



IMPACT

**Giving Hope and
Changing Lives for
Australian Families**

**ISSUE #67
SPRING 2021**

**MAKING AN
IMPACT**

**A MOTHER'S
LOVE**

**WESLEY MEDICAL
RESEARCH BIOBANK**

**MEET OUR
HOPE-BUILDERS**

FROM THE CEO'S DESK

The power of connection. Our lives and livelihoods depend on it.

Over the past year, the impact of medical research has been phenomenal as the attention of the world continues to focus on new ways to prevent, diagnose, and treat COVID-19. Undoubtedly, the most remarkable success has been the development of COVID-19 vaccines which may well be our only way out of this pandemic.

At Wesley Medical Research we are just as committed to supporting global attempts to combat COVID-19 as we were when we first made that pledge in 2020. I am delighted to feature some of the efforts made so far in this report.

Of enormous significance in forging forward is the extraordinary power of connection experienced at every level – personal, local, national, and global.

On a global scale, the international collaborations formed by Professors John Fraser's and Bala Venkatesh's teams will not only provide a powerful platform that equips intensive care clinicians with the most up-to-date information that saves lives and

improves outcomes for COVID-19 patients, but will also facilitate research over years to come across a range of other diseases.

Nationally, we've seen how the collaborations formed through our Wesley Medical Research Biobank has provided biospecimens as an invaluable resource for translational research.

At a state-wide level, our focus has been on improving the mental health of those living in remote regions where access to mental health services continues to be a real and immediate problem.

Locally, we are proud to have strengthened our partnership with our UnitingCare family as we continue to invest in world-leading medical and health services research.

On a personal level is our innate desire to connect. As a team we strive to support our community, create lasting bonds, and help one another through this challenging time. And at the heart of all this, our warmest appreciation goes

to our donors, without whom none of this would be possible.

Connection at every level sustains us and acts as a source of inspiration to continue changing lives and giving hope to those most vulnerable.

Please do reach out and please do connect. Our lives and livelihoods depend on it.



Dr Claudia Giurgiuman – CEO

SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH IN REMOTE REGIONS

Navicare – A new model of mental healthcare

In rural and remote communities, access to mental health services is substantially more limited than in metropolitan areas and tragically, rates of suicide and self-harm increase with remoteness.

Thanks to the generous support of Mitsubishi Development, a three-phased research program that aims to enhance access to mental health services and improve mental health outcomes in the Bowen Basin, is under way.

Phase 1 has been completed and with feedback from those communities, a new model of mental healthcare has been developed.

Phase 2 introduces ISAAC Navicare, a mental health navigation service located in Moranbah, Queensland. Navicare will connect Queenslanders living in remote and regional places to existing mental health services and support them in navigating an often complicated health system.

A Mental Health Care Navigator has been appointed and will provide much needed help-seeker support while promoting education and awareness of mental health services.

Find out more –

wesleyresearch.org.au/mental-health-support



**ISAAC
NAVICARE**

COVID-19 Rapid Response Research Centre update

In June 2020, Wesley Medical Research established the virtual COVID-19 Rapid Response Research Centre (CRRRC) where we publicly pledged our commitment to work towards overcoming COVID-19. The CRRRC is a private and public sector collaboration to support health workers on the frontline, patients who are critically ill, people with pre-existing conditions who are impacted by COVID-19 as well as people who are vulnerable to mental health concerns.

With the support of our generous donors we were able to initiate a series of research projects that focused on all aspects of patient care. We are now 18 months on from when the pandemic first started to impact Australia and below is an update on the progress that has been made in the fight against it.

Long-term impact of COVID-19 becoming clearer

Lead researcher: Associate Professor Gianluigi Li Bassi (Intensivist)

Millions of people across the globe have been hospitalised with COVID-19, many spending time in intensive care. Those that survive can experience long-term effects with impacts on vital organs such as the lungs, heart, liver, kidneys, and brain. To understand long-term effects, this study has already enrolled close to 100 patients in 15 centres around the world. Two hundred participants will form part of the study and their health monitored for two years. Of those enrolled, participants are six months into the follow-up period.



**COVID-19 Patient
Kirsty Hamilton**

Kirsty is the cherished daughter of a long-term Wesley Medical Research volunteer Janette. In March 2020 Kirsty contracted COVID-19 while living in Dubai.

Her recovery is ongoing and she recently said, "After testing positive I received oxygen for a week and now have a low white blood count, which is regularly monitored. I am still prone to fevers."

We wish Kirsty all the best with her recovery and know that her experience is like that of many other people diagnosed with COVID-19.

Multi-centre trial in India stalled

Lead researcher: Professor Bala Venkatesh (Intensivist)

Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) had been identified as having potential antiviral activity against COVID-19. With close to two million COVID-19 infections occurring in healthcare workers, this clinical trial aimed to assess the usefulness of this drug in preventing COVID-19 disease.

