

Capturing the heart of St Vincent's

# PULSE

December 2023



ST VINCENT'S  
HOSPITAL  
MELBOURNE

A FACILITY OF ST VINCENT'S HEALTH AUSTRALIA



130 years of  
compassion, innovation  
and outstanding care



# PULSE

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St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and water where we live and work. We respect their spiritual connections to country and community and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of Reconciliation.

Cover image: Meg, Patricia, Anna, Liv, Warren and Kathryn, from ward 10 West, celebrating SVHM's 130th anniversary in November 2023

## Chief Executive message



As we approach the end of 2023, I'm delighted to share this collection of photos and stories that highlight some of the incredible work our team has undertaken this year.

November 2023 marked 130 years since St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne (SVHM) was founded by the Sisters of Charity, with the goal of providing healthcare for the most vulnerable people in our community. More than 130 years on, we're proud to continue delivering healthcare that meets the changing needs of the people we serve.

At the heart of our mission, is a commitment to providing compassionate and innovative care and meeting the unmet needs of our community. Throughout 2023, our team has proudly lived out this commitment in many ways.

In this issue of Pulse, we celebrate the advances being made in technology and clinical research to achieve better treatments and outcomes for our patients, as well as the important work underway at two of our newest hospital hubs – the specialist Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Hub co-located in our Emergency Department, and the Rapid Access Hub, which is delivering more elective surgeries to Victorians.

We also reflect on the achievements of our Reconciliation Action Plan Steering Committee, who have continued striving to improve health outcomes for Indigenous Australians. We want our First Nations staff and communities to feel safe and welcomed from the moment they walk into our hospitals, and I am proud to share some of the steps we are taking to achieve this.

Most importantly, we celebrate our people – our dedicated staff and volunteers, our patients, residents and families who entrust us with their care, and our community who have supported SVHM throughout its proud history.

I hope that you enjoy this collection we have compiled.

**Nicole Tweddle**



## New technology changes the view on neurosurgery

### Voice-controlled, 3D technology boosts brain and spinal surgery

St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne (SVHM) is the first public hospital in Australia to install Synaptive Modus V, a high-definition imaging system that enables surgeons to see a magnified, three-dimensional image while performing microsurgeries.

The robotic exoscope is enhancing the precision and safety of brain surgery carried out at the hospital. And that's just the beginning of the possibilities offered by this technology.

Surgeons can easily move and control the device's robotic arm; the operator can use voice commands to access

a range of views, saving time and limiting patient risk.

"(With this device) ... surgeons no longer have to stand in uncomfortable positions, for long periods of time that can put incredible strain on their bodies," said Dr Paul Smith, SVHM neurosurgeon.

The exoscope's visualisation tool projects the surgeon's 3D view of the procedure onto large 4K screens in the operating theatre, enabling the whole surgical team, including the anaesthetist, nurses and technicians, to have the same view as the surgeon.

If there is a complication during the operation, the lead surgeon can access immediate feedback from colleagues, even if they are watching the operation offsite.

Community generosity saw \$170,000 raised for the purchase of the exoscope.

"It is incredibly important having this kind of support from the community," said Dr Smith.

"Their interest in helping us make a difference to the lives of patients is so meaningful."





# A new safe space for vulnerable patients



The new dedicated hub at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne (SVHM) is providing a safe space for around 6,800 people who attend the hospital's Emergency Department each year with mental health and drug and alcohol problems.

Co-located within the Emergency Department, the Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug (MHAOD) Hub is the first of six funded by the Victorian Government.

Since the Hub's launch in 2022, patients have been seen by a doctor in a shorter time and had a reduced overall stay in the Emergency Department.

The Hub is staffed by doctors, nurses and clinicians, together with specialist mental health, drug and alcohol and lived experience staff who work collaboratively to care for and treat patients.

"Historically, patients with mental health, alcohol and other drug emergencies have waited extended times for care in the Emergency Department and have had that care provided in an environment that is not particularly conducive to their healing," said Dr Jonathan Karro, SVHM Director of Emergency Medicine.

"Through our new Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug Hub we are now able to provide excellence

in patient care for these groups in a purpose-built environment that is patient and carer-centred. It is 100 per cent focused on their specific needs."

Through providing access to specialist care staff, the average length of time that a patient stays in the Hub is 40 per cent shorter than the average length of stay they would have experienced in our Emergency Department.

