

South Australia's Research Sector is being reset, with patients and the economy set to benefit.



There's a mood for change building in South Australia's health community.

Clinical research governance – the system that manages health research and clinical trials – is being reset. And enthusiasm to make this work is clear right across the sector, from researchers all the way up to [Stephen Wade, Minister for Health and Wellbeing](#).

“Clinical trials are important to the public health system – they give South Australian patients access to cutting edge treatment, and encourage the recruitment of world class clinicians,” Wade says.

“Key to this renewed focus is to refine and simplify our systems and processes to make clinical research approvals faster, fostering more consistency across our hospital networks and encouraging more research in South Australia.”

[Health Translation SA](#), an [Advanced Health Research and Translation Centre](#), is coordinating and facilitating the change in South Australia's research governance. Wendy Keech is CEO.

“Our goal at Health Translation SA is to make sure research is translated into real actions to improve health outcomes in this state,” says Keech.

“We started this governance work in July 2019 when it became clear the existing system was presenting some problems in getting research done.”

Health Translation SA's research governance approach prioritises 17 key recommendations identified in [The Birch Review](#). This document presents the findings of independent consultant Jim Birch, who undertook an investigation into the existing research governance system in 2018.

The review identifies four main areas of research governance requiring improvement: processes and structures, funding arrangements, training opportunities and ease of researchers working with patients.

SA Clinical Governance Research Steering Committee

The steering committee works to improve governance of clinical research across all local health networks. It engages with the broader health community to ensure effective implementation, and identifies other important factors requiring action.

Chair: Professor Caroline McMillen
Chief Scientist SA

Dr Hendrika Meyer Rural Support Service Chief Clinical Adviser, SA Health and Wellbeing

Professor Maria Makrides
Distinguished Clinical Researcher

Jim Birch Expert Adviser

Dr Michael Cusack Interim Chief Medical Officer & Deputy Chief Public Health Officer, Department for Health and Wellbeing

Lesley Dwyer CEO Central Adelaide Local Health Network

Professor Sue O'Neill CEO Southern Adelaide Local Health Network

Ben Shores Medical Training and Research Operations, SA Health

Dirk Beelen Director, Health & Medical Industries, Dept for Trade, Tourism & Investment

Yvette Van Eenennaam General Manager, Adelaide Biomed City

Wendy Keech CEO, Health Translation SA

Jenny Richter Project Support

What is clinical research?

Clinical research evaluates the effectiveness and safety of new approaches to prevent or treat human diseases and conditions.

“Better vaccines, new cancer treatments, targeted heart disease drugs, improved ways to treat patients – all of these and many more approaches for better health come about thanks to clinical research,” says Keech.

All clinical research goes through strict approvals processes, including ethical clearance and assessment of the site where the research will take place. While vital, administrative delays in these and other steps have slowed down South Australian research in recent years.

But improving research governance is not just about making research quicker, although of course that is a benefit when done safely.

“We don't want research to be done quickly at the price of quality,” says

Keech. “It has to be ethical, plus more efficient and more effective.”

Human nutrition research leader [Professor Maria Makrides](#) says the nuts and bolts of medical research become way easier with an effective governance system.

“Improved governance will remove the stress of reporting, of discussing a slow and tedious governance system with collaborators, and it will facilitate the flow of funds,” she says.

And patients will have improved opportunity to participate in clinical trials.

“A number of studies have shown that patients in clinical trials, regardless of their treatment allocation, have better outcomes than patients who are not in trials,” says Makrides.

This may be because clinical protocols are tighter, or that trial participants are better monitored than those not in trials.

Positive changes are already clear

Already Health Translation SA is starting to see impacts of their work in research governance.

“The right people are starting to talk about research processes, and here I mean the chairs of health boards and people in management and senior leadership roles,” says Keech.

“They now see this is a problem that needs to be solved not just for researchers, but because it will lead to better patient care.”

Keech believes early success comes from how they’ve set up the processes of refining clinical research governance in South Australia.

“This is collaboration,” she says. “Our steering committee is made up of people who make decisions in the medical sector, and together they’ve paved a way forward.”

“We’re starting to get research on the agenda in our health system,” Keech says.

[SA’s Chief Scientist](#) Professor Caroline McMillen is Chair of the [SA Clinical Research Governance Steering Committee](#), and reports to Minister Wade.

Clinical research is good for patients, it’s good for the health system, and it’s good for the South Australian economy,” says McMillen.

“There is a strong case that making clinical research governance processes more user friendly, quicker and efficient can deliver quality outcomes.”



A vision for research in South Australia

Keech has a vision of what South Australian clinical research will look like in five year’s time.

“We will have a system that is predictable, reliable and practical,” she says.

From the consumer perspective, it will create better health. From the research side, it will be transparent and streamlined.

“Scientists and doctors wanting to do research will have expectations about timelines of their research, and these will be reasonable and accurate,” Keech says.

And this will have economic benefits.

“We will better attract medical technology and pharmaceutical companies to invest in South Australia when we can assure them the processes are efficient, and that research administration won’t bog them down,” she says.

Australia’s program of advanced health research and translations centres aims to encourage excellent health research and translation in Australia by bringing together researchers, healthcare providers, education and training to improve the health and well-being of patients and the populations they serve.

“As one of these centres, it makes sense for Health Translation SA to play a role in research governance,” Keech says.

About Health Translation SA

Health Translation SA enables research findings to be translated into action. It is a virtual whole of state collaborative network.

Partner agencies:

- SA Health + 10 Local Health Networks
- SA’s primary health networks Adelaide PHN and Country SA PHN
- South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI)
- Flinders University, University of Adelaide, University of South Australia
- Aboriginal Health Council of SA
- Health Consumers Alliance of SA