

Early and mid career researcher forum

A FORUM OF THE AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

Gender equity in Australian health and medical research update from the National Health and Medical Research Council

The EMCR Forum would like to congratulate the NHMRC's ongoing commitment to gender equity in science. On 13 June 2014, CEO Professor Warwick Anderson and Director of Project Grants Dr Saraid Billiards [discussed](#) the NHMRC's efforts and future actions to improve gender equity in Australian health and medical research.

The NHMRC conducted a survey of the 82 institutions that receive NHMRC funding, asking them to outline their gender equity policies and initiatives. There was a disappointingly low response rate of 56% ([46 respondents](#)) and a large amount of variability on the amount and kind of information provided.

The NHMRC did a formal assessment of the gender equity initiatives of each organisation, assessed over 10 key areas. Of the institutions surveyed, approximately 70% were rated "unsatisfactory" or "poor", with just 13 rated "good" and only two "outstanding". Although the report is not yet public, the NHMRC will give feedback and allow institutions a "second chance" to respond before making a final assessment. Professor Anderson said he wanted to "send a strong positive signal" and suggested that the allocation of funding would be conditional on gender equity policies from institutions. The EMCR Forum hopes this will lead to positive action to close the gender gap in Australian science.

"The NHMRC survey reveals the disparity of working conditions and access to support services for women employed in the health and medical research sector. It is clear that some research organisations have not engaged in the strategic planning necessary to retain women in the research workforce. This NHMRC report will bring a greater transparency to the efforts being made to "level the playing field" for women in science and promote initiatives that enable women to contribute to research at the highest level" says EMCR Forum Chair, Dr Krystal Evans.

The EMCR Forum's "[Gender equity: current issues, best practice and new ideas](#)" document released in March 2013 urged both the NHMRC and Australian Research Council (ARC) to put in place a policy mandating that every administering institution (which includes all universities and most other research institutes) must have an effective gender equity program in place within three years, based on national benchmarks.

The EMCR Forum congratulates the NHMRC on their initial assessment of gender equity policies and looks forward to working with the NHMRC on developing national benchmarks. We also encourage the ARC to follow suit, to promote gender equity throughout the entire Australian science and research sector.

More information on the NHMRC findings and areas assessed can be found [here](#).

