

Heartbeat

St Vincent's Foundation Victoria Newsletter

Spring-Summer 2026/27



FEATURE

Margaret's St Vincent's story comes full circle

60 years on, Margaret returns to the site where she lived and trained as a nurse, this time as a member of the ACMD founding circle of donors.

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New ultrasound and wheelchairs made possible by the Edgar Foundation

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Message from the Executive Director

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Compassion has always been at the heart of St Vincent's. It is reflected not only in the care that our patients receive, but also in the generosity of those who help make that care possible.

This edition of Heartbeat highlights stories of generosity, innovation and enduring connection. We meet St Vincent's nursing alumna Margaret Gill, whose journey came full circle as she and her husband Peter returned to the former Aikenhead Wing, where Margaret once lived and trained as a nurse, for the Official Opening of the new Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery (ACMD) – this time as members of its Founders Circle.

You will also find out about the remarkable work of Caritas Christi, where dignity, comfort and compassionate care guide and support patients and their families through life-limiting illness. It is a moving reminder of the extraordinary care that takes place every day across St Vincent's.

We were overwhelmed by your response to our recent appeal. Your support will equip our Neurology Department with advanced technology that will help more people living with epilepsy receive earlier diagnoses, more precise treatment and the opportunity to live seizure-free.

You will also read how one family's generosity is honouring the legacy of Dr Jim Cummins, how another is funding sarcoma research through the Larger Than Life fundraising initiative established in memory of David Hynes, and how clinicians are transforming care for patients living with vertebral fractures.

Every story in Heartbeat reflects the same belief: that together we can improve lives, advance medical discovery and ensure St Vincent's continues to provide exceptional care for generations to come.

Thank you for being a vital and cherished part of our story.



Melina Talanis

Executive Director
St Vincent's Foundation
Victoria



Thank you for helping people like Danni reclaim their lives

Earlier this year, we asked for your support to help transform epilepsy care at St Vincent's. Together we have raised more than \$135,000 for Neurology equipment and patient services at St Vincent's.





Our recent St Vincent's Inside event, which focused on epilepsy, featured Dr Antony Tobin, Chief Medical Officer; Dr Amy Halliday, Neurologist; Matt Preston, award-winning food journalist (host); Professor Mark Cook AO, Director of Neurosciences; Dr Kristian Bulluss, Neurosurgeon. Matt (and St Vincent's) recently appeared on the documentary series, *The Hospital: In the Deep End* on SBS.

Because of you, we are investing in advanced equipment that will help our Neurology Team diagnose seizures more quickly, plan safer treatments and improve outcomes for people living with epilepsy.

Your support is helping fund specialised brain mapping software, high-density EEG technology, portable video monitoring equipment and other essential tools that enable our clinicians to pinpoint where seizures begin in the brain. These technologies will help patients receive faster diagnoses, more personalised treatment and, for some, the opportunity to become seizure-free.

As Director of Neurosciences, Professor Mark Cook AO has dedicated decades to caring for people with complex epilepsy:

"Fixing people's seizures permanently is definitely the most rewarding part of my job. While seizure freedom isn't possible for every patient, being able to give people an accurate diagnosis, explain what is happening to them and find the best possible treatment can make a profound difference to their lives."

For patients like Danni, that treatment has been life changing. After years of debilitating seizures and multiple misdiagnoses, she finally found answers at St Vincent's. Today, nearly six years after her surgery, she remains seizure-free and has regained the independence she once feared she'd lost forever.

Now Danni spends her time travelling Australia with her husband, exploring some of the country's most remote landscapes.

"The surgery gave me the chance to completely realign my values...I take joy in small things like birds and nature and creeks and the sparseness of the deserts. I'm at peace," she said.

To the hundreds of generous supporters who donated to our recent appeal, thank you. Your incredible gift is helping ensure more people in our communities can access world-class neurological care and the latest technology needed to improve patient outcomes here at St Vincent's.

Danni wanted to leave one final message for the donors who made her second chance possible:

"I may not ever get to meet any of you, but I need you to understand you have given me that second chance at life. This won't be wasted... I think about you when I'm in nature and gratitude overwhelms me."

Your gift to Neurology makes a tangible difference. Every donation helps our Neurology team provide faster diagnoses, safer treatment and renewed hope for people living with epilepsy.



