

**UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 12.01 am AEDT Monday 21 March 2016**

## Early career researchers build roadmap for Australian stem cell science

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Some of Australia's brightest young scientists have created a map for [the future of Australian stem cell science](#), saying Australia has the potential to revolutionise medicine and become a world leader in stem cell research.

A new report, developed with input from world experts, explains recent advancements and presents a roadmap for how Australia can safely and effectively take stem cell research from the lab bench to the hospital bed, and better regulate rogue stem cell therapists offering unproven and possibly risky therapies for commercial gain.

*The Stem Cell Revolution: Lessons and Imperatives for Australia* recommends clinical trials as the main route to prove the effectiveness of possible new treatments; a national centre to help accelerate the translation of clinical discoveries; and stem cell banks with relevant clinical and genomics data to help facilitate research.

Co-chair of the report's steering committee Professor Richard Harvey said Australia's stem cell research needs a national strategic effort to remain globally competitive.

"We can make organs in a dish and correct disease-causing genetic defects in a patient's own cells: it's an exciting time for stem cell researchers and new breakthroughs are making headlines almost daily. We must continue to strategically support this vital area, and see it as priority area of research for Australia if we are to reap the benefits for humanity, save on our healthcare bill, and continue to be a world leader," Professor Harvey said.

"This report provides a roadmap to encourage innovation by supporting research, facilitate the development of new treatments and provide mechanisms to test them," he said.

The report also addresses the rise of stem cell tourism and the regulatory environment that allows practitioners to offer unproven therapies. Currently 60 Australian providers are offering unproven stem cell therapies to treat everything from sports injuries to cancer, autism and Alzheimer's disease.

The Australian Academy of Science last year [expressed concern](#) about the regulatory loophole that allows the sale of these kinds of therapies without first proving that they are safe and effective.

"One downside of the excitement around stem cells is that public expectations can be falsely raised. Without more clinical trials to test new treatments in Australia, patients may be tempted to seek out unproven therapies, at home or overseas, which can cost anything between \$10,000 and \$60,000 and may not work or may even make people even more ill," Professor Harvey said.

The report is based on a Think Tank convened by the Australian Academy of Science last year with support from the Theo Murphy (Australia) Fund.

***Spokespeople are available for interview. Please contact Bella Counihan on 0419212219.***