"The Hub is not just a location but a model of care that really considers patient needs, from start to end. It is a philosophy and demonstrates the best way of doing things to benefit these patients," said Dr Karro.

*Above: Members of the MHAOD team, led by Dr Jonathan Karro (centre)*

*Above right: The MHAOD Hub, members of the MHAOD Hub team with former Minister for Mental Health Gabrielle Williams, and one of the MHAOD Hub cubicles*

## SVHM recognised at the 2023 Victorian Public Healthcare Awards



The Victorian Public Healthcare Awards highlight the excellent and innovative care being delivered across Victoria as well as the dedication, compassion, expertise and achievements of Victorian healthcare workers.

St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne (SVHM) was proud to receive the Excellence In Mental Health and Wellbeing Award at the 2023 awards, for our Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Hub (MHAOD).

This award recognises mental health and wellbeing initiatives that advance the Royal Commission's vision of creating a compassionate mental health system based

on lived experience leadership, holistic treatment, and support for all Victorians. The MHAOD Hub provides both a location and a model-of-care that considers the individualised needs of patients who present with MHAOD emergencies, from start to end.

The award was proudly accepted by MHAOD Hub Coordinators Olivia Bollington and Lisa Close (pictured right, with Minister for Mental Health Ingrid Stitt), on behalf of the large multidisciplinary team that has contributed to the Hub's success.

SVHM was also shortlisted as one of only three finalists for the Premier's Large Health Service



of the Year, which reflected our commitment over the past year to delivering essential services while also innovating and collaborating to improve health outcomes across Victoria. Our Statewide Hepatitis Program was also shortlisted as a finalist in the Excellence in Values-Based Health Care category. This program provides evidence-based assessment, management and treatment of people living with viral hepatitis in Victoria's prison system.





## Fast-tracking surgical care

### The new St Vincent's Rapid Access Hub prioritises care for low complexity surgical patients

Opening in February 2023, the Rapid Access Hub has cared for hundreds of patients and has the capacity to deliver up to 10,000 additional surgical procedures each year.

Located at St Vincent's On The Park in East Melbourne, the Hub was created in partnership with the Victorian Department of Health.

"Our new Rapid Access Hubs, like the one at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, are allowing more patients to get the treatment they need sooner and delivering on our long-term plans to deliver more surgery than ever before," said former Victorian Premier, Daniel Andrews, in August 2023.

"With Rapid Access Hubs, new public surgical centres, upgraded surgical equipment and more training for staff,

this isn't about a blitz – we're setting up the system to deliver more surgery now and into the future."

Protected from less predictable emergency work, the Hubs perform low complexity and high-volume procedures, streamlining services and freeing up operating theatres, ward capacity and staff.

The St Vincent's Hub focuses on surgeries including cancer screening tests, skin cancer removal tonsillectomy, hand surgeries and endoscopies, as well as prioritising patients with the longest waiting times and extending care to North-East Metro Health Services Partnership patients. The Hub now features four fit-for-purpose operating theatres.



### 1000th patient treated at the Rapid Access Hub

In September 2023, the St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne Rapid Access Hub delivered care to its 1000th patient. The milestone was reached after the Hub had been operating for only seven months.

*Above: Former Premier Daniel Andrews (left), Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas (second from right) and Chief Surgical Advisor Benjamin Thompson (right) with SVHM Chief Executive Nicole Tweddle and Rapid Access Hub staff*

## Using AI to improve breast cancer detection

A clinical trial is being developed to support an Australian-led research study that is examining artificial intelligence (AI) to improve the accuracy of breast cancer screening.

The BRALx project prospective clinical trial will investigate how an AI reader can be used to interpret mammograms in conjunction with radiologists.

"During the trial we will be gathering real-world evidence to assess the effectiveness of using an AI reader in the breast screening program," said Dr Helen Frazer, the Project Lead and Clinical Director of

St Vincent's BreastScreen.

It is hoped the new AI-based models may help better detect cancer, lower unnecessary recalls to assessment and improve timeliness, efficiency and participation in Australia's population breast screening program.

"We also see the potential for the AI reading model to support a risk-based personalised screening pathway. Currently, it's predominantly a one-size-fits-all program. An AI reader could enable us to predict a woman's risk of developing breast cancer and is something we will be exploring as we progress with

the research," said Dr Frazer.