FEATURE

Margaret's St Vincent's story comes full circle

Imagine returning almost 60 years later to the place where you once lived and trained. The building you knew is gone. In its place stands a world-class centre for medical discovery – and you are there for its opening. Not as a nurse, but as a member of its founding circle of donors.

For St Vincent's nursing alumna Margaret Gill, the official opening of the Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery (ACMD) in June was one of life's special full circle moments.

Australia's first collaborative, hospital-based biomedical engineering translation centre now occupies the site of the former Aikenhead Wing – once home to Margaret and generations of young St Vincent's nurses.

Returning to the site with her husband Peter Gill AM for the ACMD Official Opening, Margaret found herself reflecting on a place that shaped both her career and her life. Living and training in the Aikenhead Wing before graduating in 1969, she became part of a close-knit community where young nurses lived, trained and grew together – supporting one another along the way. It was there she forged lifelong friendships and began her relationship with Peter.

"The Aikenhead Wing was much more than a place to train – it was a home," Margaret said. "We lived, trained and grew together, and the friendships we formed were lifelong. We supported one another through everything, and even now many of us remain close."

Much has changed since Margaret's nursing days at St Vincent's, yet something familiar still echoes through the ACMD's 11 floors. Clinicians, researchers and engineers now work side by side, developing groundbreaking technologies while remaining united by the same commitment to improving the health of our communities.

Margaret Gill during her nursing days at St Vincent's. She lived and trained in the Aikenhead Wing before graduating in 1969. Historical images sourced from St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne Archives.



Margaret Gill with her husband Peter Gill AM at the official opening of the Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery.



In the late 1960s, Margaret recalls medical research taking place in far more modest and makeshift surroundings. While the scale and sophistication may have changed, the purpose underpinning the work remains constant.

"When I visited the Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery, I was amazed by how far things had come," Margaret said. "What moved me most was seeing the continuum – from the dedication of the hospital staff I knew as a young nurse to the cutting-edge research taking place now. It is the same commitment to improving lives, just expressed in new ways."

Today, Margaret and Peter are helping write the next chapter of that story. As members of the ACMD Founders Circle, they are among the earliest supporters investing in the future of medical discovery in the St Vincent's Fitzroy Health and Innovation Precinct.

"Supporting the ACMD felt like a way of honouring the past while investing in the future," Margaret said. "I believe it will go from strength to strength and make a real difference for generations to come."

Margaret first came to the Aikenhead Wing to learn how to care for others. Nearly 60 years later, she and Peter returned to ensure future generations can discover new ways of doing the same.

To learn more about the ACMD or how you can support its work, please get in touch with us on (03) 9231 3365 or email foundation@svha.org.au.

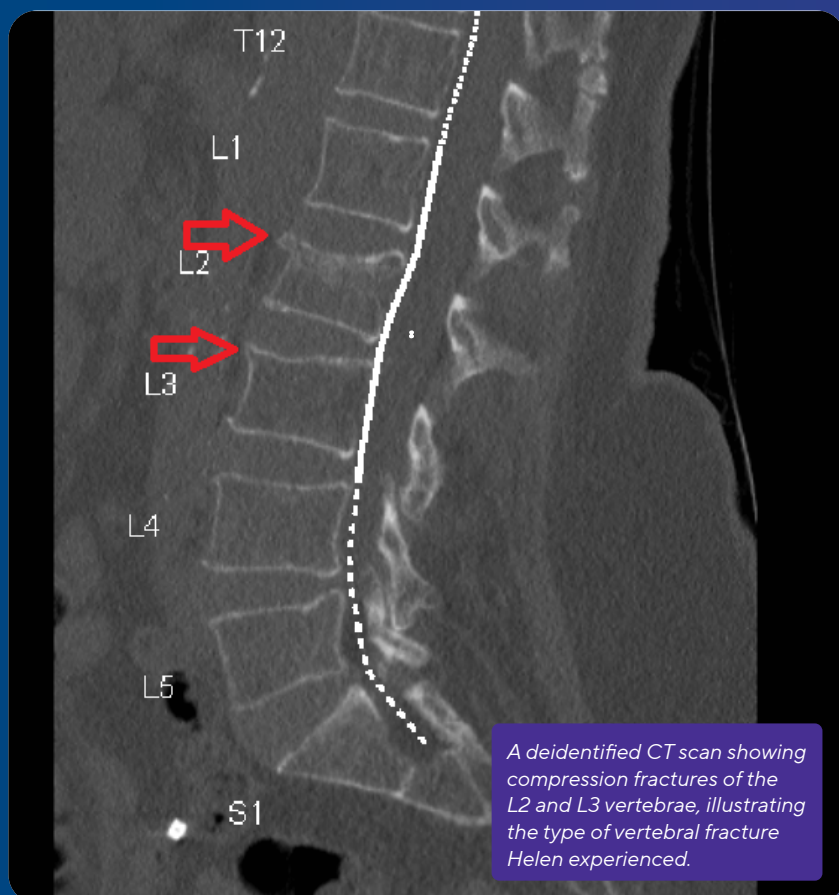
The former Aikenhead Wing, where Margaret and other St Vincent's nurses once lived and trained, and the new Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery, which now occupies the site. Historical images sourced from St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne Archives.



