



5 May 2023

Mr Michael Brennan
Chair, Productivity Commission
4 National Circuit
Barton ACT 2600
Email: philanthropy@pc.gov.au

Dear Mr Brennan,

INQUIRY INTO PHILANTHROPY RESPONSE FROM OVARIAN CANCER RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into philanthropy in Australia.

The Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation (OCRF) is a national not-for profit organisation with head office in Victoria. We rely entirely on individual donations, philanthropic fundraising activity, and corporate giving, to raise funds for medical research in ovarian cancer. We have done so for the last 23 years.

Therefore, the OCRF is well-placed to comment on the main productivity benefits to be gained by creation of new and shared value models of philanthropy in Australia, as well as on how best to increase and leverage private giving through co-investment with reputable foundations and corporations.

About the Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation

The Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation is Australia's leading charitable foundation dedicated to raising funds for ovarian cancer research, with a priority focus on areas where there are gnawing gaps: early detection, precision medicine and personalised treatment, significant episodes of disease recurrence, and ultimately, prevention.

Ovarian cancer is Australia's most lethal gynaecological cancer, male or female. The survival rate for this cancer has not changed in 50 years – it remains at a 49% five-year survival rate, despite advancements in most other cancers in this country.

Since 2000, the OCRF has invested more than **\$22 million of privately-sourced funds** in promising and innovative cancer research in **over 50 medical research projects** in Australia. This has employed 100+ lead investigators, doctoral fellows, research assistants and other professionals at the laboratory bench.

Our mission is to direct funds to research programs conducted by major medical institutes and universities, whilst also supporting these teams to access Federal funding through the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF), the National Health and Medical Research Council



(NHMRC) and other government sources. Currently, we fund multi-year projects across 12 national institutions in four states.

In the period from 2016-2022, the Federal government distributed just over \$40 million to ovarian cancer research of \$6.6 billion in medical research funding. Noting published reports include any mention of ovarian cancer, *however minor*, direct investment is potentially less than the reported amount. This was **<0.59 per cent** of total available funding.

In the same period, the OCRF invested \$14 million to this field, over one third.

By demonstrating excellence, integrity and innovation in philanthropy, the OCRF is **the second leading funder of ovarian cancer research** in this country, second only to government. We therefore consider ourselves to be a shared value partner *with* government, the tertiary sector and NGO peers in this important aim.

Current state: Interaction with government

As noted, the current level of investment by Federal government to women's reproductive health is **structurally low** - and **gender inequity** persists.

To solve intractable health and societal problems for women with complex/low survival cancers, all pillars of society must therefore align resources, effort, knowledge and skills. Philanthropy is rarely the sole source of funding for 'worthy' causes - and it needn't be. With **effective, coordinated planning**, in open and transparent dialogue with government, **impact can be achieved efficiently** - and sooner - against all agreed metrics for women's health, community involvement, desired participation in the workforce, and voluntary/discretionary effort as carers.

Federal and State governments are therefore significant co-contributors to women's health research (and other areas of need) and **must not take the view they can vacate the field simply because philanthropic organisations have demonstrated the ability to raise funds.**

As just one example, it was recently said to me in a meeting in Canberra, *'we [government] do not need to fund ovarian cancer research because organisations like yours are raising funds for it'*.

This is quite simply a limited view that does not allow for productivity improvement.

Co-investment and coordination

On the contrary, in a shared value model, **government investment in the development, growth, sector alignment, and capability of major philanthropic foundations** can improve efficiency, consumer benefit and impact for all involved. These kinds of organisations already have **demonstrated effectiveness** in governance and administration, skills in professional fundraising, long experience in strategic communications, oversight of international scientific advisory networks, and direct access to consumer insights from affected patients and families.



In addition, research and charitable foundations are accustomed to operating as lean teams. The OCRF, for example, currently employs 7 staff to achieve the above fundraising results: consider this against the background of a wide and deep public sector workforce.

The redistribution of strategic research funds, toward organisations already established in strategic philanthropy, has the potential to be a refreshed impact investment model for industry and the public sector alike.

Benefits for productivity

Strategic investment to, and co-funding with, major charitable and research foundations, would provide a higher level of due diligence and confidence to government for best possible outcomes. In our case, the extensive on-ground knowledge and research networks we hold offers an attractive alternative to Chief Investigator-led research rounds, which inevitably lead to wide gaps in inquiry, extensive bureaucracy, and duplication of time and effort.