In addition, service delivery may also be improved.

"We will evaluate whether using AI has the potential to reduce the current two-week turnaround time for a screening result," said Dr Frazer.

The BRALx clinical trial is planned to start in 2024, pending full ethics review and approval. It is being developed in partnership with St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research, the University of Melbourne, the University of Adelaide, Monash University, BreastScreen Victoria and BreastScreen SA.

## Patient-focused breast cancer database

A generous \$50,000 grant from the Collier Charitable Fund has enabled the creation of an innovative patient information database for the Breast Surgery Unit at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne (SVHM).

The new database, called BRENDA, will collate patient medical details and is the only database in Victoria to include a routine collection of information on patients' breast treatment and patient-reported outcomes. Its holistic approach aims to better monitor and improve the quality of care provided to breast surgery patients.

"Breast cancer treatment is very personalised. What hasn't previously been collected is patient feedback regarding side effects, as well as patients' thoughts and experiences relating to breast reconstruction, body image and sexual wellbeing after their operations," said Dr Jocelyn Lippey, SVHM Breast Surgeon.



"By capturing what matters to our patients, we can improve treatment, streamline processes and minimise side effects. Ultimately, this will have positive impacts on recovery and quality of life after breast surgery."

The BRENDA database started

as a vision shared by Dr Lippey and SVHM's Head of Breast Surgery, Caroline Baker, just over five years ago.

"We feel so fortunate to receive this funding that has allowed our dream to become a reality," said Dr Lippey.

*Above right: St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne Breast Surgery Unit team members Suraya Roslan, Dr Jocelyn Lippey, Miss Christina Foley, Miss Caroline Baker, Annabelle Motteram, Rafaela Anja*





# A new home for biomedical engineering research

The Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery (ACMD) aims to transform the future of healthcare

In February 2023, construction began on the 11-storey Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery (ACMD), which will be located on the site of the former Aikenhead Wing of St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne. The building’s location will see it play a key role in the development of the Victorian Government’s 10-year plan for a new biomedical precinct.

The new ACMD, a \$206 million biomedical engineering research facility, will emerge as a global leader in

the use of new technologies in healthcare, including robotics, digital tools and data engineering to develop healthcare solutions with positive life-changing impacts.

The purpose-built 16,500sqm building will include 3D printing laboratories, a human kinetics lab and insulated rooms used to develop sensitive hearing and vision technologies. There will also be engineering workshops to produce medical device prototypes and

robotics that can be used to help accelerate clinical trials.

Another key focus of the site will be the education of future medical professionals. The education hub will nurture tomorrow’s clinical, nursing, allied health and biomedical research innovators and leaders. The space will incorporate seminar and tutorial rooms, a clinical simulation laboratory and a large lecture theatre extending over two levels.

Above: Former Premier Daniel Andrews, Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas, SVHM Chief Executive Nicole Tweddle and ACMD Chief Executive Officer Dr Erol Harvey marking the start of the ACMD construction



## A new home for innovation

As a hub for cutting-edge work, the ACMD will foster a collaborative approach to medical research bringing together the brightest minds from universities, research institutes and a tertiary hospital. The ACMD is a collaboration of eight partner organisations – St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne, St Vincent’s Institute of Medical Research, the Bionics Institute, the Centre for Eye Research Australia, University of Melbourne, RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology and Australian Catholic University.

The multidisciplinary approach will help to create new opportunities for collaboration between research, engineering development and clinical application.

“Strong collaborative partnerships that bring together leading universities, research institutes, a leading tertiary hospital within a national healthcare group and major industry partners underpin the valuable work being done through the ACMD,” said Dr Erol Harvey, CEO of the ACMD.

Above: Professor Andrea O’Connor, Hub Co-Director and Dr Erol Harvey, CEO of the ACMD

# Honouring a brother’s memory



On 13 June 2017, Yvonne popped in to visit her brother’s home, as she often did. However, his home was strangely quiet when she arrived. Yvonne was shocked to discover that Alf had died alone after suffering a heart attack.

“To me, my brother was invincible. You don’t expect to lose someone at 68. It was a massive shock,” Yvonne said.

Yvonne knew her brother as a clever, kind-hearted and generous man but, until his funeral, she didn’t realise how many people felt the same way.