Turning experience into better care

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When Helen McCausland experienced two vertebral fractures within weeks of each other, she expected the hardest part would be recovering from her injuries.



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6.2 million Australians over the age of 50 have poor bone health – a number expected to rise as our population ages.

What Helen did not expect was how difficult it would be to navigate the healthcare system – an experience that revealed gaps in care and opportunities to improve the patient journey.

Despite her background as an experienced physiotherapist, Helen discovered there was little coordinated guidance to help patients recover after a vertebral fracture. There were specialists to see, scans to undergo and treatments to consider, but no clear pathway bringing it all together.

As a healthcare professional, “I thought things could have been done much better,” Helen said.

Her experience ignited an idea that she hopes will improve care for thousands of Australians every year.

Through a considered gift to St Vincent’s, Helen is supporting the development of multidisciplinary clinical guidelines for vertebral fractures, bringing together experts from emergency medicine, endocrinology, neurosurgery, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, radiology, pain medicine and nursing to create a more consistent, evidence-based approach to care.

In 2023, there were more than 35,000 vertebral fractures cases in Australia. Often referred to as “crush” fractures, these painful injuries are most commonly caused by osteoporosis, and with Australia’s ageing population, these are expected to become increasingly common.

Yet the fracture itself is often only part of the story.

“A vertebral fracture is a bit like a first heart attack or stroke. Once someone has had one fragility fracture, they’re at much higher risk of having another,” said St Vincent’s Endocrinologist, Dr Alice Hong, who is project lead of the vertebral fracture management guideline development.

Rather than simply treating the immediate injury, the new guidelines will help ensure patients receive the right care from the right specialists at the right time, while also identifying and treating the underlying osteoporosis that may have caused the fracture in the first place.

“We’re not just treating the fracture they’ve come in with,” Dr Hong said. “We’re making sure they’re assessed and started on treatment to help prevent future fractures.”

For clinicians, the guidelines will provide a shared framework that helps identify which patients need specialist care, streamlines referrals and ensures opportunities to improve long-term bone health aren’t missed.

“You don’t want people to have to reinvent the wheel again and again,” she said. “If everyone is working together and sharing ideas, the patient benefits.”

Originally intending to leave a gift through her Will, Helen decided to bring her donation forward in her lifetime, so that she could help create change now.

“I just thought it would be good to get on with it,” she said.

Having begun her physiotherapy career at St Vincent’s in the 1960s, supporting the project at St Vincent’s felt like a natural choice.

Dr Hong said the team are incredibly grateful for the support, especially when healthcare funding is always under pressure.

“Support like Helen’s gives us the opportunity to improve patient care in ways we otherwise wouldn’t have the time or resources to do. Not only will we better manage people with vertebral fractures today, but we’ll also help prevent future fractures and improve quality of life for years to come,” Dr Hong said.

Registered Nurses Shona Bruce and Morgan Sterley preparing a patient room at Caritas Christi.



FEATURE

A new vision for living well with palliative care

Sharing our vision for Caritas Christi

When most people hear the term palliative care, they think of end-of-life care. But its role extends far beyond symptom management - supporting people and their families for many months, and sometimes years, before death. It is about living as well as possible for as long as possible.

This is particularly important at Caritas Christi. Many of our patients aren't elderly. They are parents of young children, partners, carers, people with mortgages, careers, and busy lives that have been interrupted by a life-limiting illness. They are still making memories, celebrating milestones and finding ways to live meaningful lives with the people they love.

