NOVA

Public Policy

Evaluation of the Third Community Pharmacy Agreement Research and Development Grants Program

Executive Summary
For the Pharmacy Guild of Australia

April 2006

Executive Summary

The purpose of this evaluation is to inform the Pharmacy Guild of Australia (the Guild) and government decisions about the future objectives and funding of the Third Community Pharmacy Agreement Research and Development Program (the R&D Program), including whether the Program is meeting its stated aims and objectives, whether it is still appropriate and fulfilling a research and evaluation need and if so, the priorities for the future Program. The evaluation was designed to provide the Guild and the Department of Health and Ageing (the Department) with a comprehensive assessment of program operation and management, outputs and outcomes of the projects and the Program and the impact of the Program.

The Research and Development Program

The Research and Development Program is funded through the Third Community Pharmacy Agreement (Third Agreement) between the Pharmacy Guild of Australia and the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. The Agreement ran from 2000 to mid 2005, and provided $188 million for the Pharmacy Development Program (PDP), which makes periodic grant payments to individual community pharmacies to take part in identified quality activities or achieve particular quality outcomes. Of the funding, $15 million was allocated to the R&D Program for the development of proposals relating to the objectives of the PDP.

The goal of the R&D Program is to identify research priority areas in community pharmacy service provision and to fund projects with the greatest potential to deliver services with positive health and economic impacts to consumers and the health system.

The program aims to:

1. improve/maintain the health of Australians through the delivery of quality pharmacy services
2. deliver cost effective pharmacy services using best practice professional and management standards
3. enhance and develop the role of the community pharmacist as a member of the health care team
4. develop and support research expertise and capacity in community pharmacy.

The Program priority areas are:

- quality use of medicines
- continuing care across the health system
- evaluation and further development of existing community pharmacy services and programs
- development of new cognitive services
- harm reduction for drug dependent people
- facilitating change processes within pharmacy practice and the health system to deliver higher quality and morecost effective pharmacy professional services
- the pharmacy workforce.

The Program provided funding for two types of projects:

- Investigator Initiated Grants (IIG) that are generated through calling for Expressions of Interest (EOI) followed by a full grant application process. The awarding of IIG grants

was made through selection committees that were established to shortlist EOIs and assess full grant applications.

- Commissioned Grants that were put out for public tender. All Commissioned Grants were overseen by an Expert Advisory Group that included key stakeholders.

Over the five-year period the Program provided funding for 58 projects.

The evaluation methodology

The evaluation involved three distinct phases and incorporated three evaluation approaches.

1. A process evaluation which examined and measured the procedures and tasks involved in implementing the program against the guidelines in the Australian National Audit Office's *Grants Administration Better Practice Guide*, published by the Commonwealth of Australia in 2002. The NOVA evaluation team used a combination of methods including:

- interviewing Guild staff and Department personnel
- reviewing a selection of files, reports and other documentation provided by the Guild
- examining online tools, the Guild Website and email records.

2. An outputs and outcomes evaluation, which assessed the outputs and outcomes of the projects funded by the Program. Expert reviewers identified the priority or priorities addressed by each project, on the basis of the project report and external evaluation report. A Professional Services Classification was assigned, also on the basis of the project report and external evaluation report.

3. An assessment of program impact, which was informed by the outputs and outcomes evaluation, and based on consultations with key stakeholders. The consultations included a particular emphasis on the assessment of the extent to which major stakeholders in the health system were aware of and engaged with the process and the extent to which they were able to identify effects the program had on its stakeholders and the community.

The consultations took several forms:

- an expert workshop with a small group of invited pharmacy educators and researchers and representatives of selected stakeholder groups, the Divisions of General Practice and primary health funders
- a group consultation with representatives of the Department
- a range of individual discussions with service provider, professional and consumer association representatives.

Evaluation of process

The process evaluation assessed and reviewed the appropriateness of systems, processes and documentation in place for the administration of the grants and benchmarks better practice as set out in the Australian National Audit Office *Grants Administration—Better Practice Guide.* The Guide recommends four categories in grants administration:

1. Planning for an effective grant program
2. Selection of projects
3. Management of funding agreements
4. Evaluation of the program.

