

**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**  
**Inquiry into the 2023-24 Budget Estimates – Questions on Notice**  
**9 JUNE 2023**

**PORTFOLIO: MEDICAL RESEARCH**

**Members**

Sarah Connolly – Chair	Lauren Kathage
Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair	Bev McArthur
Michael Galea	Danny O’Brien
Paul Hamer	Ellen Sandell
Mathew Hilakari	

**Witnesses**

- Ms Mary-Anne Thomas MP, Minister for Medical Research
- Professor Euan Wallace, Secretary
- Mr Daen Dorazio, Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services
- Ms Nicole Brady, Deputy Services, Reform and Medical Research
- Ms Megan Astle, Executive Director, Health and Medical Research

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**QUESTION 1 (Directed to the Secretary, Dept of Health)**

**On page 6**

**Danny O’BRIEN:** Thank you, Minister. Secretary, page 227 again, on the total output costs: the budget for this year was \$61.7 million but the actual expected outcome is \$98 million – \$36.3 million. The footnote says the additional funding is:

*... due to funding provided for government policy initiatives. Secretary, I will take that up at another time perhaps, but ‘funding provided for government policy initiatives’ is so broad as to be ridiculous. The entire budget is for government policy initiatives. What did it go to?*

**Euan WALLACE:** It went to COVID-related research.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** COVID-related research. Can I ask for a list of the funding?

**Euan WALLACE:** We have a list here.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** Yes. Could you provide that to us on notice?

**Euan WALLACE:** Of course.

**RESPONSE****Answer:**

The target output cost for the Medical Research portfolio in 2022-23 was \$61.7 million, with the actual expected outcome being \$98 million. (1)

The difference between the target and expected figures relates to funding decisions made after the publication of the 2022-23 Budget, including COVID-19 research, such as funding for the Australian Institute for Infectious Disease and the Living Evidence initiative; and funding for the Brain Cancer Centre's Brain Perioperative Clinical Trial Program (Brain-POP); the Aboriginal Health, Medical and Wellbeing Research Accord; and clinical trials programs.

In addition to those listed above, the COVID-19 research projects focussing on treatments received funding through the medical research portfolio (2), including:

- a clinical study by University of Melbourne, Monash University and Northern Hospital exploring off-label use of a heparin-based nasal spray in COVID infected households
- new trials to research antiviral cocktails to protect immunocompromised patients from COVID-19, as well as in defend against vaccine evading variants by the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute
- a study on a suite of immune stimulating virus decoy biologicals with the ability to neutralise and kill the COVID virus and virus infected cells by the Burnet Institute
- a study focused on manufacturing antibodies and testing their efficacy in blocking the transmission of COVID-19 infection by the Burnet Institute
- a study to explore treatments for severe inflammatory effects of tissue damage, an identified long term health impact of COVID-19 by the Hudson Institute of Medical Research
- a study to determine if anti-GM-GSF antibody Lenzilumab can improve outcomes for Victorian patients in hospital with COVID-19 by the Olivia-Newton John Cancer Research Institute
- studies by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute to establish the profiles of Victorian children with COVID-19, as well as research potential impacts of vaccinations in children and alternative treatment methodologies.

**Source:**

(1) 2023-24 State Budget – Service Delivery, p. 227

(2) <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/backing-world-leading-research-covid-19-treatments> accessed 15 June 2023