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Ballarat Innovation and Research Collaborative for Health (BIRCH)

The Ask

\$20 million for stage one of a Ballarat Innovation and Research Collaborative for Health (BIRCH).

Overview

BIRCH will be a multifaceted research centre located within the Ballarat Health and Knowledge Precinct on Ballarat Health Services' Drummond Street site.

Collaboration

BIRCH will be a collaboration between Ballarat's two hospitals (Ballarat Health Services and St John of God Ballarat Hospital) and six universities (Federation University Australia, Australian Catholic University, Deakin University Rural Clinical School, La Trobe University Dental School, Notre Dame University Rural Clinical School and University of Melbourne Rural Clinical School).

An Innovative Research Hub

BIRCH will bring together the current separate research facilities within these institutions and develop Ballarat into a renowned and innovative health care research hub.

It will also support Ballarat's medical students to undertake mandatory research locally, rather than travelling to Melbourne, and create career research pathways currently not available to them.

BIRCH will also significantly enhance Ballarat's ability to attract both research income and researchers, leading to collaborative research grant submissions and strong philanthropic and community engagement.

A Research and Development Project Director will establish BIRCH, with two to four academics to lead acute health, aged care, integrated care and primary care (including social determinants of health) research disciplines.

BIRCH will be an enterprise the whole Ballarat community can be proud of.



Broad Benefits

Researchers will be able to develop, implement and facilitate research which serves our community's health care needs, provides investment opportunities and creates employment for researchers, research support workers and associated health care staff.

Using technology, BIRCH will also service the broader Grampians region through tele-education, reinforcing Ballarat's role as the health capital of Western Victoria.

BIRCH aims to be similar to the Hunter Medical Research Institute's (HMRI) growth model, aspiring to have 300 affiliated researchers within a decade, and over 1000 within 20 years.

Ballarat's environment is similar to the HMRI's original environment and would be conducive to achieving similar success, along with significant National Health and Medical Research funding.

In eight years, BIRCH would like to be known as a centre for innovation in regional/rural health research and be contributing to significant health outcome improvements within 15 years.

Context

The Ballarat Health Services (BHS) Drummond Street site currently hosts students from Federation University, Deakin University, Melbourne University, Australian Catholic University, Charles Sturt University and La Trobe University.

BHS also hosts numerous other education providers on site throughout the year, making it the principal educational site for both doctor and nursing training in Western Victoria.

BHS is located in the City of Ballarat's Health, Knowledge and City Living Precinct, along with St John of God Hospital, Australian Catholic University and several medical training schools.

These two hospitals and six universities all conduct their own research in a siloed structure, often unaware of the projects being undertaken by the other groups.

Breaking down these silos is vital for effective business collaboration, broadening the focus from individual groups to communal needs.

The City of Ballarat has identified the Health and Knowledge Precinct as Ballarat's largest health provider and acknowledges the need to guide new health job creation, new investment opportunities and to collaborate with universities to build industry research and development capacity.

A Draft Master Plan has been prepared which identified an Integrated Research Hub as a priority project. Several sites are identified as potential locations for the facility including likely site requirements.

The Benefits

The Health, Knowledge and City Living Precinct's broader goal is to create a geographic heart of healing and learning in the middle of Ballarat.

A purpose-built BIRCH facility would achieve this goal, allowing for a dedicated education and research zone, serving as a base for both medical and nursing education, clinical research and broader health education needs.

It would create new jobs, both during the construction and in research and associated support roles when it is completed and allow for much better retention of our current cohort of medical students.

Studies have also shown that, when research is carried out in a hospital or by health-services providers, the care standards also increase and attract medical specialists to the region.

It would also bring an influx of research and philanthropic funding, allow for a unique collaboration



between public and private sector health services and universities in a regional setting, and enhance Ballarat's reputation as the health capital of western Victoria.

It would also build skill capacity, provide an economic return and create a health research reputation of renown for Ballarat.

The Site

BIRCH would be a purpose-built facility, located in the Health, Knowledge and City Living Precinct

Timeframe

Commence construction in late 2019

Benefits

- **Jobs** – New jobs across research and associated support roles, plus retention of medical students
- **Investment** – Invaluable investment in health research will benefit all of Western Victoria, plus provide economic returns
- **Community** – The creation of best/next practice healthcare in the region

Economic Benefits

This \$20 million project is estimated to generate 118 jobs during construction and increase the size of the Ballarat economy by \$16.7 million. (Remplan June 2018)

Strategic Alignment

- City of Ballarat – Health, Knowledge and City Living Precinct Master Plan
- Central Highlands Regional Partnership – identified as a priority project
- Committee for Ballarat – strategic focus to “find innovative ways to deliver quality health services”

Partners

- Ballarat Health Services
- St John of God Ballarat Hospital
- Federation University
- La Trobe University
- Deakin University
- University of Melbourne
- Australian Catholic University
- Notre Dame University
- Primary Health Network Western Victoria
- Western Alliance

Project Status

Currently working with Regional Development Victoria to support the foundation partners with the BIRCH model's establishment. Ballarat Health Services has completed a site master plan and has preliminary BIRCH facility drawings. BHS has received funds for the Drummond Street site's redevelopment, but the community's education and research needs are not currently within the redevelopment's scope of works.

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