“His funeral brought people from far and wide to our little town of Meeniyan in South Gippsland,” she reflected.

As a handyman, Alf’s passion project was building a reproduction Victorian-style home set on 16 acres of land. He spent 20 years constructing the heritage-style home from original materials. Yvonne was the only person named in Alf’s will and it was his wish for her to sell the property. After three

years of looking after the home, Yvonne put the home on the market.

“As soon as Alf passed, I knew instinctively what I needed to do. I decided to create a legacy to enable me to support medical research. I selected three organisations undertaking important research to give funds to,” Yvonne said.

After being treated at St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne for a brain aneurysm before Alf’s passing, Yvonne spoke with the St Vincent’s Foundation Victoria about supporting the hospital. From there, she decided to preserve Alf’s legacy by giving a large sum of money towards the building of the Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery. The centre, due to be completed in late 2024, will support the development of new healthcare technologies and treatments, enhancing patient care and outcomes into the future.

Yvonne Clements with St Vincent’s Foundation Chief Executive Sue Parkes at the ACMD building site







# At the forefront of psilocybin-assisted therapy

St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne has undertaken an innovative, world-first clinical trial

Clinical psychologist Dr Margaret Ross and psychiatrist Dr Justin Dwyer are examining the use of psilocybin-assisted therapy, to potentially offer an effective treatment for the depression and death-anxiety often experienced by terminally ill patients.

The trial aims to reduce depression and death-anxiety in terminally ill patients, particularly those nearing end-of-life and suffering fear, demoralisation and depression, who don't respond to traditional anti-depressant and anti-anxiety therapies.

Dr Margaret Ross, Lead Therapist and Chief Principal Investigator of the trial, describes the trial as one of

the most exciting developments in psychiatric research in decades.

"There are very few treatments available for people experiencing distress around dying. We are hopeful the trial treatment will not only alleviate existential fear and distress but may potentially offer an enriching and beneficial experience for people approaching end-of-life. It is a privilege to lead research into this innovative treatment that has the potential to help some of our most vulnerable patients," said Dr Ross.

Dr Ross says findings from overseas trials and the experiences of the St Vincent's trial participants suggest

that the benefits of psychedelic-assisted therapy can be significant if used correctly in a clinical setting.

"It is important that people are aware that the drug and therapy are inseparable. It is not a simple pill that is taken in isolation. It is a week-long psychotherapy process that uses the psychedelic drug to amplify the psychotherapy experience."

The St Vincent's trial involved 35 terminally ill patients. Participants underwent two dose sessions. The trial results are expected to be published in 2024.

Above: Dr Margaret Ross and Dr Justin Dwyer, in a treatment room for their psilocybin-assisted therapy clinical trial

# Tackling skull base tumours head on

St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne's (SVHM) Ear, Nose & Throat (ENT), Head & Neck Unit has built their reputation on an ability to treat a high number of complex conditions.

Patients from Melbourne, regional Victoria, Tasmania or southern New South Wales who need surgery on a tumour growing in or near their head, can be referred to the unit led by Dr Ben Dixon.

"We provide general ENT surgery care for the common things, as well as many more complex procedures around the head, neck and skull base," Dr Dixon said.

"We do these operations weekly at SVHM, which is quite unusual. These are rare cancers and tumours, but as a tertiary referral centre, we have built up our reputation, skillset and expertise, to be able to do these on a day-to-day basis."

Dr Dixon describes the head, neck and skull base as complex anatomy.

The skull base, refers to the junction between the brain and the skull, as well as all the facial structures, including the nose, eye, ear, jaw and tissues at the bottom of the skull.

"To treat patients with these more complex disorders, we need a big team including surgeons, radiation oncology, radiologists, pathologists, speech pathologists, dieticians and physiotherapists, a network of nursing staff on the ward, in the clinic and in the operating theatre, and a nurse coordinator."

Neurosurgery is often involved because of cases where the tumour affects the brain.

"Sometimes that is for access to a tumour that is within the brain entirely, but we access it through the nose or via the ear or through a number of other routes," Dr Dixon said.

"Or it could be a tumour within our area – the nose, the eye, the ear – that is extending into the brain."

In recent decades, much has changed to make these surgeries a reality.

"In the '70s and '80s it was very difficult to get scans," Dr Dixon said.

