

# Best and Brightest: Advancing Medical Research

# Women in the MRI sector



## Science | Innovation | Health and medical research

Many of the barriers that face women in the MRI sector are not unique to the science and research community; they can however be exacerbated by the job insecurity that characterises employment that is contingent upon grant-based funding.

The Best and Brightest report found major problems with attrition of women from the sector, lack of work/life balance and the under-representation of women at senior levels of the MRI sector.

The medical breakthroughs of the future will rely on having the best and brightest medical researchers. We need to address the factors that disadvantage women at the systemic and workplace levels not only as a justice and equity issue, but to ensure we don't waste our existing talent in a way that would seriously compromise our innovation capability and health outcomes for the community.

The funding system plays a major role in creating barriers. The focus on recent publications as the key measure of success, the nature of funding cycles, being sidelined from promotion due to career breaks, promotions being drawn from full-time staff and a culture of long hours can disproportionately impact women.

We know this is not a new problem, but it is a problem we must fix together.



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The Best and Brightest: Advancing Medical Research report found major problems with attrition from the sector, lack of work/life balance and the under-representation of women at senior levels of the MRI sector.

#### **More specifically, the report found that:**

- 87.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the attrition of female researchers from the MRI sector represents the loss of an important source of talent;
- 77.1% said women were under-represented at the senior researcher level in the broader MRI sector;
- 65.8% said women were under-represented in leadership and management roles;
- 75.5% of those with caregiver responsibilities said the responsibilities had negatively impacted their career;
- 43.4% of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that women that have taken a career break are sidelined for promotion.

Addressing gender bias in funding and employment practices will be fundamental to addressing the disproportionate attrition of women from the sector and their over-representation at less senior levels in MRIs.

#### **To address the issues related to gender equity highlighted in the Best and Brightest report, we will:**

- advocate for changes to funding levels/practices and policy measures which create disadvantage for women; and
- focus on initiatives at the workplace level to address gender inequity and the under-representation of women at senior levels.

Everyone agrees that research excellence and improved health outcomes are the primary aims of the health and medical research community and a strong and diverse group of committed researchers underpins these goals. The potential attrition of so many women scientists is a significant waste of expertise, talent and investment that puts these goals at risk.

We need to work to remove the obstacles and barriers which operate as disincentives for women remaining in the sector. To do this, institutional gender bias and funding and employment practices that disadvantage women must be addressed. Together we can work towards addressing these issues at the systemic, workplace and individual levels.

