

# Heartbeat

St Vincent's Foundation Newsletter

Spring 2025

FEATURE

## A new era in cardiac imaging

### In this issue

Lifesaving cardiology equipment  
made possible by you

St Vincent's performs world-first dual  
robotic surgery

From gratitude to action: Vietnamese  
community raises \$21,000 for breast  
cancer care

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# Message from the Executive Director

It has been a busy and exciting few months at St Vincent's, and this springtime edition of Heartbeat is filled with stories of impact – made possible thanks to you.

We celebrate the opening of our newly refurbished Day Infusion Centre at Werribee Private Hospital – a collaborative effort made possible by our generous supporters, community partners, and dedicated staff. We also honour Brenda Shanahan AO's visionary leadership and philanthropy through the naming of the ACMD Auditorium.

You will hear about the groundbreaking work of Associate Professor Wendy Stevens and her team in scleroderma research, as well as exploring the far-reaching impact of the Thomas Trauer Fund, which is supporting mental health training for nurses across the Asia-Pacific region.

We feature our three current priority needs for philanthropic investment and partnership:

- A dedicated MRI machine to assess heart function during exercise
- The revolutionary Symani surgical system, to transform the future of microsurgery
- Investing in our nurses through scholarships to advance patient care and clinical excellence

Last but certainly not least, we would like to thank you for your incredible support during our tax-time appeal for cardiology. Together, we raised \$176,000 for urgently needed equipment to diagnose and treat life-threatening heart conditions.

Thank you, as always, for being here with us. We feel your support every day – and it continues to inspire everything we do.

Kindest regards



**Melina Talanis**

Executive Director (acting)  
St Vincent's Foundation  
Victoria



# Supporting Nursing Excellence at St Vincent's

When Jocelle migrated from the Philippines, she never imagined her path would lead to palliative care at St Vincent's. She began in aged care before joining Caritas Christi in 2021 and quickly knew she had found her calling.

"I first had the opportunity to work in the palliative care ward at St Vincent's as part of the Nurse Workforce Unit. I observed firsthand how patients are treated with dignity, compassion, and a solid commitment to person-centred care. This experience solidified my conviction to join this dedicated team and pursue my journey as a palliative care nurse," Jocelle explained.

Now studying for a graduate diploma in palliative care nursing, Jocelle hopes to become a nurse practitioner and expand into community-based care. Her studies are giving her the skills to develop new approaches for patients facing serious illness and to advocate for greater awareness of palliative care.

Her story reflects what makes St Vincent's nurses extraordinary – they are more than caregivers. They are leaders, healers, advocates, researchers and innovators.

And behind every story like Jocelle's lies a confronting reality: today's nurses are working in an environment that is more complex and demanding than ever before.

## The changing landscape of patient care

Healthcare is evolving rapidly. Nurses are managing increasingly complex patients, adapting to new technologies, supporting care delivered in the home, and facing the pressures of workforce shortages and an ageing population. These demands can only be met by equipping nurses with advanced skills, confidence, and resilience.

As Jacqui Bilo, Chief Nursing Officer at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, explains: "Having access to formal postgraduate education helps improve the skills, confidence and expertise of nurses to work in specialist

care services. It not only prepares them clinically, but it also gives them the tools to navigate the emotional aspects of the job."

## The Nursing Excellence campaign

That is why St Vincent's has launched the Nursing Excellence campaign – with an initial focus on scholarships that open doors to education and growth opportunities. These scholarships give nurses like Jocelle the chance to pursue specialist training, share knowledge with colleagues, and bring back insights that improve care across the hospital.

## The impact of your support

Your gift to the Nursing Excellence campaign presents an opportunity to invest in our nurses – empowering them when we need them most. That empowerment not only shapes the culture of St Vincent's today but builds a legacy of excellence for the future.



Left to right: Jacqui Bilo (SVHM Chief Nursing Officer), nursing scholarship recipient Sabita Pahari, Dame Quentin Bryce, nursing scholarship recipient Jocelle Cape, and Nicole Tweedle (SVHM Chief Executive).

You can show your support for our Nursing Excellence campaign by getting in contact with St Vincent's Foundation on [foundation@svha.org.au](mailto:foundation@svha.org.au), calling (03) 9231 3365 or by scanning the QR code.





FEATURE

# A new era in cardiac imaging

We all know that exercise is good for us – it boosts heart health, builds strength, reduces stress, and lowers the risk of chronic disease. For most people, regular physical activity is one of the best ways to improve long-term wellbeing.



