

The Buttressing Coalition of the Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research

Terms of Reference

Background

The Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR) was established in 1968 as a Statutory Body of the Government of Papua New Guinea, with its governing Council responsible to the Minister for Health. The Institute's primary purpose is to conduct research into the health and wellbeing of the people of Papua New Guinea. Since its inception, major research programs have been established in infectious diseases, especially respiratory infections and malaria; malnutrition; enteric diseases; sexual health and women's health, thus addressing some of the biggest health problems of Papua New Guinea. The Institute's affairs are governed by the PNGIMR Council with diverse representation from within Papua New Guinea.

The headquarters, administration, main library and largest laboratories of the Institute are based in Goroka (Eastern Highlands Province). There are also laboratory and office complexes in Madang, Maprik (East Sepik) and Port Moresby, with smaller branches in Alotau (Milne Bay), Kokopo (East New Britain) and Wewak (East Sepik), and field stations that support ongoing research in other provinces.

The Institute conducts research into specific diseases and health problems in areas and populations of greatest need. The Institute is organized principally around its problem-based research programs: pneumonia, malaria, enteric diseases, viral diseases, nutrition, sexual health, women's health, and other diseases. More recent restructure has organised these disease-based programs into units based on scientific disciplines: Emerging and Environmental Diseases; Infection and Immunity; Population Health and Demography; Sexual and Reproductive Health; and Vector Borne Diseases. A third structural dimension is provided by the Corporate Affairs and Support Services unit supporting research units and includes administration, finances, transport, library and laboratory management, which support all programs and units across the Institute.

The Institute has grown significantly since its inception, and has expanded its network of collaborators around the world, leveraging institutional partnerships that have been important in supporting the leadership of specific research streams, and to the development of the PNGIMR's research workforce, including cadetships and post-graduate training (Honours, Masters and PhD). To further strengthen coordination and engagement with its international partners, the PNGIMR Buttressing Coalition was formed in 2000.

The Terms of Reference of the Buttressing Coalition aim to formalise its responsibilities in supporting the PNGIMR to conduct research that will improve health outcomes for the people of Papua New Guinea.

Purpose of the Buttressing Coalition and History

Good partnerships are based on mutual benefits. The PNG Institute of Medical Research has many successful research collaborations that form the basis of the Buttressing Coalition. The Coalition provides a general platform for the PNGIMR to source support in all areas relevant to the PNGIMR's responsibilities in conducting and fostering health and medical research in Papua New Guinea. This includes but is not limited to engagement with international organisations; development of training opportunities and human resources; administrative support; and translating research findings into policy and practice. As is appropriate for the tropics, the buttress relates to a rainforest tree with its buttress roots which support and maintain the tree and help it to live and breathe. The Buttressing Coalition began with groups already collaborating with PNGIMR. New collaborators, interested groups and supporters were included since 1999. Two meetings were held in Australia to start the partnership, the inaugural meeting in Melbourne in 2000 and second meeting in Cairns in 2002 with between 30 to 60 attendees. Other meetings have been hosted in conjunction with events at PNGIMR or the annual Medical Society or via email interactions.

Membership in the Buttressing Coalition is in addition to and in no way competes with or replaces the multiple, dynamic partnerships between PNGIMR and individual researchers and research institutions.

Key Responsibilities of the Buttressing Coalition

The Buttressing Coalition has primary responsibility for providing strategic advice to the PNGIMR when requested, for proactively recommending any research and/or development opportunities that might arise internationally for the PNGIMR, and for assisting the PNGIMR through advocacy and technical advice in sourcing additional support or resources needed to fulfil its mandate.

The relationship between the Buttressing Coalition and the PNGIMR is primarily conducted via the Director of the PNGIMR, but will periodically engage with all PNGIMR senior staff, at the discretion of the PNGIMR Director and the Co-Chair of the Buttressing Coalition.

The relationship between the Buttressing Coalition and the PNGIMR will include the following specific inputs and responsibilities:

- Ensure coordination of collaborative activities among the PNGIMR’s external partners to maximise efficiency, transparency and synergy;
- Share information concerning research opportunities and partnerships between its members and the PNGIMR;
- Share information about progress in international research relevant to PNGIMR expertise and with PNG health and development priorities, as per the National Health and HIV Research Agenda (NHHRA);
- Support the PNGIMR to map and monitor all its current and potential research collaborators and the expertise that they can contribute in the conduct of research relevant to the PNGIMR mandate;
- Support the PNGIMR in reviewing research proposals in regard to scientific validity and ethics through the PNGIMR Institutional Review Board;
- Support the PNGIMR in its education and training programs, both by short-term attachments for on-the-job training and by facilitating academic research training leading to postgraduate qualifications;
- Support the PNGIMR to source advice on effective fulfilment of all its responsibilities – including for governance and strategy, mobilisation and management of resources, and implementation of research, as requested;
- Respond to crises faced by the PNGIMR from time to time with appropriate and timely assistance; and
- Subject to PNGIMR request, act as the custodian of research samples and data arising from collaborative research.

