

Petition supporting medical research funding tabled in parliament

A petition signed by more than 12,000 people in support of maintaining government funding of medical research is to be tabled in parliament tomorrow evening by Federal Member for Melbourne, Mr Adam Bandt MP.

The petition was developed in response to Cabinet leaks that suggested \$400 million was to be cut from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) budget. Signatures were gathered from all across Australia, calling on the Government to protect medical research from funding cuts in the 2011-12 budget.

Mr Bandt will table the petition in parliament on Wednesday 6 July at 7:00pm AEST.

"Scientists and researchers make critical contributions to our health, our community and our economy everyday," Mr Bandt said. "There are more health and medical researchers here in Melbourne than anywhere else in the country and I am proud to have supported this important campaign because discoveries need dollars."

Many community groups expressed concern that the budget cut would hinder development of new treatments for diseases and threaten the future health of Australians. More than 12,000 people across Australia took to the streets in April to 'Rally for Research' in Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra, Perth, Brisbane, and Darwin.

Ms Linda Rodger, who has lost several family members to motor neurone disease, was one of the many Australians who signed the petition.

"Motor neurone disease affects over 100,000 Australians each year and is devastating for the people and families affected," said Ms Rodger. "Medical research gives my family hope that in the future, we will not continue to see our loved ones suffer from this terrible disease. I signed the petition to send a message to the Australian government that continued investment in research not only saves lives, but gives us hope for the future."

Professor Doug Hilton, director of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, said that the number of signatures on the petition demonstrates the passion and commitment that the Australian public has for medical research.

"It is great to have a petition supporting medical research funding tabled in the Federal Parliament," said Professor Hilton. "It sends a message to this, and future, governments that Australians value public investment in medical research and is a reminder of the many benefits that medical research brings to the Australian community."

The government maintained funding for the NHMRC in the May budget and Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, The Honourable Mark Butler MP, announced that there would be a strategic review of Australian medical research funding to look at overhauling the current system. The terms of reference for the review are currently being determined, and it is expected that submissions from the community will be invited later in the year.

Professor Hilton has welcomed the review. "We now have an opportunity to work with the government to determine how medical research funding can be best spent to benefit the entire community," he said. "The review offers us the chance to determine the most effective balance of medical research funding between basic, clinical, public health and health economic research. It should look at the most efficient ways to translate results into benefits for patients, and it should explore the best systems to divide health research between government, the private sector and philanthropic support."

The Discoveries Need Dollars campaign was established as a voice for the many supporters of medical research, including patients, researchers and clinicians. The Discoveries Need Dollars campaign is currently examining its role in future advocacy for the medical research sector.

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