What if the act of exercise itself could tell us potentially lifesaving information about our hearts? This is where a new imaging technique at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne is changing the game.

At the centre of this groundbreaking work is Professor André La Gerche, Head of the HEART Laboratory and a world-leading cardiologist. His team is using advanced Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) technology in a new way – to study the heart while it's working at full capacity, not just when it's at rest.

Typically, most cardiologists or doctors test patients' hearts while they are lying still. But Prof. La Gerche points out that many heart symptoms rarely occur while resting.

"No one comes in and says, 'I'm short of breath when I'm lying watching TV.' They say, 'I'm short of breath when I walk the stairs,'" he said.

His team has therefore adopted a novel approach where patients lie in the MRI machine and pedal on a specially designed bicycle setup, raising their heart rate as the scan takes place. This exercise-based imaging allows the team to see how all four chambers of the heart are functioning in real time, under stress. It's a major advantage over traditional cardiac imaging, which often can't capture such a comprehensive view.

"The heart is only as good as its weakest chamber," said Prof. La Gerche. "By assessing all four chambers at the same time, we get an insight into where the heart's Achilles heel is during exercise."

These detailed images help uncover scarring, inflammation, arrhythmias, atrial fibrillation and other hidden issues that might not show up on other types of scans. Most importantly, this deeper insight means cardiologists can tailor treatments to each individual.

"Once we understand what's happening, we can direct the therapy and provide a specific treatment for the patient – it's personalised medicine," he said.

For Prof. La Gerche, the goal is clear: make exercise safer for everyone. While the benefits of physical activity are undeniable, being able to detect early warning signs in certain individuals means they can keep doing what they love, safely.

"If I could leave that sort of thumbprint on the research world, I'd be very happy," he said.

But there's one major hurdle: the St Vincent's current MRI machines are stretched to capacity with urgent clinical use, leaving almost no time for research imaging.

Significant philanthropic investment of \$2.7 million is required to purchase a dedicated MRI machine so that Prof. La Gerche and his group at St Vincent's Institute can dramatically accelerate their research.

Despite the lack of resources, Prof. La Gerche's Melbourne-based lab has emerged as one of the most productive in the field of sports cardiology over the past five years, competing with multi-million-dollar research institutes around the world.

"We've proven what we can do with a small, focused team and a few tools," he said. "If someone put \$2.7 million into our research unit, we would do justice to every single dollar of that. We've proven that, and we'd prove it again."

Their pioneering research could lead to a global shift in how we test for and treat heart conditions for everyone, from elite athletes to everyday individuals.

**For more information about the philanthropic investment required for the MRI machine, and to support Prof. Le Gerche's research program, please contact Anthony North, Senior Philanthropy Manager, at [anthony.north@svha.org.au](mailto:anthony.north@svha.org.au) or call (03) 9231 3361**



# Lifesaving cardiology equipment made possible by you

Thank you to everyone who kindly supported our 2025 Annual Tax Appeal. We're thrilled to announce that together, we raised more than \$176,000 in support of urgently needed Cardiology equipment that diagnoses and treats life threatening heart conditions.



*Sarah Kerr, whose captivating story was featured in this year's Tax Appeal.*

This year's appeal featured the powerful story of Sarah Kerr. At 49, Sarah suffered a sudden cardiac arrest at home, without warning. Sarah survived thanks to the quick actions of her partner and emergency services, the vital care she received at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne and a ground-breaking implant of a minimally invasive defibrillator at St Vincent's Private Hospital Fitzroy.

Your generous contributions will go towards Holter monitors, which detect heart rhythm issues, Transoesophageal Echo Probes for clearer imaging of the heart, portable ultrasound machines for quick heart assessments and training for our cardiology nurses at St Vincent's.

"I'd like to thank our donors so much – we're incredibly grateful," said Director of Cardiology Services, Associate Professor Andrew Macisaac.

"Every contribution, even kind thoughts and words of support, means a great deal. Our patients are the reason we do everything we do – without them, none of it would matter.

"I want to assure you that any donation made to Cardiology goes directly toward improving access, care and treatment for people with heart conditions across Victoria. Your support truly makes a difference," A/Prof. Macisaac said.