The Coalition is guided by the principle of respect and promotes the autonomy of the IMR for the Institute’s direction and decision making.

Co-Chairs of the Buttressing Coalition

The Buttressing Coalition is led through a Co-Chair arrangement, comprising:

- the Director of the PNGIMR or their delegate on an ad hoc basis; and
- an individual from one of the institutional members of the Buttressing Coalition (see below) – selected for a 3-year term by a consensus of institutional members and approved by the Executive Committee.

Membership of the Coalition

The Buttressing Coalition has four membership types.

- *Institutional members* - are institutes, schools, departments or other entities prepared to provide collaborative support to the PNGIMR. Each institutional member nominates one delegate as primary contact for the institution as a whole. PNGIMR is an institutional member.
- *Individual members* – are colleagues who are or have been research collaborators of the PNGIMR or otherwise are committed to supporting the work of the PNGIMR

- *Lifetime members* – are longstanding friends of PNGIMR whose contributions are recognized through this membership.
- *Friends of PNGIMR* – are colleagues who want to be connected with PNGIMR and receive communication about the Institute and the Buttressing Coalition.

The full membership list is submitted to the annual Buttressing Coalition meeting. Members who joined in the preceding year are formally approved at the annual meeting of the Buttressing Coalition.

Buttressing Coalition Membership Fees

The Buttressing Coalition will have the following membership fee structure for the four types of membership.

- *Institutional members*: Overseas institutions AUD 5,000 to AUD 30,000 per annum. Membership fees waived for PNG institutions.
- *Individual members*: Outside of PNG AUD 300 to AUD 1,000 per annum. Membership fees waived for individuals residing in PNG.
- *Lifetime members*: Membership fees waived.
- *Friends of PNGIMR*: No membership fees.

Executive Committee

The Co-Chairs of the Buttressing Coalition will chair an Executive Committee comprising of five representatives from the membership elected for two-year terms at the annual Buttressing Coalition meeting. At least three of the five representatives will be from an institutional member. An institutional member may only have one representative on the Executive Committee. Two other members of the Executive Committee will be chosen by the PNGIMR Director.

The Executive Committee will meet quarterly to review and approve applications for Buttressing Coalition Fund expenditure and conduct other business related to the purpose of the Buttressing Coalition. Ad hoc meetings may also be held more frequently at the discretion of the PNGIMR Director and the Co-Chair of the Buttressing Coalition.

Buttressing Coalition Fund

Annual Membership Fees will establish the **Buttressing Coalition Fund** that will support the PNGIMR in agreed-upon priority areas of research infrastructure and organisational capacity strengthening. Bilateral donors or other agencies may also contribute to the Buttressing Coalition Fund.

The objective of the Fund is to enhance the institutional capacity of the PNGIMR, including providing PNGIMR staff and students the ability to undertake training and professional development exchanges/courses/workshops/activities, both domestically and internationally, as well as to support twinning arrangements and to address urgent unexpected needs. The institutional location of the Fund will be regularly reviewed by the Executive Committee and endorsed biennially at the meeting of the full Buttressing Coalition. Expenditure will be approved according to guidelines defined by the PNGIMR and the Buttressing Coalition Executive Committee.

A record of revenue, expenditure and impact of the Buttressing Coalition Fund will be presented at the annual Buttressing Coalition meeting.

Meetings of the Buttressing Coalition

- Communication between members of the Buttressing Coalition will normally be by email, with an annual virtual or face-to-face meeting (usually in the margins of the PNG Medical Symposium). Ad hoc Buttressing Coalition meetings may be called by the Co-Chairs. Standing agenda items for the Buttressing Coalition meeting are report on the Buttressing Coalition Fund, review of membership and election of Executive Committee members. Decisions by the Buttressing Coalition are binding on the Executive Committee.

- Details for the annual and other meetings will be communicated in advance to the nominated representative of institutional members, all individual members and lifetime members. Employees of institutional members are able to attend the Buttressing Coalition meeting.
- If voting is required to assist decision-making, institutional members have five votes and individual and lifetime members have one vote each.
- Minutes of Buttressing Coalition meetings will be shared with all members.

Administrative Support

Administrative support for the Buttressing Coalition is provided by the PNGIMR and the institution of the Co-Chair to implement discussions and recommendations, disseminate documents, provide oversight of logistics of meetings, training and funding opportunities, and other business as required.