability been resolved? I understand that we have to talk in general terms, but I understand there are currently and have been some ongoing challenges in IP for researchers working in an HSP who utilise those resources but develop their own research capability. Can the parliamentary secretary provide some clarification about what the government is doing to try to iron out and provide better clarity around those issues?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I thank the member. All answers will have to be very general. I also point out that this is not actually relating to any expenditure in the budget, so the answer will be limited, but I will defer to the acting director general.

**Ms A. Kelly:** Thank you. All grant agreements include clauses relating to intellectual property, and they have been clarified over a number of years. There may be instances from some years ago whereby perhaps the clarity around that did not make it easy for individuals. I am not being clear because some of the issues are ongoing and I need to protect that. The good thing is that a new intellectual property has been released this week that will provide greater certainty and greater clarity for the public sector, and particularly for those researchers in health service providers.

**Ms L. METTAM:** The acting director general said that a document providing further clarity has been released this week. I did not catch the name of the document. Is it an intellectual property document or a policy paper of the Department of Health?

**Ms A. Kelly:** I would like to take credit for it, but it is definitely not mine. It is a government policy that has been released this week.

**The CHAIR:** There is one piece of housekeeping. Parliamentary secretary, you agreed to provide a list of grant recipients, I think. Do you want to do that through supplementary information?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Yes, I will provide it as supplementary information. It is for the future health research and innovation fund programs and initiatives that have received funding between 2020–21 and May 2023.

[*Supplementary Information No B13.*]

**The appropriation was recommended.**