Left to right: Prof. Peter Barlis (Interventional Cardiologist), Dr Angeline Leet (Head of Heart Wellness Service), Elise Beacom (Moderator and Run With It podcast host) and Prof. André Le Gerche (Sports Cardiologist)

## Want to know the secret to a healthy heart?

In May, we invited you to our Secrets of a Healthy Heart event, which was a fantastic evening exploring key insights into heart health with three top cardiologists from St Vincent's.

Our expert panel featured Professor André La Gerche (Sports Cardiologist), Dr Angeline Leet (Head of Heart Wellness Service), and Professor Peter Barlis (Interventional Cardiologist) who explained how exercise, nutrition, hydration and stress impact our heart health, while underlining the importance of regular check-ups.

**Prof. Barlis even shared a smoothie recipe packed with ingredients to promote a healthy heart. We hope you enjoy it too.**



## Berry Power Protein Booster Smoothie

**Your heart-healthy start to the day**

### Ingredients:

- 200ml pasteurised egg whites
- 20-40g rolled oats (adjust to your carb needs)
- 1 scoop vanilla protein powder
- 100g frozen blueberries
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- 3-5g psyllium husk (start low)
- 1 tbsp flaxseed oil
- 1 cup unsweetened almond milk (or preferred milk)
- ½ tsp xanthan gum (optional)

### Method:

Mix all ingredients in a blender until smooth. Add ice for a thicker, chilled texture.



# St Vincent's performs world-first dual robotic surgery

In a groundbreaking medical milestone, clinicians at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne have performed a world-first surgical procedure using two advanced robotic systems.

Professor Ben Dixon, Director of ENT/Head and Neck Surgery, and Dr Edwin Morrison, Plastics and Reconstructive Surgeon, used the da Vinci surgical robot and the Symani Surgical System in combination to remove a sarcoma from deep in the throat of 27-year-old Jordan, while preserving his ability to speak and swallow.

Jordan had initially faced the prospect of a total laryngectomy – the permanent removal of the voice box – which would have left him unable to speak. Instead, the dual-robot approach enabled complete tumour removal and intricate reconstruction that preserved his larynx. He has returned to near-normal speech and swallowing and requires no further treatment.

## A seamless collaboration

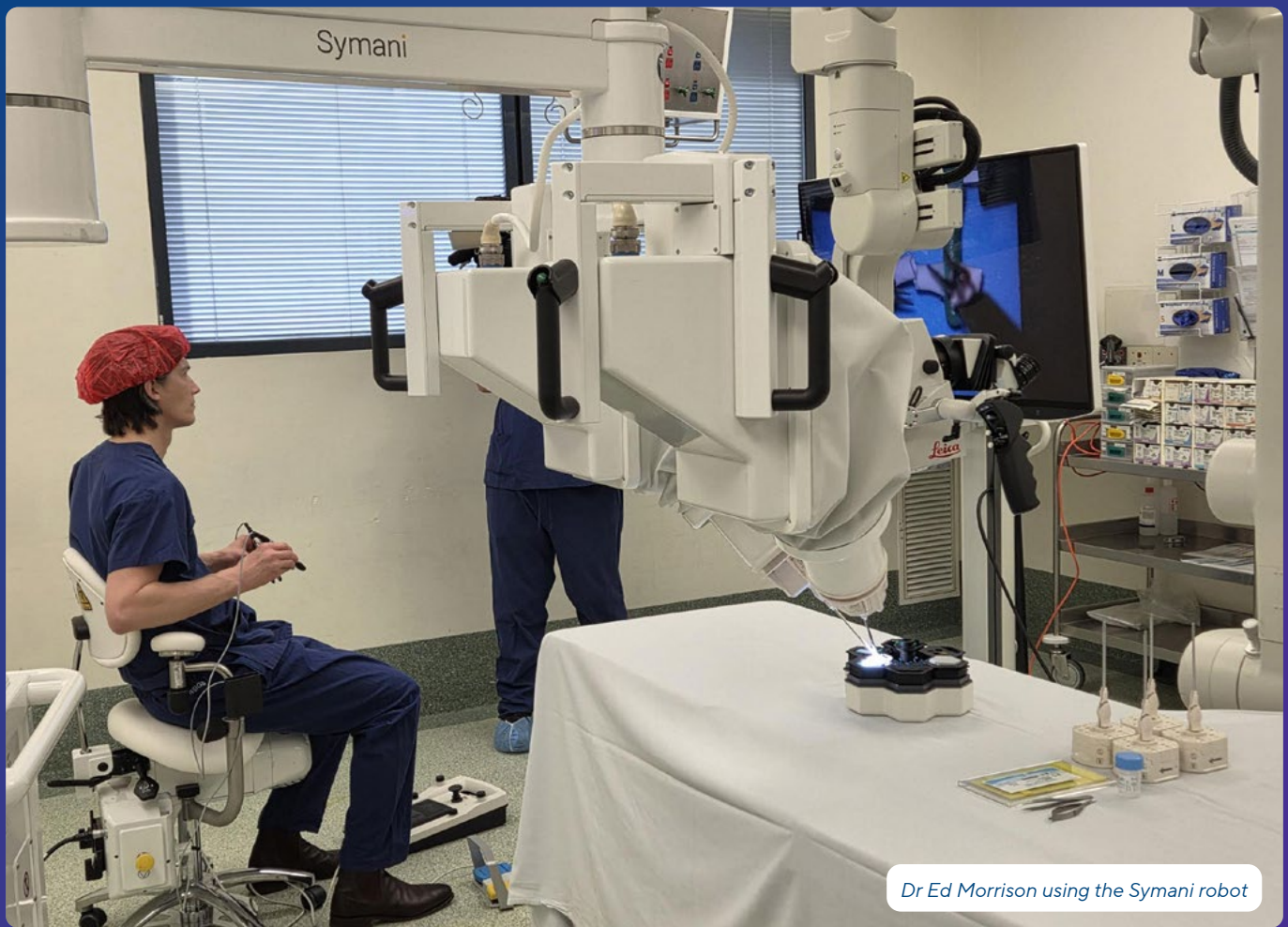
The significance of this procedure lies in the synergy between the two robotic systems. The da Vinci platform, now widely adopted in minimally invasive surgery, provides the visibility and precision required to access and remove the tumour from within the narrow confines of the throat. The Symani robot extends the scope of reconstruction, enabling surgeons to transplant tissue from the thigh and reconnect vessels less than 1.5 millimetres wide. By translating hand movements into ultra-precise, microscale actions, the system allows delicate procedures to be performed with steadiness and accuracy beyond human hands alone.