Due to the high numbers of COVID-19 infections in India, 15 centres were opened to recruit 7,900 healthcare workers and the study was on track with 430 healthcare workers recruited.

However, the study was placed on hold indefinitely with the vaccine rollout in India that contraindicates the use of HCQ. Since the closure of this study, a similar study opened in Australia (Melbourne) to answer this same question.



A global collaboration born out of a global crisis

Lead researcher: Professor John Fraser (Intensivist)

Our COVID Critical research continues to provide a platform for data collection and analysis that is essential to a better understanding of critically ill COVID-19 patient treatment. A true global collaboration, spanning across 52 countries and 400 centres, this work equips all intensive care clinicians, with the best and most up-to-date information to save lives and improve outcomes for patients.

THE GIFT OF JUSTIN CAMERON'S LEGACY

A mother's love

It has been nearly twenty years since Rhonda Cameron's son, Justin, lost his life to a rare disease.

Justin and his family featured in our June campaign this year and helped raise vital funds for Wesley Medical Research. In life, Rhonda said that Justin was always thinking of others; and in death, he still is.

Rhonda will never get over the heartache of losing her son. "We desperately wanted to know something good could come of his passing. Justin would have wanted that too. My beautiful boy always wanted to make others' lives better," she said.

Just before his seventeenth birthday, Justin lost his life to Ewing's sarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer that has a higher incidence rate in adolescents and young adults.

Justin's tissue samples were donated to help researchers learn about, and identify new treatments for Australians diagnosed with this rare cancer. Sadly, because Ewing's sarcomas are so rare, they are hard to study, which is why the Wesley Medical Research Biobank is so important to this research.

Through the generous support of the Wesley Medical Research community over \$65,000 was raised to help fund medical research.



Mother Rhonda, father Alan, and sister Lauren visit Justin while in hospital.



Rhonda Cameron and her son Justin (pictured).

Rhonda said she draws on Justin's grace and strength every day. "When they found a secondary cancer, they told him it could be five months or five years. At that point he said he was going to live for today but look to the future."

"That was how we survived after we lost him. You deal with one day at a time, because it's just too hard to think of doing it again tomorrow."

With your help, we can help other families live longer lives together. But more importantly Wesley Medical Research will work tirelessly to ensure Rhonda Cameron and her family continue to see advances in research, in memory of her son, Justin.

Donate to research today –
wesleyresearch.org.au/donate

WHAT IS A BIOBANK?

Growing the Wesley Medical Research Biobank

The Wesley Medical Research Biobank is playing a significant role in breakthroughs for cancer, autism, and rare genetic diseases.

Founded in 2007, this open-sourced and purpose-built facility provides a diverse collection of ethically obtained blood and tissue specimen samples for biomedical research. Uniquely, it is the largest of its kind in the southern hemisphere and provides researchers access to human specimens which are used to identify improvements in the detection, diagnosis, and treatment of diseases.

Holding more than 40,000 samples, this highly specialised facility offers long-term protection and storage for samples including the Queensland Brain Tumour Bank, the Australian Autism Biobank, and the Justin Cameron Sarcoma Collection.

The Biobank is a collection of biological samples, stored in a laboratory. Researchers can use these samples to learn more about diseases and trial new drugs and treatments.

Samples stored in the Biobank have been collected from people all over Queensland and are then distributed to medical researchers who investigate better ways to diagnose, prevent, and treat cancer and other conditions.

For example, samples from the Australian Autism Biobank stored at the Wesley Medical Research Biobank have been used to analyse Autism Spectrum Disorder, a complex neurodevelopmental condition whose biological basis is yet to be discovered.

Using biobank samples, researchers Professor Naomi Wray and Dr Jake Gratten recently showed that autism traits lead to restricted dietary intake, resulting in reduced microbiome (gut health) diversity. These results are based on information from 2,477 individuals with DNA data from 546 families.

Here is what your support would mean to the Biobank.

Collecting and storing a single solid tissue sample costs \$100.



\$100

Storing a single sample costs \$5c per month. With over 40,000 samples, providing the Biobank service costs \$2,000 per month.



5¢

Collecting and storing a single test tube of blood costs \$30.



\$30

WESLEY MEDICAL RESEARCH WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE CATALANO FAMILY FOUNDATION FOR THEIR GENEROUS GIFT TO SUPPORT THE BIOBANK. SAM CATALANO, THE FOUNDER OF CATALANO FAMILY FOUNDATION, ESTABLISHED THE FOUNDATION IN MEMORY OF HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTER WHO HAVE BOTH PASSED AWAY DUE TO ILLNESS.



