

Policy Document

Research (Open Access) Policy

Background

The Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) is the peak representative body for Australia's 17,000 medical students. As such, AMSA is a key body able to advocate on issues that impact upon the education of medical students; our future access to knowledge as medical practitioners; and the research which influences our practice of medicine.

Research and the dissemination of knowledge are central to the progression of every field of academia - from medicine to agriculture. Traditional methods of publishing restrict access to those who can afford to pay, whether individually or through their institution. This is the status quo even for the high amount of research conducted through public funding [1], or other public interest sources such as charitable organisations. These financial barriers significantly limit access to the results of research. Open Access (OA) is free, immediate, online access to scientific and scholarly articles coupled with full reuse rights [2]. OA still preserves the author's right to be properly acknowledged [2]. Articles are optimally supplemented with the provision of free, immediate, online access to associated data and other material, where relevant.

The vast majority of the world's population are currently unable to access scholarly articles due to cost. The benefits of sharing research are considerable. Firstly, OA improves education by enabling students and teachers at all levels to access articles not covered by their institutional subscriptions; secondly, it increases resources for researchers, including citizen researchers [3], to contribute to advancing knowledge; and thirdly, it provides global access to individuals and institutions unable to pay the high costs [4] of any or all journal subscriptions. Sharing research via an OA policy provides benefits to both the institution and researchers responsible, such as higher citation counts [5]. There is an even more pressing ethical imperative to make publicly available all research funded by the public; in doing so, both researchers and the wider community can benefit from the public investment made in supporting research [6].

It should be noted that although open availability of medical research is most pressingly relevant to Australian medical students, the principles behind OA apply to all areas of scientific and scholarly research. In addition, medical students are frequently involved in research which crosses disciplines, such as ethics, economics and broader areas of science. Therefore OA to all research is within the best interests of AMSA.

OA can be accomplished in a number of ways; prime examples are commonly referred to as Green OA and Gold OA. Green OA involves deposition of manuscripts (preferably the final peer reviewed version) into online repositories [7] such as those held by institutions, or specific to a discipline. Gold OA involves publication of research in OA journals [7] which make the article freely available immediately upon publication with full reuse rights. By whatever means this is achieved, research

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findings should be made freely and immediately available online, including associated data and reuse rights.

In Australia, both the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and Australian Research Council (ARC) have OA policies in place. These policies are in alignment, both stating that publications arising from research funded by the NHMRC and ARC must be deposited into an OA institutional repository within a twelve month period from the date of publication [6][8][9]. Moreover, both the NHMRC and ARC require the deposition of publication metadata within the researchers' institutional repository as soon as possible after being accepted for publication. Australia has a number of such OA repositories [10], as well as OA institutional policies, which alongside the NHMRC and ARC policies highlight the recognition of research as a public good and the importance of OA. Despite the above policies covering publicly funded research in Australia, other funding bodies may be yet to implement OA policies.

The Right to Research Coalition (R2RC) is an international coalition of student organisations who have signed the Student Statement on the Right to Research [11]. The R2RC actively engages in student advocacy on OA issues; notably, members include a number of medical student organisations internationally. Most relevant for AMSA, the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) in 2011 adopted a Policy Statement on Open Access to Research [12].

In order for us to effectively learn and practice medicine, we need access to research. This issue crosses the interests of students, health professionals and global health. As the peak representative body of Australia's future medical practitioners, AMSA is well placed to advocate for increased uptake of OA in Australia.

Position Statement

AMSA believes that the results of academic research should be Open Access (available freely and immediately online with full reuse rights) as the default standard in scholarly research, in order to globally increase the availability of knowledge with particular thought to benefiting students, health professionals, patients and the global health community.

Policy

AMSA believes that:

1. All scientific and scholarly research articles should be made Open Access (OA) (freely available online immediately upon publication and with full reuse rights);
2. There is an additional imperative for research that is funded publicly, or by other bodies with a public interest, to be made OA in order for all Australians and populations around the world to benefit from our collective investment in research; and
3. Where possible, associated datasets should be freely available alongside scientific and scholarly articles.

AMSA calls upon:

1. The AMSA Executive to:
 - a. Sign the Right to Research Coalition Student Statement on the Right to Research, formalising AMSA as a member of the Coalition;
 - b. Advocate for OA supportive policies at the institutional, national and international levels; and
 - c. Educate AMSA members about OA and its importance to medicine and education.
2. Australian medical students and researchers to:
 - a. Become aware of any OA policy of their institution and its associates, or

- i. Where the above does not currently exist, support action to implement policies supportive of OA at their institution and its associates; and
 - b. When publishing their own research, or being involved in the publication of research they have contributed to, consider OA options for dissemination. This includes both publishing in OA journals and/or depositing manuscripts in OA repositories.
3. Australian higher education institutions and other bodies conducting research to:
 - a. Adopt their own institutional policies and procedures supportive of OA, to increase free dissemination of scholarly work produced on their campus; and
 - b. Provide resources on OA, through institutional libraries or other means, to educate students and researchers on OA options and benefits.
4. Research funding bodies which currently do not have an OA policy to:
 - a. Adopt OA supportive policy which requires research articles resulting from their funding be openly available as soon as possible.

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Policy Details

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