The Symani System is a purpose-specific microsurgical tool, the only one of its kind in the world. While advanced microscopes have long allowed surgeons to visualise intricate structures such as arteries, nerves, and lymphatics, reliably operating on them has been constrained by human capacity and the limitations of traditional instruments. The Symani robot overcomes these challenges, translating hand movements into ultra-precise actions that enable complex reconstructions with precision and control sustained over extended periods.



*Dr Edwin Morrison - Plastics and Reconstructive Surgeon at St Vincent's, and patient Jordan*





*Dr Ed Morrison using the Symani robot*

## Expanding the frontiers of surgery

While both platforms have individually transformed surgical practice, this operation marked the first time that the da Vinci and Symani systems have been deployed together in a live procedure. It positions St Vincent's at the forefront of robotic innovation, demonstrating how technologies once considered distinct can combine to achieve unprecedented outcomes.

St Vincent's has established a dedicated Clinical Microsurgery Robotic Unit, which is exploring applications across breast reconstruction, sarcoma surgery, and complex head and neck procedures. The unit is also contributing to international research shaping the future of microsurgery.

The breakthrough shows how advanced robotics can transform care for patients with life-altering diagnoses and continues the tradition of innovation so closely associated with St Vincent's – from pioneering microsurgery in the 1970s to embracing robotics today.

To enable our hospitals to remain at the forefront of rapidly evolving technology, the Foundation will be focusing its fundraising efforts to support the acquisition of the latest technology.

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**"The Symani system allows us to operate on structures that were previously beyond the reach of traditional microsurgery,"** explains Dr Morrison. **"We continue to work with international collaborators to explore the next frontier in reconstructive surgery."**

# Transforming the future of scleroderma through research

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In a quiet corner of Melbourne, a global force for progress in scleroderma research has been steadily growing – powered by compassion, collaboration, and the generosity of philanthropic supporters.

At the centre of it all is Associate Professor Wendy Stevens, a consultant rheumatologist at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne and one of Australia's most respected voices in scleroderma care and research.

Scleroderma, or systemic sclerosis, is a rare autoimmune disease that causes hardening and scarring of the skin and internal organs. For many years, treatment options were limited. That began to change more than 17 years ago when Assoc. Prof. Stevens and Prof. Susanna Proudman from the Royal Adelaide Hospital established a national registry of scleroderma patients – supported by grants and philanthropy. Professor Mandana Nikpour later joined to lead research and mentor PhD and Masters students, and today, with contributions from dedicated teams at St Vincent's Melbourne and partner sites in Adelaide, Perth and Sydney, this collaborative effort has produced more than 130 peer-reviewed publications, fuelling new discoveries and giving hope to people living with this complex condition.