"Even CT scans were very early on, and there were no MRIs, no PET Scans, all these modalities we use daily to make good decisions and good plans for our patients – they didn't have that back then."

Over the past four decades, imaging systems, improved pathology and data, developed surgical expertise and better equipment have made head, neck and skull base tumour treatment much less invasive.

At SVHM, that progress has been guided by Dr Dixon's predecessors, Dr Jack Kennedy and Dr Bernard Lyons.

"It is a great privilege to take over from these surgeons who have paved the way for a wonderful multidisciplinary service," said Dr Dixon.





# It's a RAP!

Highlights from our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and our progress in addressing the disparity in health outcomes for First Nations people.



## A renewed commitment

### St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne and the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service united to improve care

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne (SVHM) and Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) was re-signed during National Reconciliation Week this year. The Memorandum was initially signed in 2011, however the connection between both services dates back much further than this. Outlining our shared commitment to improving the experiences of First Nations, the Memorandum signifies the strengthening of this long-standing partnership.

SVHM has been working alongside VAHS for decades to improve the

experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing both health services. At its core, the MoU outlines our shared commitment to improving the experiences of First Nations and signifies the strengthening of this long-standing partnership.

This relationship has seen the establishment of various initiatives to ensure culturally safe care for First Nations patients in the community. The Mental Health Adult Inpatient Services Koori Unit was established in 1994 and is located in the St Vincent's Mental Health Adult Inpatient Service. The integrated Koori Unit supports a

state-wide, five bed inpatient service that liaises with VAHS and their family counselling and mental health teams.

SVHM's Wilam Ngarrang Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Service exemplifies our commitment to providing safe environments for First Nations people. This team works with health professionals, including VAHS, to provide culturally appropriate care for First Nations patients and families. The team improves access to care, experiences of care and health outcomes. They offer advocacy and cultural support to First Nations patients and their families as they navigate health and social services.

Above: St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne Chief Executive, Nicole Tweddle and Victorian Aboriginal Health Service Chief Executive Officer, Michael Graham

# Inaugural First Nations Clinic Liaison Nurse

"There's a whole web of us working to help our community"

As part of St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne's commitment to closing the gap, earlier this year we welcomed a new team member to our Wilam Ngarrang Aboriginal Health Unit. A registered psychiatric nurse, Lily Mercer joined Wilam Ngarrang as the inaugural First Nations Clinic Liaison Nurse.

"I'm a very proud Gadigal woman, born and raised in Sydney. I also have lots of cultural ties to Bundjalung nation (in Northern New South Wales) where I also lived growing up," Lily said.

"My mother was an ex-nurse and she always taught me about the importance of equitable healthcare and that we should be at the table when it comes to healthcare.

"As an Aboriginal Clinic Liaison Nurse, my role is supporting Mob

coming through specialist clinics or the outpatient department and helping them navigate the health system."

Lily advocates for First Nations patients prior to, during and following their appointments with the health service.

"I'm in a unique position where I can break down the medical jargon, answer questions, advocate and intervene in areas where Mob traditionally don't always feel comfortable," Lily said.

She also emphasised that, as a First Nations person, she had an opportunity to break down cultural barriers and build trust in a sensitive manner.

Lily said her role and work should not be seen in isolation, but as part of a much bigger collective workload

undertaken by different First Nations individuals and services.

She said working with other First Nations staff at St Vincent's "enables the health service as a whole to wrap its arms around patients and let them know they can trust us".

"We all work together. Through interagency, we lean on each other and transfer care [of patients]. We lean on community so much for support as well. If the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) is sending someone up, then we're the second person to give care and lean on them as they lean on us.

"It's a web of us working together to get this person housing, for example, or make sure their diabetes is under control or make sure they're okay to go into surgery."



First Nations Clinic Liaison Nurse, Lily





# National recognition for our culturally safe emergency care

The AI Spillman award for Culturally Safe Emergency Departments, 2022 was presented to St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne (SVHM) by the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine to acknowledge the positive work being led in this area by SVHM's Indigenous Health Equity Working Group (IHEWG).

Led by Emergency Physician, Dr Jennie Hutton, the IHEWG is supported by a multidisciplinary team that harnesses the collaborative energy and expertise from across the Emergency Department (ED), together with members of the Wilam Ngarrang Aboriginal Health Unit.