For more information about the Wesley Medical Research Biobank please contact:

Dr Johanna Schagen – Research Officer

✉ WMRBiobank@wesleyresearch.org.au

☎ (07) 3721 1500

MEET OUR HOPE-BUILDERS

Wendy and Alan Grummitt

In conversation with **Cherie Smith** Business Development Manager and **Pamela Felling** Marketing & Communication Specialist.

Generosity and humbleness are often companions. Changemakers Wendy and Alan Grummitt are wonderful examples of this.

In their family room, we enjoyed some small talk before diving into the big question—Why donate?

Wendy and Alan, life-time supporters of Wesley Medical Research, say why not?

No strangers to philanthropy, Wendy and Alan say that they have always been driven to help, and now want to encourage others to think about doing the same.

“We worked hard all of these years and now we want to put that hard work into helping our community’s future,” Alan reflected.

They have a long history with the Methodist, then Uniting Church, The Wesley Hospital, and Wesley Medical Research. Wendy volunteered in the coffee shop at The Wesley Hospital for almost 25 years and more recently was a patient.

Wendy and Alan know her treatment, and successful recovery, was due to the many generous donors who support medical research. This meant the doctors and health workers had the opportunity to identify new ways to treat disease and illnesses.



Wendy and Alan Grummitt at home.

“We understand how research develops. Doctors start researching in one area, only to discover that the drug they thought would do one thing ended up doing something completely different. Research is wonderful for that,” Wendy remarked.

Wendy and Alan’s recent donation to Wesley Medical Research is ‘in perpetuity’, with the hope that their donation will continue to have an impact for many years.

But large or small Wendy and Alan say any donation helps.

Thank you the Grummitt family, for your investment in Wesley Medical Research. Your donation has made a difference and will help continue life-saving research for many years to come.

“We had made provision for the donation in our wills but decided to make the donation now, recognising the outstanding medical research currently in progress.”
– Alan Grummitt



Dr Claudia Giurgiuan – CEO (left) receives donation from Wendy and Alan Grummitt.

Sharing your story to inspire others

If you would like to share your story of what inspired you to give to Wesley Medical Research, please email cherie.smith@wesleyresearch.org.au or call 3721 1500 and let’s have a chat!

Living and working during a pandemic

In 2020, the focus on COVID-19 research showcased Wesley Medical Research's commitment to giving hope and changing lives to Queenslanders and across the world.

The pandemic has impacted every aspect of our lives; how and where we work, our ability to gather socially, participate in sports, our travel plans, and even how our children engage in school activities. Initially, we hoped it would be all over in three to six months, but the impact of increasing case numbers, vaccine rollouts, restrictions, and lockdowns look to have an enduring effect on our lives.

Medical research is always searching for answers and this attitude has never been more important. One of the impacts the pandemic had on the staff at Wesley Medical Research was an increased focus on our digital strategy. We conducted an infrastructure assessment to better understand our digital requirements and developed a preferred IT model for Wesley Medical Research.

Just as these plans were progressing, the larger UnitingCare organisation was impacted by a significant cyber incident, which also affected the team at Wesley Medical Research. Fortunately, we were able to re-position to cloud-based technology, enabling the team to quickly restore critical data and business processes.

Again, it was the spirit of adaptability and collaboration that impressed me during this challenge. Every person within Wesley Medical Research and the broader UnitingCare organisation banded together to find solutions, with patient care at the centre of this work. I felt our team demonstrated a good deal of calm in this situation, keeping essential services operating whilst methodically problem solving to continue working.

The experience was a valuable one for our team culture and our ongoing resilience. Everyone pulled together so well and were open to very rapid change. Now we have transitioned to the new environment, our digital maturity has been greatly enhanced. This has increased confidence in our data security, in addition to the many other benefits cloud solutions provide.

Through these testing times, the need to become a best practice research institute has increased and we are well under way, thanks to your help.

Thank you.

“
Last year my entire family was working and schooling from home, creating a hectic blur between work and family time.

Simon Smith – CFO




For the price of a coffee a day, every month you are giving hope and changing lives.

Join our community, make research possible, and help improve patient outcomes so they can go back to spending time with family.



Help us raise awareness

-  wesleyresearch.org.au
-  [@WesleyMedicalResearch](https://www.facebook.com/WesleyMedicalResearch)
-  [@Wesley Medical Research](https://www.linkedin.com/company/Wesley%20Medical%20Research)
-  [@WesleyResearch](https://twitter.com/WesleyResearch)
-  [@wesleyresearch](https://www.instagram.com/wesleyresearch)

Donate

-  wesleyresearch.org.au/donate
-  07 3721 1500

Make a lasting impact by leaving a gift in your will

-  donate@wesleyresearch.org.au
-  07 3721 1500

Register for a clinical trial

-  wesleyresearch.org.au/clinical-trials