

Biotech heart of the world?



Andrew Fraser.



John Prins.



Richard Ashby.

The interlinking of new health research and development (R&D) facilities on Brisbane's south side with the new Queensland Bioscience Precinct at the University of Queensland and the new Boggo Road Ecosciences Precinct – already being dubbed Australia's Biotechnology Heart – will supercharge Queensland's competitive advantage in these sectors.

That was the overwhelming message at the final Queensland Innovation Series luncheon for 2009 at Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre last month, with addresses by Queensland Treasurer Andrew Fraser, Princess Alexandra Hospital executive director Richard Ashby and Mater Medical Research Institute chief executive, John Prins.

Mr Fraser summed up the work on the precinct as being to "provide bricks and mortar for the real investment, which is the brains – attracting the people who are to be involved in these industries".

Queensland has already been labelled an 'innovation hotspot' by the World Health Forum, Mr Fraser said.

"This has been a journey of bricks to brains ... and we now have a critical mass to capitalise upon it."

Through the Queensland Government's Smart Communities initiative, a 'knowledge corridor' nicknamed the Clinical Spine that extends from the north's RBH and the Queensland Institute of Medical Research to the Biotechnology Heart and the Wesley Hospital.

"And that gives us the ability to aggregate that investment into the next pathways of innovation," Mr Fraser said. He said in the health area innovation was the only way to pro-

vide a more economical system of better health care, as demand was constantly growing.

People are living longer and healthier lives, he said, "and that's the circularity of the argument".

"The cure to society's ills is in the society's balance sheet. The benefit lies in translating the breakthroughs into an efficient model of care," Mr Fraser said. "The delivery part should not be imagined the way it was delivered before."

DRIVING MORE RESEARCH

Mater Medical Institute CEO, professor John Prins categorised the three precincts of medical research that are being interlinked on Brisbane's south side as Australia's greatest health innovation opportunity.

"Research (in health) saves dollars, according to studies by Access Economics," Prof. Prins said. "It surpasses the value of the research in every other aspect of life. The annual rate of return is about \$5 for every dollar spent," he said, "and that's a worldwide value."

But Prof. Prins said while Australia had the capacity to be a world leader in research, reports such as *Medical Research: Queensland's Health and Wealth 2007*, and the *Cutler Report* revealed Australia was lagging behind in its spend on medical innovation.

Sweden spent 3.6 percent of its health budget on research, Japan 3.4 percent and Australia just one percent. This compared poorly with the average 12 percent R&D spend by the private companies.

Prof. Prins said, "Health is inevitably a growth industry. We know the challenges will be there and solutions will require increased complexity.

"The reality is that a component of the workforce (in health) must be paid to think."

E-HEALTH COMES OF AGE

Queensland health professionals are in many ways already leading the world in terms of e-health delivery, partly driven by the state's vast geography.

"You have to understand that Queensland Health is the largest entity in Queensland, apart from the Queensland Government itself – and it employs more people than any other organisation by a large margin," Princess Alexandra Hospital (PAH) executive director Richard Ashby said.

Dr Ashby said the PAH was developing from a hospital and research institute to a bio-precinct.

He labelled it the "co-location of intellect" or an area in which "you can break down the organisational barriers that allows the interaction of ideas".

He saw the area as an incubator for creativity and entrepreneurship, creating value, expanding the tax base and providing high value jobs.

The Smart Community Dr Ashby describes engages the PAH, TRI, PACE 1/2/3, and the Boggo Road Ecosciences Precinct, which brings in the possibilities for the health sector to engage with biogenomics.

The issue of electronic medical records, he said, "is a subject of global focus". He said the *National Health Service Connecting for Health* program in the UK is the biggest IT program in the world and in history.

"E-health may actually have a greater effect on world population health than water and sanitation."

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