



**NICM**  
THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF  
COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE

**WESTERN SYDNEY  
UNIVERSITY**



**AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL RESEARCH AND  
INNOVATION FIVE YEAR STRATEGY**

**COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINES FOR BETTER HEALTH**

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# COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINES FOR BETTER HEALTH

**Submitted by:** NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE (NICM); AUSTRALIAN SELF MEDICATION INDUSTRY (ASMI); COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINES AUSTRALIA (CMA)

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## THE GAP – THE CHALLENGE THAT NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED.

The Australian population, on the whole, are engaged in taking an active role in their health care and are willing to invest in preventive health and self-care measures, however the current underdeveloped evidence-base around complementary medicine (CM), including natural and traditional medicines, means this investment is being poorly utilised as a national health strategy. NHMRC's investment in CM research, notwithstanding a targeted intervention in 2008, remains at low levels.

Australians are among the world's highest consumers of CM, with research undertaken by Macquarie University showing 70% of Australians had used vitamins, minerals and supplements in the past year and that those who had taken specific supplements tended to take these daily<sup>1</sup> and are paid for fully by the consumer themselves. Their primary reason for using CM products is for general health maintenance,<sup>2</sup> but also to prevent and control chronic diseases including joint health, bone health, boosting immunity, for energy and heart health.<sup>3</sup> This demonstrates that the Australian population are willing to invest in improving their health, and want an active role in their health care and disease prevention. An innovative approach to health care would suggest that enabling consumers to make more effective preventive health and self-care choices not only improves individual health outcomes, but capitalises on this personal investment as a resource towards broader health targets. Building a robust evidence-base around CM could provide the innovation that Australia needs in order to reduce the burden on the health care system, improve health statistics nationally, and ensure an economically productive society moving including healthier citizens and a viable health industry CM is already one of Australia's top 20 exports.<sup>4</sup>

In summary:

- CMs are widely used by Australians at no cost to government
- CMs are primarily used for health maintenance/disease prevention<sup>5</sup>
- Positive health outcomes can reduce the financial burden on government<sup>6,7</sup>
- Lack of intellectual property protection afforded under Australia's 'listed medicines' regime impedes research and innovation
- Robust research on the broad public health impacts of CMs will benefit citizens from a health standpoint, government from a cost standpoint and industry from a viability standpoint.

This submission addresses the main impediments to effective use of CM which result from (a) inadequate incentives for manufacturers to undertake high quality research; (b) lack of knowledge about the decision-making, information seeking, motivations, behaviours and communications of CM users nor the way in which such issues are mediated in different circumstances (based upon preventative use or specific condition/illness of user

as well as other factors); and (c) an inadequate understanding of the current and potential public health contribution of well-evidenced CM.

## How this gap should be addressed, with a focus on a proposed pathway forward or solution.

Government co-investment with industry is proposed:

- (a) To **conduct research** into the potential contribution of CM to health outcomes for Australians, both at the whole of system level and in relation to most-used and particular supplements and modalities
- (b) To **support implementation** of research-informed changes in health and health care systems towards an integrative approach to healthcare;
- (c) To **undertake synthesis and dissemination** of existing research relevant to improving integrative healthcare;
- (d) To **undertake collaborative new research** to improve health and health care using methods that are cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary and national in scope; and
- (e) To **build capacity**, within the research community to do applied research in complementary medicine, and within the health system to use this research to ensure their safe and efficacious use.

