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Go8 Washington meetings lobby to continue valuable US/Australia research collaboration

The Group of Eight (Go8) is currently in Washington for a series of meetings with Australia's Ambassador, The Hon Joe Hockey, US officials and the American Association of Universities (AAU). The meetings are aimed at reinforcing the immense value to both nations of our well-established joint research projects that occur through US organisations, including the National Institute of Health (NIH), the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA).

"The NIH invests almost US\$32.3 billion each year in medical research and last year the Go8 received some 70 percent of the NIH grants awarded to Australia," says Go8 Chief Executive, Vicki Thomson. "The Go8 is committed to advocating that our strong research relationship with the USA should continue to mutual benefit."

It is a relationship that has seen Australia rank number seven of countries co-publishing with the finest institutions in the USA. Of the almost 50,000 co-publications between Australia and the USA since 2011, the Go8 co-authored some 35,000.

The NSF supports landmark international research collaboration such as the gravitational wave detector LIGO which involved intense international collaboration including some 60 researchers from the Go8. However, this funding exchange is a two-way street with one-third of new Australian Research Council (ARC) funded projects in 2015 involving US collaboration. Ms Thomson is advocating that research has no borders, that it is global and should be valued as such, and that everyone benefits as a result of cross-national collaboration.

"While we have had no official indication this current relationship could be affected by the administration change in the US, the Go8 wanted to be pro-active in setting out the vast mutual benefits in its continuing," she said. "The US and Australia have a long and deep history of partnership and we continue to have much to offer each other through our ongoing collaborative research as we tackle truly global issues such as communicable diseases. The research dollar has always sought to fund the best, and to ensure that best researchers collaborate with one another, regardless of location. We are keen that value not be diluted.

"It is therefore concerning that the US may now seek to take a more domestically focused approach to research funding, which would be limiting for the future of global research.

"Hand-in-hand with maintaining funding for international research collaboration is the freedom of researchers to travel internationally to pursue their collaborations. The Go8 is hopeful that the US will continue to support researcher mobility into the US which is the backbone of collaborative research involving the US and partners such as Australia.

"It has been important to be in Washington to advocate strongly that research results of benefit to the US – and the world - could be impacted if such a policy change were to occur."

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