"Although First Nations patients make up 0.5 per cent of the population in the hospital's surrounding local government areas, they comprise 3.5 per cent of ED presentations. This project has enabled us to provide more equitable care to First Nations people in our ED," said Dr Hutton.

Among the challenges faced was the lack of consistent identification of First Nations patients. Although part of mandatory questioning, barriers were highlighted by ED staff that potentially prevented these patients from being accurately identified.

"We found information often wasn't



flowing through to all staff and this could result in patients not being properly identified at different stages and some getting asked the same identity questions lots of times, which became frustrating, and sometimes distressing, for the patient," Dr Georgina Phillips explained.

The Rapid Identification and Engagement of First Nations People was developed and introduced by the group to ensure all patients are correctly identified on arrival and that this information is communicated directly to other hospital staff via an identification flag that is added to the patient's computer administration file.

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait

Islander flag next to the patient's name provides a visual prompt to quickly assist ED staff in prioritising culturally safe and appropriate help and treatment to patients with a First Nations background.

This process also activates a fast-tracking system to ensure that when a First Nations patient presents at the triage stage in ED, prompt assessment and escalation is actioned.

"Accurate identification ensures that we are able to appropriately support our First Nations Community throughout their entire hospital experience," said Nicole Watt, Manager of St Vincent's Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Service.

Above: Members of the Indigenous Health Equity Working Group (IHEWG) accepting the AI Spillman award for Culturally Safe Emergency Departments

## NAIDOC Week

We celebrated NAIDOC Week with a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony by Wurundjeri Elder Perry Wandin.

NAIDOC Week recognises the history, culture and achievements of our First Nations people. This year's NAIDOC Week theme, For Our Elders, celebrates the role of Elders in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

Smoking Ceremonies are a significant moment of cultural healing in the holistic health and wellbeing of First Nations people.

During NAIDOC Week, Indigenous Recruitment Coordinator and Co-Chair of our Reconciliation Action Plan Steering Committee, Chris Delamont, shared what

the week meant to him. Chris is a proud Wiradjuri Nari Nari man who celebrates his connection to culture and his Elders through art and his work at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne.

"Creating art makes me feel connected to my culture and Elders, it helps me keep my culture alive. NAIDOC Week celebrates the resilience of our Elders. They are the reason I have the opportunities that I have," Chris said.

"We understand the strength and courage of our Elders, but we're also seeing more Australians walking together with us. I've never felt such a strong connection in this way."



NAIDOC Week Smoking Ceremony

## Bindari

First Nations Recruitment Coordinator and Co-Chair of the Cross Campus Reconciliation Action Plan Committee, Chris Delamont, was commissioned to paint Bindari (pictured) for St Vincent's Private Hospital Melbourne (SVPHM).

"Bindari" means "Place on the Hill" or "Place Up High."

The bright future, depicted in artwork and through the use of vibrant colours, symbolises the progression that has taken place across St Vincent's. Footprints of First Nations people, who are now making their way to the hospital, mark a significant shift.

The Birrarung, known as the Yarra, holds great significance in Bindari. The journey of Elders along the river, dreaming of a better time for themselves, their children and families. Bunjil, the creative spirit for the Wurundjeri people and part of the Kulin nation in Victoria, is represented in the form of Jesus



on the cross, emphasising our spiritual connection.

Bunjil shares the sacred space with the five Sisters of Charity and their spirits. This representation underscores the interconnectedness that binds us all.

Efforts like the display of artworks like Bindari throughout the hospital have transformed it into a more welcoming space for First Nations patients, fostering a sense of belonging and connection.

Grant Mitchell, A First Nations patient at SVPHM wrote a poem as he reflected on Bindari.

### A Story to be Told

I look into your story  
And what it says to me  
Many people here have travelled  
Caring for Community  
I see land touched by the sun  
Takes on a healing glow  
As river ever flowing  
Brings life there as it goes  
A cross within draws me in  
And angels descend from high  
And standing strong says we belong  
Our totem in the sky  
So come with thee you will see  
The path along the river  
Has much to give so we can live  
And nature will deliver.



# Making music

## St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne has its very own string quartet!

Made up of four clinicians, the quartet started after a chance encounter between urologist Li-Ming Wong and medical student Elizabeth Hu in St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne's urology outpatient clinic. Elizabeth, who is a violinist and studied a medical elective in music therapy, connected Li-Ming with a network of rich musical talent in the medical

student group, and the St Vincent's String Quartet began.

