

## Science System Advisory Group

Submitter:	<b>Dr Nicole Stanton, Research Manager</b>
Submitting on behalf of Organisation:	<b>Cancer Society of New Zealand National Office</b>

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The Cancer Society is New Zealand's largest non-governmental funder of cancer research, with an investment of over \$50 million into cancer research in the past 10 years. The Cancer Society plays a unique role in the cancer research system in New Zealand, as it provides funding for researchers and research projects that then enables them to be highly competitive when applying for larger contestable government funding, as well as funding important research centres such as the Auckland Cancer Society Research Centre, Cancer Trials New Zealand, and He Taonga Tapu, Cancer Society Tissue Bank.

This submission is written on behalf of the Cancer Society National Office, which administers our national research grants. We will be addressing the below question:

*2. What are the opportunities, challenges and barriers that need to be addressed to build a more thriving research, science, innovation, and technology system that delivers positive sustainable growth and prosperity for New Zealand?*

The research the Cancer Society funds is reliant on the New Zealand University and Science Systems being strong and effective. This particularly relates to New Zealand's research infrastructure, which includes tenured researchers and research facilities, as our research funds do not generally include support for these roles and facilities. Without functional research infrastructure, we would not be able to fund high quality, high impact research conducted here in New Zealand. This is why we are writing this submission to the Science System Advisory Group.

The New Zealand Science System is made up of highly capable people who are achieving incredible things in this country, but this is despite the many barriers to success. While the Cancer Society does not have access to a large funding pool or research facilities directly, we have implemented some initiatives as part of our research grants which we would like to see better supported by the Science System.

One of the primary concerns of our National Scientific Advisory Committee (NSAC), who assesses all of our national research grant applications, is that there is very little support available for researchers once they have completed their PhD studies. Post-Doctoral Fellowships offered by the government are low in number and cover the entire research

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sector, making them highly competitive. This means that most post-doctoral researchers trained in NZ need to go overseas to continue their research, and many don't return.

To attempt to combat this 'brain drain', in 2018 we introduced our own Post-Doctoral Fellowships, which have now supported 8 post-doctoral researchers. Based on our experience with these applications, we know that there are many more excellent candidates that we could not fund and are likely to be lost from the New Zealand science system. This issue was identified by the Te Ara Paerangi - Future Pathways Programme and a series of new Fellowships were established as part of this programme, though we note that these are still far too low in number to support the majority of New Zealand's talented post-doctoral researchers. We also note that fellowships are merely a stop-gap measure, and that more permanent positions need to be established across the science sector to create viable career pathways for post-doctoral researchers in New Zealand.

Another observation we have made is that there is a severe lack of Māori researchers in the cancer research community. By not having Māori voices contributing to this work, we miss opportunities to make a real difference to Māori with cancer and, importantly, we miss the opportunity to do work to support a population that is unique to New Zealand. Our contribution to addressing this problem is the establishment of the Māori Cancer Researcher Awards in partnership with Hei Āhuru Mōwai Māori Cancer Leadership Aotearoa, which are PhD and Masters scholarships for Māori students studying cancer. Since its inception in 2021, we have supported 8 students - 6 PhD and 2 Masters - to complete their studies. In this process we have found that the Science System can be challenging for Māori students and researchers to navigate. We would like to see better support integrated throughout the system for Māori researchers. As was evident at the World Indigenous Cancer Conference, New Zealand is seen as a world leader in indigenous cancer research, and we need to ensure we not only retain this position, but continue to push forward.

The Cancer Society wants to see a thriving science system that supports research that is high value, high impact, and produces good outcomes for all New Zealanders. Our current system needs serious reform for us to realise that vision. We have highlighted some issues that particularly relate to our interactions with the science system, and we acknowledge that the problems that need to be addressed go well beyond the scope of our submission.


Thank you for your consideration of this submission. We look forward to seeing meaningful progress on building a strong and effective science system through the advice of the Science System Advisory Group.

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Ngā mihi nui,



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