The evaluation found that the R&D Program administration and management had:

- good processes and systems in place

- well-documented policies and guidelines (for IIG)

- good documentation

- an impressive database providing easy access to information on the progress and status of all EOIs, tenders and funded projects

- consistent formal protocols and formats for contracts, application forms, Requests For Tender (RFT) and other documentation.

The Program administration and management generally met or exceeded ANAO standards for the management of a grants program.

Evaluation of outputs/outcomes

This component of the evaluation is substantially based on review and consideration of the 31 completed projects, with limited capacity to extract applicable information from ongoing projects, with and without interim and progress reports. The projects covered the full range of program priorities:

- 23 projects undertook the development of a new cognitive service

- 21 undertook an evaluation and development of community pharmacy services and programs and/or a quality assurance strategy

- 20 focused on continuing care, with a number also addressing the professional service type continuity of care

- 16 focused on quality use of medicines

- 13 projects focused on change facilitation.

Analysis of the projects funded through the Program showed that:

- new cognitive services have demonstrated or indicated benefit

- projects to some extent have indicated health behaviour change or consumer satisfaction. Those projects that identified client satisfaction usually focused on pharmacist, general practitioner and consumer. The measurement of satisfaction, of itself, does not provide significant information

- few projects specifically assessed economic factors or outcomes. Economic benefit tools for analysis of pharmacy interventions and initiatives need improvement

- a substantial proportion of studies reported problems with recruitment and retention of of pharmacies, pharmacists, and/or consumers for the study

- lack of collaboration with key stakeholders, particularly general practice and consumers across projects, was evident. However, other projects did show some benefit through collaboration with general practice and other health service providers

- for a research program of this substance, there has been minimal active dissemination of the information and knowledge generated by the research projects.

The overall conclusion of the NOVA evaluation team was that a substantial body of useful information has been generated, with a number of projects demonstrating potential for further development and potential implementation. Allocation of sufficient funds to selected areas of focus or priority attention is warranted to support deliberative attention to and intensive development in selected areas.

Consultative assessment of impact

The consultative approach to assessment of the impact of the Program identified that the Program has:

- produced some valuable and innovative outputs

- demonstrated considerable potential to have a positive impact on government policy and pharmacy practice

- developed greater capacity within itself, through the successive national Community Pharmacy Agreements and

- undertaken (through the Third Agreement Program) the first consultative approach to the development of research priorities and directions.

Stakeholders considered that the Program would maintain and increase its impact on community pharmacy research, practice and on health outcomes through:

- a multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral program structure and administration that is designed to maximise collaboration between the Program, the Department and major relevant stakeholders

- stronger delineation of focus on community pharmacy services and community pharmacy infrastructure

- continuation of innovative research to some level

- strengthening of the technical/research development and advisory capacity available to the management of the Program and the projects

- consideration of the breakthrough collaborative approach for specific practice and policy issues, including case conferencing, chronic disease management, and practice models.

Program performance

The NOVA evaluation team's overall assessment is that the Program has been performing as well as possible, given some structural and cultural barriers that have inhibited the ability of the Program to reach its full potential.

Factors that facilitated the achievements of the Program included:

- Government and stakeholder support

- good management systems and processes

- increased research capacity in the pharmacy sector.

The performance of the Program has been affected by some significant barriers, including:

- limited activity focused on the provision of policy and practice information and application

- the relationship between the Program and policy and program areas in the Department

- limited structural engagement of other health disciplines and sectors

- low to poor levels of recruitment of research participants, pharmacies, pharmacists and other health professionals, notably general practitioners and consumers

- limited economic analysis capacity resulting from low recruitment, lack of validated tools and lack of focus in a range of projects.

The future program

The NOVA evaluation team strongly recommends that the Community Pharmacy Research and Development Program be continued and enhanced. The next generation of the program should now take a strategic approach, establishing a strong pathway from academic research and publication to development, trial and implementation of service models and pharmacy practice evidence-based information.

The evaluation recommendations propose an improved structure and focus for the Program to consolidate its achievements, identify future research gaps and priorities, and to develop strategies and programs for the application of research to community pharmacy practice.

Recommendations are made in relation to:

- program administration, structure and processes
- the research focus
- a Program management committee
- the Program Goal and Objectives
- program priorities
- a communication protocol and process between the Guild and the Department
- a communication strategy.