Two visionary donors, both personally impacted by scleroderma, have made transformational gifts that continue to drive this research forward.

**“What we've created at St Vincent's is extraordinary – a national registry that started with a vision and a few hundred patients to become a recognised global resource and catalyst for life-saving projects that improve patient care,” said Associate Professor Stevens.**

“And the truth is, we couldn't have done this without philanthropy,” she said.

Holding detailed long-term data on nearly 3,000 patients, the national scleroderma registry is the only one of its kind in Australia and is internationally recognised as a major research resource. Each patient returns annually for a clinical review, contributing blood samples and DNA which are stored in the registry – offering invaluable insights into how the disease progresses over time. The powerful database drives vital research projects, informs new clinical practice guidelines, and enables meaningful international collaborations.

**“The registry underpins everything we do – clinical trials, screening programs, predictive research... it's the engine room for progress,” said Assoc. Prof. Stevens.**



**Assoc. Prof. Wendy Stevens**

*Founding member of the Australian Scleroderma Interest Group and consultant Rheumatologist at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne.*



## Donors driving the next generation of research leaders

Thanks to philanthropic support, the next generation of scleroderma researchers is thriving at St Vincent's under the mentorship of Assoc. Prof. Stevens, Prof. Nikpour and Prof. Proudman. Rising stars Dr Laura Ross and Dr Jess Fairley are leading groundbreaking investigations into the hidden cardiac impacts of scleroderma.

Dr Ross' discovery of under-recognised heart muscle disease in patients with scleroderma has sparked new investigations and earned her the Premier's Award for Medical Research. Now a postdoctoral fellow, she continues to explore how the disease affects both quality of life and heart function, including the development of a dedicated palliative care clinic.

Building on Dr Ross' findings, Dr Fairley is investigating abnormal heart rhythms – another overlooked complication – with the potential to improve diagnosis and treatment for many patients. Her PhD work delves deeper into cardiac health and its role in overall wellbeing.

Holding detailed long-term data on nearly 3,000 patients, the national scleroderma registry is the only one of its kind in Australia and is internationally recognised as a major research resource.

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Their findings are gaining international recognition, with presentations at the World Scleroderma Congress, the American College of Rheumatology, and EULAR (European Alliance of Associations for Rheumatology).

"One project leads to another," said Assoc. Prof. Stevens. "Laura's work led to Jess's research, which led to a whole new area exploring muscle function and fatigue. That's the power of a well-supported research environment."

To find out more about how you can support scleroderma research, please contact Anthony North, Senior Philanthropy Manager, at [anthony.north@svha.org.au](mailto:anthony.north@svha.org.au) or call (03) 9231 3361.

# A new chapter for cancer care in Werribee – thanks to the local community

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**As one of the fastest growing regions in Victoria, Wyndham is seeing increasing demand for accessible high-quality healthcare. That's why we're so proud to now provide care closer to home at our newly refurbished Day Infusion Centre at St Vincent's Private Hospital Werribee.**

Purpose-built to offer a calm and comfortable environment, the new Centre provides patients living with cancer with exceptional care in a space designed to support both their physical and emotional wellbeing.

With around 170 admissions each month, it delivers vital treatment services without the added stress of travelling into the city.

"We know how important comfort and dignity are for patients undergoing ongoing treatment," said Nurse Manager Rachael Simpson. "The new unit supports both, offering a more personalised and supportive experience for patients and their families."

Fundraising events like the Winter Ball in 2022 and the Long Table Lunch at Shadowfax over the past three years, along with the generosity of individuals who funded treatment pods,

were instrumental in bringing the new Day Infusion Centre to life. The ribbon cutting event in May was a proud and inspiring moment for our staff – to stand alongside the generous donors and community partners who made it all possible.

Since opening in 2018, St Vincent's Private Hospital Werribee has continued to expand its services in response to the region's growth. The Day Infusion Centre serves as the latest example of this and a reminder of the extraordinary role that community support plays in shaping the future of local healthcare.

*The newly refurbished Day Infusion Centre at the St Vincent's Private Hospital Werribee*

"The new unit supports both, offering a more personalised and supportive experience for patients and their families."