Our vision is to create a model of care that reflects this reality, and your support allows us to create a space where people can continue living while they have a life-limiting illness. Caritas Christi was brought to life with the help of our donor community, and philanthropy remains pivotal to its future - making possible the programs, spaces and experiences that fall outside traditional hospital funding.

One of our aspirations is to develop a Palliative Care Tourism Program, enabling people from regional and rural Victoria to access intensive specialist palliative care support while staying alongside their families in a dedicated accommodation suite. Rather than travelling to Melbourne solely for appointments, patients and their loved ones could combine their care with meaningful experiences, such as attending a football match, going to the theatre, or visiting their favourite places. This would be supported by specialist clinical care, art therapy, pastoral care and advance care planning services, helping people make the most of the time that matters.

We also hope to establish a dedicated First Nations Healing and Connection suite, developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the state. The space would recognise the profound importance of connection to Country, culture and community. Through collaboration with local observatories, patients would be able to see the night sky from their traditional lands projected above them. We would also create opportunities for families and communities to bring meaningful items from Country, such as soil, leaves, native plants, artwork, water or other culturally significant objects, so that people can remain connected to home, culture and identity throughout their care.

Another key priority is the continued redevelopment of our gardens to create a Sensory and Celebration Garden, with direct access from patient rooms and family living areas. Too often, patients become disconnected from the outdoors as their illness progresses. This new green space would allow patients and families to move easily between their rooms and a welcoming outdoor environment designed for gathering, reflection and connection. It would be a place to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries and family milestones, creating memories with children and grandchildren, enjoy nature, and simply spend precious time together.

We also envision creating a dedicated Study and Work Hub for patients, families and visitors. Life-limiting illnesses do not stop life. Children still need to complete schoolwork, university students still need to study, and family members often need to continue working while supporting a loved one. Providing a comfortable, technology-enabled workspace would allow people to remain connected to their education, employment and daily responsibilities while staying close to those who matter most.

These projects are about much more than buildings and infrastructure. They are about creating a palliative care service that helps people continue to live, connect, celebrate and belong. They are about ensuring that patients and families have the opportunity to make meaningful memories, remain connected to what matters most, and receive care that supports the whole person.

Your generous support is helping us transform the experience of palliative care for future generations of Victorian families.

Warmest regards,

Esther McMillan-Drendel

Operations Manager and
Interim Director of Nursing,
Palliative Care Services





A NEW VISION FOR LIVING WELL WITH PALLIATIVE CARE

Mark never liked hospitals, but he loved St Vincent's

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Mark Finn spent much of his life in and out of hospital. Living with complex medical conditions from childhood, he endured countless admissions and procedures throughout his life.

He never enjoyed being in hospital. But he always loved St Vincent's.

"Mark spoke highly of the medical support and care across all disciplines," said his partner, Alan Jones. "He always felt in good hands at St Vincent's and often spoke of the care and compassion he received."

Despite the health challenges he faced, Mark never let illness define him. He completed a law degree at Monash University and built a distinguished career in family law, where he was known for his compassion, empathy and ability to understand people during some of the most difficult times in their lives.

When Mark passed away at the age of 65, he chose to leave a bequest to St Vincent's including an incredibly thoughtful contribution towards Caritas Christi and palliative care. His gift was inspired by gratitude for the care he had received over many years.

Today, his legacy lives on in a beautiful reflection garden, offering patients, families and staff a serene place to pause and seek peace and calmness.

"Sometimes it's really important for families to step away from the bedside and have somewhere to simply sit, reflect and gather themselves," said Esther McMillan-Drendel, Replace with Operations Manager and Interim Director of Nursing, Palliative Care Services. "It's somewhere people can watch the light play on the water and just have a moment of mindfulness."

For Esther, the reflection garden is about creating an environment that nurtures the emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing of patients and families, alongside their medical care.

