

Time to stop abusing the NHMRC for ideological purposes

Written by The Conversation

The release today of the long-awaited NHMRC [Statement and Advice on Homeopathy](#) is just the latest in a series of pointless and ideologically motivated exercises that this peak scientific body has been tasked to undertake.

We have seen this group of professional scientists sent on wild goose chases after [Wind Turbine Syndrome](#)

,
[water fluoridation](#)

and now homeopathy on behalf of a government that clearly wants science to be done to order for its political agenda. At a time when they are holding valuable, productive and world-class research infrastructure hostage to their unpopular higher education legislation, it is simply impossible to believe that the federal government takes science seriously at all.

Thankfully, the scientists continue to do their job well even when sent on a fool's errand. The report on homeopathy is a model of science-based enquiry. It really should put to bed the case for supporting this entirely fantastical enterprise with science or higher education dollars. The analysis of the literature was comprehensive, covering some 1800 articles published. The majority of these were of such poor quality that only a couple of hundred even met the most basic criteria for further analysis. The consensus of these acceptable studies was that there was nothing to see here, and science should move on.

If some good is to come out of such a whimsical use of public funds, it should lead to the removal of public subsidies for private health insurance to cover homeopathy services. It should be wielded mercilessly in support of a crackdown by TGA and ACCC on the spivs and hucksters who sell complete moonshine to vulnerable patients. After all, as the Prime Minister reminded us yesterday in another context,

“ what we can't do is endlessly subsidise lifestyle choices”

This Statement of Advice on homeopathy is reported to have cost around \$800,000 to produce, and followed a similar document having been produced in the UK which arrived at the same conclusion just a couple of years earlier. I'm sure a few of Australia's newly unemployed research scientists could have put that money to good use. The fluoridation and wind turbine fiascos add insult to injury by wasting precious science dollars on fatuous ideological stunts.

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One wonders whether NHMRC reports on the health effects of “superfoods” or dangers of immunisation will be next. Perhaps Senator McFarlane should just change his job title to Minister for Industry and Junk Science.

Michael Vagg does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations.

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