*Nurse Manager Rachel Simpson*





# The driving force behind Melbourne's new biomedical research hub

Sitting prominent and proud on the corner of the St Vincent's Fitzroy Campus, the Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery (ACMD) stands as a pioneering hub at the forefront of biomedical innovation.

This state-of-the-art facility brings together researchers, clinicians, scientists, and industry leaders in a truly collaborative environment – designed to accelerate medical breakthroughs and tackle some of healthcare's most complex challenges.

Central to this transformative project is Brenda Shanahan AO, whose vision and leadership has driven the ACMD from the very beginning. For over a decade, she has united the medical, business, government, and philanthropic sectors to secure vital partnerships and source funding, turning the idea of a world-class innovation and translation centre into a reality. Since formally becoming Chair of the ACMD Board in 2016, Brenda has continued to shape its strategic direction and champion its mission.

"The ACMD is a model of cross-sector collaboration," Brenda said.

**"We would not be standing where we are without years of hard work and dedication from our Partner network, St Vincent's Health Australia, and the ACMD Board – I thank them for helping to bring the ACMD to life."**

A deep commitment to philanthropy has guided much of Brenda's work and influence. Through the Brenda Shanahan Charitable Foundation, she has long supported initiatives that drive scientific discovery and improve human health. Her generosity also extends to the arts, most notably through her support of Rock Art Australia, reflecting her broad commitment to enriching communities and preserving culture.

In recognition of her outstanding contributions, Brenda was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in 2021. This prestigious honour acknowledged her impact across medical research, corporate governance, finance, and philanthropy – fields in which she has been a trailblazer for decades.

Her extensive career in Australia's financial sector exemplifies the depth of experience she brings to all her philanthropic efforts.

In a fitting tribute, a room within the ACMD will soon bear Brenda's name when it formally opens its doors later this year. The Brenda Shanahan AO Auditorium will serve as a lasting reminder of the vision, generosity, and belief in collaboration that helped bring the ACMD to life.

**"The launch of the ACMD will be a transformational moment for Australia's biomedical research community," Brenda said.**

"The facility will create new ways for our country's top minds to collaborate and solve our most challenging health problems, helping to transform our healthcare system for the benefit of all Australians."

**Brenda Shanahan AO**  
Chair of the ACMD Board



# Leaving a legacy that transforms lives

The impact of generosity is not measured only in size – it is measured in intention, alignment with what we care about, and the lives it touches. Professor Thomas “Tom” Trauer is a perfect example of this. When he died suddenly in 2013, he left more than a distinguished career in psychology and psychiatry.



*Tom was a leading researcher in psychiatric outcome measurement, an advocate for mental health services and a former Professor of Psychiatry at St Vincent's Hospital.*





He left a legacy of compassion, intellect, and unwavering advocacy for mental healthcare – particularly in regions where the need is greatest and resources are limited.

Tom spent decades as a researcher, teacher, and clinician, and most recently as a professorial fellow at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne. He was a generous mentor, known for his humility and quiet drive to shift systems and mindsets around mental healthcare. Towards the end of his life, his focus broadened to the Asia-Pacific region, where he worked to improve services in countries where stigma and under-resourcing often left people without support.

To honour his life and values, Tom's wife Barbara and their sons James and Michael created the Thomas Trauer Fund through St Vincent's Foundation Victoria. Their goal was simple yet powerful: to continue the work Tom had begun in a way that reflected his passions, creating something lasting that makes a real difference.

Since 2015, the Fund has supported dozens of initiatives across the Asia Pacific – from training frontline clinicians to fostering peer networks – all designed to strengthen mental health services

where they are needed most. What is remarkable is how far even modest gifts can go. Grants as small as \$9,000 have funded weeks-long courses on topics such as gender-based violence, reaching health professionals across multiple countries and sparking changes that ripple through communities.

"Tom had seen firsthand the lack of funding and support for mental health in the region. We felt it was important to do something lasting and meaningful that reflected his values and vision," Barbara said.

Her son James reflects: "This is a perfect example of how small-scale philanthropy can spark huge impact. The money acts as a catalyst, but what follows is driven by goodwill and passion."

The Thomas Trauer Fund continues to grow. What began as individual grants is now a coordinated program with a clear focus on lasting change. From the Pacific Mental Health Nursing Community of Practice to targeted training initiatives, the Fund shows that leaving a legacy is about aligning generosity with what matters most to you and your loved ones – creating something enduring that transforms lives across the Asia-Pacific region now and for generations to come.