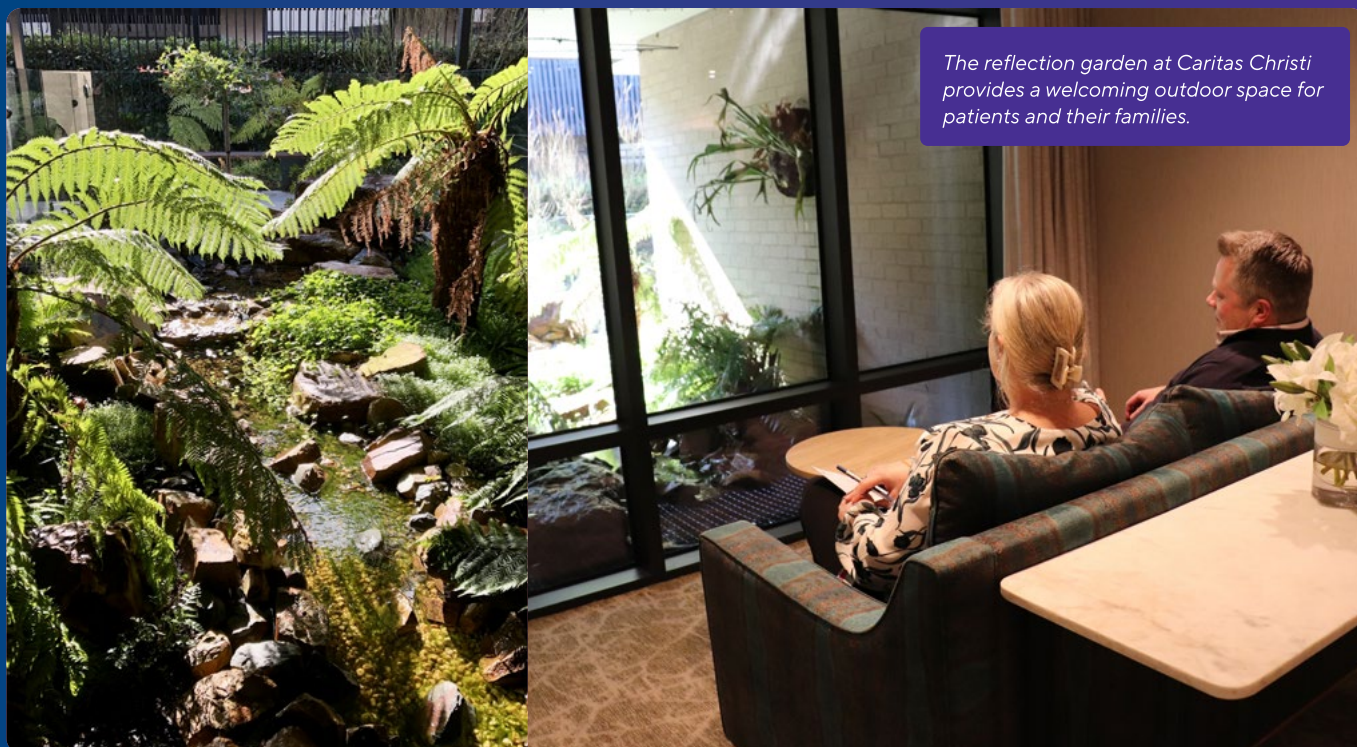
"We're not just here to manage symptoms," she said. "We're here to care for the whole person, their family and everyone around them."

Mark's bequest has also helped support specialised education for St Vincent's clinicians, ensuring staff continue to develop the skills needed to provide exceptional palliative care.

For Alan, seeing photos of the completed garden was an emotional moment.

"Mark would be over the moon to see this outcome of his bequest... The beautiful reflection garden will keep us connected to Mark, who would be so happy knowing his gift is bringing peace and tranquillity to the people at Caritas."

To learn more about supporting Caritas Christi through a donation or a bequest, please contact Kristy Lawler on (03) 9231 3118.



The reflection garden at Caritas Christi provides a welcoming outdoor space for patients and their families.



Registered Nurse Shona Bruce in the Caritas Christi art room.

Zeine Tawfic and Loan Tran from Patient Services at the Caritas Christi reception desk.

Jim's wife Anne (centre) with her daughter Jillian and son-in-law Peter. Jim and Anne married in 1959 and had three daughters, a son and 10 grandchildren.



Honouring Dr Jim Cummins – a lifetime spent caring for others



The late Dr James “Jim” Cummins was a man who cared deeply and genuinely about other people. While devoted to his family, Jim was equally known for the compassion and dedication he showed to his patients and those who worked alongside him as a highly skilled neurosurgeon at St Vincent’s.

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In recognition of his lifelong commitment to medicine and neurosurgery, Jim’s family decided to honour his memory with a generous donation to the St Vincent’s Private Hospital Fitzroy capital campaign.

“I am proud to give this donation to fund specialised equipment, research and education, important investments that my husband, James highly valued,” said Jim’s wife, Anne Cummins.