The co-investment scheme would support:

- **pre-clinical and clinical research** into the safety and effectiveness of CM in use by Australians for self-care and as an adjunct to mainstream medical treatment. It is essential that this use is underpinned by evidence.
- **public health and health services research** with particular attention to chronic illness, ageing and maintaining wellness. The scheme would support the building of a solid platform of evidence the thinking and behaviours of users; how the broader range of 'points of sale' (including internet, pharmacies, health food stores, supermarkets, clinical settings) relate to each other to inform self-care behaviours; and it would produce new information on the varied range of clinical interactions occurring in various settings (general practice, hospitals, specialist clinics, CM and allied health practices) and how they mediate CM use, decision-making and notions of evidence amongst users.
- **research into the health literacy of Australians** with respect to CM, and how best to provide evidence to inform self-care decisions.
- **data collection** on Australians' use of CM for self-care and as part of integrative medical care at point of care in new patient data collection management systems, point of sale as part of pharmaceutical retailers' major role in maintaining population health and treating chronic conditions, and comprehensively as part of the work of bodies such as the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's activities to capitalise on the contemporary information environment in producing independent and authoritative health and welfare information and statistics.

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## RELEVANCE TO STRATEGY BUILDING BLOCKS

This submission addresses the AMRI Strategy's identified challenge of continuous improvement and efficiency in healthcare delivery, by bridging the gap between self-care and the health care system.

It meets the AMRI Strategy's objective of a high quality, cost-effective and sustainable healthcare system by maximising the health system benefits of self-care, ensuring CMs in use have a strong evidence base.

By guiding Australians in their use of preventive measures that have the effect of reducing the burden of disease on the Australian community and economy, this submission's proposals comprehensively address the Strategy's mandatory considerations, including delivering benefit to as many Australians as possible, delivering the greatest value and ensuring disbursements complement and enhance other government investments in healthcare.

Measures of success, explaining what success would look like, and when and how this could be measured.

Success in this area will be achieved when:

- Australians have access to a comprehensive evidence base for CMs most in use
- Industry is making a substantial contribution, alongside Government, to the development and delivery of this evidence
- The health system easily accommodates an integrative approach whereby patients openly and confidently share their self-care practices and the full range of evidenced CM approaches can be incorporated into treatment regimes

Data for measuring success should be drawn from Australia's primary data collection agencies where possible, supplemented with longitudinal studies to be funded through the partnership program.

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## ABOUT NICM

The National Institute of Complementary Medicine is one of the world's largest complementary medicine research concentrations and Australia's leader in complementary medicine research and policy development. Seed funded by the Commonwealth and State Governments, NICM plays a key national role in ensuring Australians have access to reliable evidence on complementary medicines and treatments in use. As an *Excellence in Research Australia* (ERA) 5 ranking institute, NICM is globally recognised for its world-class research across from pre-clinical studies to translation to healthcare.

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## ABOUT ASMI

ASMI is the peak body representing companies involved in the manufacture and distribution of consumer healthcare products in Australia. Since its establishment in 1974, ASMI has focussed its efforts on supporting the progress and development of the non-prescription medicines industry which incorporates both over-the-counter (OTC) and complementary medicines (CM). ASMI's aim is to advance consumer health through responsible self-care.

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## ABOUT CMA

Complementary Medicines Australia (CMA) is the peak industry body for the complementary medicines industry, representing members across the supply chain, including manufacturers, importers, exporters, raw material suppliers, wholesalers, distributors and retailers. CMA promotes appropriate industry regulation and advancement to ensure consumers have access to complementary medicines of the highest quality.

CMA is the principal reference point for members, the government, the media and consumers to communicate about issues relating to the complementary medicines industry.

### End Notes

- 1 111 2015 Consumer Behaviour Fact Book, Macquarie University March 2015 pp228-39
- 2 Ibid. 41
- 3 Ibid. 42
- 4 <http://www.smartcompany.com.au/growth/69720-australias-top-20-export-industries-revealed/>
- 5 Ibid
- 6 [http://www.asmi.com.au/media/14046/final\\_frost\\_sullivan\\_report\\_photocopy\\_ready\\_8\\_oct\\_2014.pdf](http://www.asmi.com.au/media/14046/final_frost_sullivan_report_photocopy_ready_8_oct_2014.pdf)
- 7 [http://nicm.edu.au/\\_\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/537657/Cost\\_effectiveness\\_of\\_CM\\_2010.pdf](http://nicm.edu.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0006/537657/Cost_effectiveness_of_CM_2010.pdf)

[ENDS]

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