# Geoff Andrews: Community service that goes beyond a lifetime

Each morning, before heading off to one of his many community service roles, Geoff Andrews pins on his volunteer badges with quiet pride. It's a simple gesture, but one that captures a lifetime devoted to community, compassion, and care.

"I've had a perfect life – health, travel, family, everything," Geoff said with gratitude. "It's time to give something back."

From volunteering in Melbourne to delivering medical supplies to a remote mountain hospital in Nepal, Geoff's life has been shaped by a deep belief in the power of healthcare and human connection.

"I remember trekking up to 3,500 metres in Nepal," he said. "We ran out of most of our food and lived only on pasta for three days. But the people were so honourable – beautiful souls. Nepal taught me everything about humanity."

Over the last 13 years, since moving from Sydney to Geelong, Geoff has volunteered at some of Victoria's busiest hospitals, including Royal Melbourne Hospital. He currently volunteers with the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and St John of God Hospital Geelong, always choosing roles that bring him close to helping people.

"I don't want to just sit and read a newspaper three times," he laughed. "I like to be with the people – to help, to listen. That's what I'm here for."

Geoff's roots in healthcare run deep. His grandfather was an obstetrician, his grandmother a nurse at Sydney Hospital, and his daughter has worked in hospitals as an Occupational Therapist for years in the UK and Australia, including St Vincent's in Sydney. Even Geoff himself spent 38 years as a Senior Medical Detailer for major pharmaceutical companies, promoting his products to GPs and hospital specialists in NSW.

*Geoff Andrews, a dedicated volunteer and lifelong supporter of health care, has decided to leave a gift in his Will to St Vincent's.*

Geoff has also been a patient on many occasions, including undergoing complex skin cancer surgery at the Skin Health Institute, St Vincent's. He was deeply moved by the professional, clinical care and attention he received.

With the support of his wife Stephanie and their two children, Geoff made the decision to leave a gift in his Will to St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne.

**"It's not about leaving a fortune," Geoff said. "It's about giving back to something you believe in. St Vincent's looked after me so well. I want to assist them with research to be able to improve the lives of others."**

For Geoff, giving back is more than a duty – it's a way of life. "I've had nine lives," he chuckled. "I've had car accidents, skin cancers removed, bicycle crashes, you name it. The Lord must be looking after me, He is with me all the time."

Now in his late seventies, when Geoff volunteers, he still greets each patient with a smile and a warm, comforting word.

"I just put myself in their shoes," he said. "It's not a lot of help, but when people are coming into hospital, they're often vulnerable. If I can help them, that's something."



To learn how you can leave a gift in your Will, please contact Kristy Lawler, Gifts in Wills Manager, at [kristy.lawler@svha.org.au](mailto:kristy.lawler@svha.org.au), (03) 9231 3365 or use the QR code.



# Going the extra mile for patients

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Every day John Kourouvanis hops into his taxi, he's ready to help someone in need. He's not a nurse or a doctor, but for many patients, he's just as important. John has been transporting patients for St Vincent's for the past 46 years.

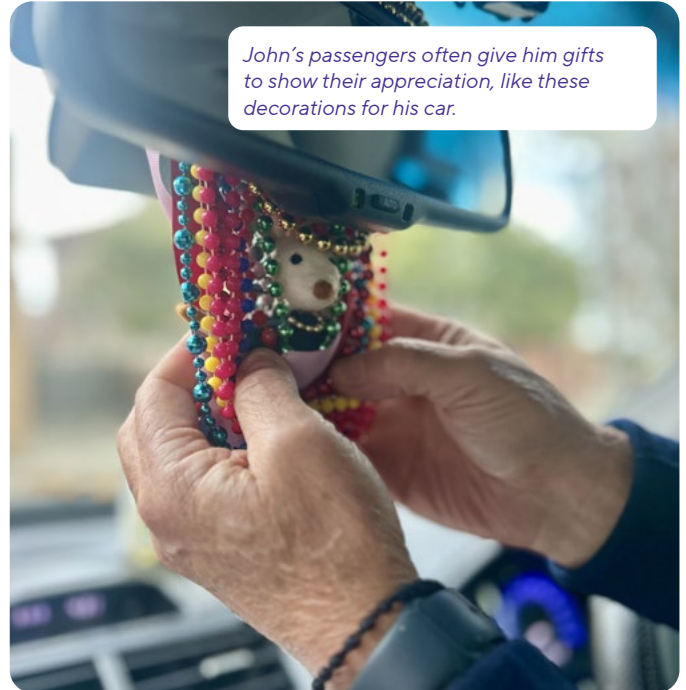
Born in Greece, John arrived in Australia when he was 14 and went straight to work at a wool factory. He took English classes at night school before becoming a taxi driver. Now, he's made it his mission to help people with special needs get from A to B safely.