The Cummins family recently visited the hospital to unveil a recognition plaque on Level 5 and hear reflections on Jim’s remarkable career from Director of Neurosurgery Dr Paul Smith and former Director of Neurosurgery Dr Peter McNeill.

Jim’s connection with St Vincent’s spanned more than four decades. He first joined the hospital as a junior resident in 1958, and after being stationed at a RAAF base in Malaysia and embarking on further training in the United Kingdom, he eventually returned to St Vincent’s in 1971. Jim went on to become Head of Neurosurgery in 1988, retiring in 1999 after a distinguished career that earned international recognition for his research and extraordinary contributions to his field.

In 2021, Jim’s outstanding service to medicine, neurosurgery and professional medical societies was recognised with a posthumous Member of the Order of Australia (AM).

The Cummins family’s gift reflects a lasting commitment to the hospital and its patients, while ensuring Jim’s legacy continues to benefit future generations. We are sincerely grateful to the Cummins family for choosing to honour Jim’s life in this way.

New ultrasound and wheelchairs made possible by the Edgar Foundation

One of St Vincent's longest standing and most loyal philanthropic partners, the Edgar Foundation, recently provided a grant of \$45,000 for our Anaesthesia Department to purchase much needed equipment.



Cardiac anaesthesiologists routinely use cardiac ultrasound to image the heart during valvular surgery, helping monitor cardiac function and improve surgical procedures.

A new portable ultrasound will help clinicians quickly and accurately locate veins and arteries for catheter insertion, making it easier to deliver fluids, medications and monitor patients. It will also support more informed clinical assessments by providing greater certainty, precision and an improved patient experience.

St Vincent's currently has 13 anaesthesia ultrasounds across our operating suites, but many are now over ten years old and reaching the end of their working life.

Director of Anaesthesia, Associate Professor Brian Cowie explained that the grant was extremely useful and had enabled the department to replace one of its oldest ultrasound units. However, a further 12 machines need to be replaced to complete the modernisation – an investment of approximately \$1million in total.

"While our fleet of ultrasounds are still effective, it is now like using a ten-year-old laptop. They were great in 2015 but can no longer do everything that's required – the older machines are slow to

power up, regularly 'freeze' or shutdown and they no longer have the functionality to perform high end imaging," said Associate Professor Cowie.

"To enable our Anaesthesia physicians to provide the best possible care, we need to replace more of our older machines with a modern fleet."

This year, the Edgar Foundation also generously donated more than \$27,000 for two motorised wheelchairs, helping patients with limited mobility move safely and independently around the hospital.

The Edgar Foundation has supported St Vincent's for more than 20 years and has been extremely generous in enabling us to purchase high-priority equipment for many medical teams across St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne. We are very grateful for their support and to all our long-standing and loyal donors who generously support us.

If you would like to learn more about supporting the purchase of vital equipment at St Vincent's, please contact the St Vincent's Foundation team on (03) 9231 3365 or foundation@svha.org.au.

Benefits of ultrasound

The use of ultrasound technology in anaesthesia has grown significantly in recent years, playing an important role in:

- Guiding and monitoring the insertion of needles and catheters
- Enabling the safe placement of catheters into central parts of the body such as the heart
- Addressing low blood pressure in cardiac surgery, a potentially life-threatening complication
- Monitoring cardiac function in real time during open heart surgery and cardiac cath lab procedures.

Larger Than Life: A legacy changing the future of sarcoma care

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David Hynes was 'larger than life' in every sense of the phrase. When he passed away from sarcoma in 2022, his family resolved to honour his life in the most meaningful way they knew – by helping change the future for others facing the same disease.

That commitment became Larger Than Life – a community fundraising initiative established by David's children, Harry, Chloe and Archie Hynes in partnership with St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, where David received his care. What began as a deeply personal tribute has grown into a passionate community, supporting pioneering research into sarcoma – a rare and complex group of cancers that can develop in bone and soft tissue.

From Ironman challenges and merchandise sales to community fundraising events, supporters continue to rally behind the family's vision. When we caught up with the Hynes family, they were finalising plans for another special event in August 2026 – Larger Than Life – Wear Your Colours Night. The event aims to raise \$40,000 towards the Regenerative Engineering Modelling of Osteochondral Diseases (REMOD) program at the Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery (ACMD). Previous fundraising has already helped support a dedicated sarcoma research nurse, strengthening national and international research collaborations, while supporting laboratory research into osteosarcoma.