A considered coalition of national foundations working in partnership with government for each cause would also offer assurance that funds are being directed to the **most innovative and relevant** research in any area.

This kind of approach has the potential to: (a) reduce current, heavy reliance upon bureaucratic processes and public sector staff; (b) prioritise research effort appropriately; (c) ensure cross-sector and community effort is coordinated and evidence-based; (d) reduce duplication of activity for all involved parties; and (e) thereby vastly improve efficacy and efficiency within the philanthropic sector.

This is one example where a re-shaping of philanthropy in Australia could lead to significant productivity benefits for society, and thereby, offer increased leverage and benefits to individual donors and corporations as well.

Examples of current best practice

Most of the OCRF's charitable fundraising is sourced through corporate partnerships, peer to peer fundraising activities, and by appropriate and skilled solicitation of donations from individuals through multiple channels (campaigns, appeals, events, regular monthly giving, direct asks, etc et al).

A significant example is our ongoing collaborative partnership with Witchery Holdings Australia, now in its fifteenth year. This annual cause-related marketing campaign encourages community members to buy a white shirt from Witchery each autumn – reflective of the lab coats worn by medical researchers – with *100% of gross profit* donated to the OCRF. This campaign involves the voluntary time and effort of hundreds of Witchery creative and in-store staff, PR and marketing specialists, community ambassadors and production teams, as well as the dedicated involvement and hard budget allocation of the corporation's leadership at the highest levels within Witchery and Country Road Group – the Managing Director, Chief Executive Officer, and Group Chief Executive Officer of Woolworths Holdings Limited in South Africa.

It is an impressive, coordinated effort, and this campaign alone has contributed **more than \$16 million to ovarian cancer research** since 2008.



We also work directly and strategically with individual high-net-worth donors and influential ambassadors for this cause, and tens of thousands of community supporters raise funds through events within their communities and workplace/s each year.

Far more than rattling tins

As you can see, this kind of impact involves far more than rattling tins. In addition to our own specialist knowledge and networks, this level of philanthropic engagement – extensive donations of time, money, effort, creative talent, strategy and productivity - involves the expertise of some of Australia's most noteworthy and respected community leaders, media, private industry, researchers themselves, and other influential voices, to keep medical research in ovarian cancer afloat.

Our organisation brings those diverse stakeholders together in unique alignment. It is not possible for government, for example, to align philanthropists of all stripes in this same way.

Reducing donor confusion

There are other barriers to participation to private giving by individuals and corporations in this country. ACNC oversight provides some reassurance to people who give; however, its creation has highlighted the significant *number* of charitable organisations in our relatively small country. To rationalise the sector, small and founder-led charities (<\$4 million turnover p.a., fewer than 3 staff) could be encouraged to merge with larger foundations that share the same objects, perhaps with appropriate incentives and transition plans.

Whilst difficult to transform an entire landscape, the level of donor confusion created by multiple, splintered foundations and charities cannot be under-estimated.

Relationship management and reporting

Further, there is a not-infrequent assumption that high-net-worth individuals, donors and patrons are sitting around 'waiting to be asked' to give to projects: They are not.

Philanthropy in Australia is largely driven by astute business professionals seeking high value return for their investment in philanthropic organisations. Individuals do not appreciate being treated simply as 'money buckets', especially when their own private wealth was established, most often, through strategic business development.

Therefore, to seek genuine partnership with philanthropists involves nuanced and ongoing relationship development and management.

This increased focus on impact philanthropy has led to **significantly increased and detailed levels of reporting and project evaluation** for charitable foundations. Combined with all other forms of reporting placed upon workers in the philanthropic sector, it is welcome scrutiny but onerous.

No other pillar of society is scrutinised in quite the same way, dollar for dollar.



In closing

On a personal note, some of the above insights are gleaned from over thirty years as an experienced philanthropic fundraiser, having built dozens of effective, long-term partnerships with government and industry across health, education, the arts and culture, environment, public engagement, and tourism. I would be keen to present to the Commission in person should an appropriate opportunity arise.

I can be contacted at _____ or mobile _____

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Robin Penty
Chief Executive Officer