John drives patients slowly, carefully, across Melbourne's inner-north to rehabilitation centres, medical appointments, or to our hospital. He adjusts the seats to ease bad backs, avoids speed bumps for those in pain, and fills the car with good humour.

He sees people arrive broken to our Community Rehabilitation Centre in Fairfield – unable to lift an arm or walk – and leave stronger. "From day one to the last day, the change is unbelievable," he said. "And the staff here? They've got golden hands. They deserve a medal."

At 74, John could retire, but he won't. "If I stay home, I'll go mad. This gives me life."

Though a recipient of an Australia Day achievement award, John said his higher purpose is bigger than any personal recognition. What matters is this: "They get in the car crying, they get out smiling. That's my job."



*John's passengers often give him gifts to show their appreciation, like these decorations for his car.*

*Taxi driver, John Kourouvanis shows there are many ways to express philanthropy and make a difference. He always goes the extra mile – whether it's speaking Greek with older passengers, taking them to the airport or buying someone a coffee to brighten their day.*



# From gratitude to action: Vietnamese community raises \$21,000 for breast cancer care

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What began as one couple's heartfelt thank you turned into a powerful show of community spirit, raising \$21,000 to support breast cancer care at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne.

Current patient Mai Dang and her husband Hung Nguyen hosted a sold-out charity dinner that brought together more than 250 guests from Melbourne's Vietnamese community. The event was a vibrant celebration of culture, compassion and generosity, held in support of the St Vincent's Breast Unit, where Mai received care during her breast cancer journey.

**"Breast cancer has touched the lives of many people and their families, including ours... We understand the importance of care and support when going through this difficult time," said Mai and Hung, whose motivations for hosting the event were twofold.**

"Firstly, we wanted to ensure better care for people going through breast cancer," said Mai and Hung. "And secondly, to show our gratitude to the Breast Unit for their excellent care during Mai's treatment."

The couple's vision extended beyond fundraising. They hoped to unite their community and raise greater awareness about breast cancer.

Head of Breast Surgery, Associate Professor Caroline Baker, gave a talk on the night to encourage breast awareness, which Hung translated onto four screens around the venue to ensure the message could reach as many members of his community as possible.

"We also had BreastScreen brochures in Vietnamese, as it is well known that our culturally and linguistically diverse community often miss out on BreastScreen, which exists to save lives from breast cancer," said A/Prof. Baker.

"Our whole Breast Unit was in attendance to celebrate this event and witness a celebration of Vietnamese culture. We were astonished by what Hung and Mai were able to achieve."

Thanks to the dedication of volunteers and overwhelming community support, the event was a resounding success. Tickets sold out three weeks in advance, and the atmosphere on the night was filled with music, heartfelt speeches, and a shared sense of purpose.

**"We were deeply touched, and honestly a little overwhelmed, by the incredible support and generosity," said Mai and Hung. "It showed how powerful our community can be when we rally together for something that matters."**

The funds raised will go directly toward enhancing expert care and compassionate support for patients at the St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne Breast Unit.

To everyone who supported the event, Mai and Hung had a simple but powerful message:

**"From the bottom of our hearts, thank you. Whether you donated, attended, volunteered, or simply shared words of encouragement, you played a part in making this night such a success. Your kindness and generosity will have a real impact on people's lives, and we're so grateful."**



If you'd like to join Mai and Hung in supporting the St Vincent's Breast Unit, please contact St Vincent's Foundation Victoria on (03) 9231 3365 or use the QR code.





**Associate Professor  
Caroline Baker**

*Head of Breast Surgery at St Vincent's  
Hospital Melbourne Breast Unit*



**Mai Dang**

*Event organiser and patient of  
St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne  
Breast Unit*



**Hung Nguyen**

*Event organiser and husband of Mai*



Did you enjoy the newsletter?  
If you have any feedback, we  
would love to hear from you.

[foundation@svha.org.au](mailto:foundation@svha.org.au)  
[stvfoundation.org.au](http://stvfoundation.org.au)  
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Scan the QR code  
to make an online  
donation

Better and  
fairer care.  
**Always.**



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