Building on St Vincent's long-standing leadership in sarcoma care, researchers at the newly opened ACMD are advancing new approaches to understanding and treating the disease. Led by Associate Professor Serena Duchi in collaboration with Associate Professor Claudia Di Bella and PhD researcher William Humble, the team is developing patient-specific tumour "avatars" in the laboratory that closely mimic osteosarcoma – the most common type of bone sarcoma. By recreating a patient's tumour, researchers can test potential treatments before they reach the patient – a significant step forward for a disease with around 70 recognised subtypes.

"Osteosarcoma is considered a rare sarcoma so there are not many patients available to run clinical trials in the world. That's why there is a necessity of having something that, without using animals, can be used to reproduce a real human patient and test different drugs," said Associate Professor Serena Duchi.

The value of developing patient-specific tumour models may extend far beyond osteosarcoma itself.

"The impact spreads so much wider than osteosarcoma. The research we do has so many implications for other types of research," William Humble added.

For the Hynes family, every dollar raised honours their father's memory while helping to shape the future of sarcoma care. It is a legacy measured not only by the life David lived, but by the continuing impact he inspired, and the lives that may one day be changed – a legacy that is truly larger than life.

If you are interested in hearing more about the Larger Than Life initiative or community fundraising more broadly, please get in contact with us at foundation@svha.org.au.

L-R Lily McCurdy, Associate Professor Serena Duchi, William Humble, Archie Hynes, and Harry Hynes filming a video for their community of donors in the ACMD's bio-fabrication lab.



L-R Harry Hynes, Archie Hynes, William Humble, and Associate Professor Serena Duchi at the ACMD



Welcome to our new home!

St Vincent's Foundation Victoria
has moved to:

Brenan Place
Level 2, 33 Victoria Parade
Fitzroy VIC 3065

If you are visiting the St Vincent's
Fitzroy Health and Innovation
Precinct, we would love you to
come and say hello.

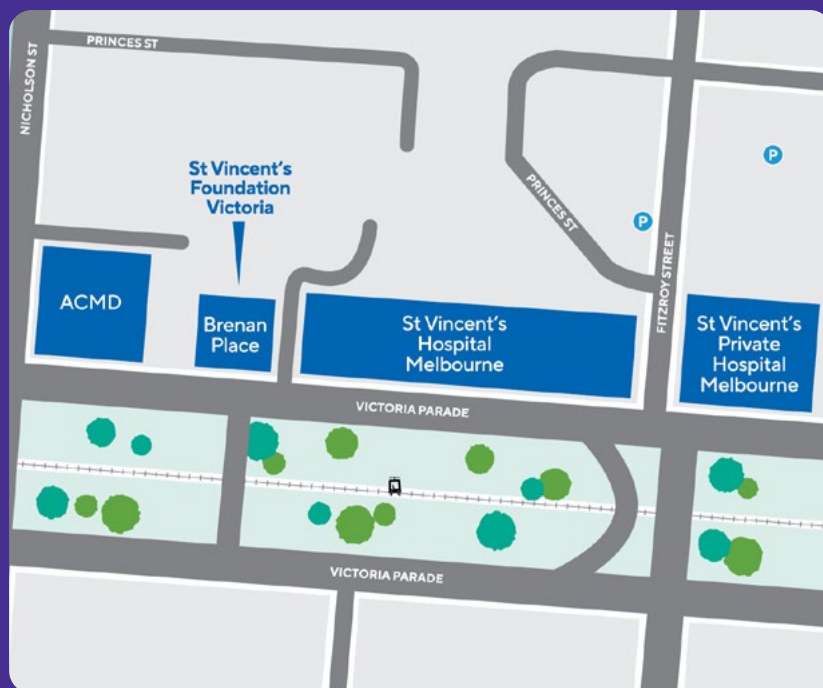
Our office is open Monday to
Friday from 9am–5pm (excluding
public holidays). Please call us on
(03) 9231 3365 before your visit so
a member of our team can meet you.

Show your support

You can make a donation when you
visit our office or scan the QR code
to donate online.

Donations can also be made in
person at the cashier's desk in
Building A or at St Vincent's
Private Hospital Fitzroy reception.

Scan to
make a
donation



Better and
fairer care.
Always.



**ST VINCENT'S
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