The quartet includes Lih-Ming Wong (urologist) and Anna Sing (medical student) on violins, Garry Zhu (medical intern) on the viola and Vincent Wang (medical student) on cello, and they hope to continue involving other musicians on campus and be available to provide music at the hospital.



# Improving accessibility

We are working to make sure St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne (SVHM) is an accessible service provider and employer and that we meet the needs of Victorians of all abilities.

To help guide us, we launched our Access and Inclusion Plan for People with Disability 2023-2025.

Patients, consumers and staff helped shape the plan by sharing their thoughts and experiences. The new plan sets four key priorities to help set our direction across the next few years. These include deepening our understanding by reviewing our current practice to find ways to improve equity

and elevating the value of lived experience to create opportunities for staff and consumers with disability to have meaningful input.

Other key areas of focus are enabling access and inclusion by providing systems and tools so all staff can put our intentions into action, and, to embed an inclusive organisational structure to ensure equity is firmly part of our culture, recruitment, and training, as well as service planning, design and implementation.

We want all people with disability to feel welcome in our hospital and get the support they need; this plan is our pathway forward.

The Plan, including an Easy English version, is available on the SVHM website.



Angela, a patient and consumer who was involved in the development of St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne's Access and Inclusion Plan



# Recognising our nurses



## We celebrated 23 nurses as finalists in our 2023 Nursing Excellence Awards

St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne (SVHM) is proud to recognise outstanding nurses at all stages of their careers and to celebrate the wonderful impact of their work and their compassion for our patients and our hospital.

As part of marking International Nurses Day, we proudly shone the spotlight on the achievements of our nurses through celebrating finalists across five categories:

**Chief Nursing Officer Leadership and Excellence Award: Sue Cowling, Nurse Unit Manager, Emergency Department**

This award recognises an outstanding nurse leader who has made a significant contribution to both their team and the wider organisation. Sue has been part of SVHM for more than 40 years and is one of Victoria's longest serving Emergency Nurse Unit Managers.

**Graduate of the Year Award – Erin A'Hearn, Grade 2 Registered Nurse, 4 West**

This award recognises an outstanding graduate nurse in their first year of practice. Erin displays compassion and justice in all that she does, and patients and families have commented on how comfortable and safe they feel with Erin as their nurse. She consistently follows best practice and is a highly valued member of her team.

**Researcher of the Year Award – Katherine McBrearty, Practice Development Nurse, Research and Projects, Education and Learning**

This award recognises an early career nurse researcher who is making a significant impact through their research and contributing to improvements in their field. Katherine has been a researcher at SVHM since 2018, focusing on the experience of early-career nurses, critical events in subacute care and the role of RUSONs (student nurses). Her work examining critical events in the subacute wards led to the introduction of a study day where staff are trained to navigate medical emergencies in the subacute setting.

**Postgraduate Nurse of the Year Award – Kirsten Sandstrom, Registered Nurse, 4 East**

This award recognises a nurse who shows exceptional promise through their commitment to postgraduate study and expanding their scope of practice. Kirsten undertook her Postgraduate Certificate in Cardiac Nursing in 2022. Despite the pressure of her studies, Kirsten regularly stepped up during staff shortages to lead the team in charge of shifts, keeping calm and collected.

**Early Career Nurse of the Year Award – Krysdell Cabanilla, Registered Nurse, 4 West and CCU**

This award is given to a nurse in the first five years of their career, who has shown emerging leadership skills and commitment. Krysdell is a leading motivator in cardiac services, providing outstanding care and a positive outlook. She is an excellent communicator and highly engaged with multidisciplinary teams and is currently undertaking her Postgraduate Certificate in Cardiac Nursing.

Above: Recipients of the Nursing Excellence Awards with Chief Executive Nicole Tweddle (left) and Chief Nursing Officer Jacqui Bilo (right)



## A special companion

Xander, a four-year-old Italian greyhound, has been volunteering at St Vincent's for four-and-a-half years.

As part of our pet therapy program, volunteers bring companions like Xander to spend quality time with patients.

Xander is accompanied by 14 other dogs in the program, as well as volunteers like Sonia (pictured), who has been volunteering at St Vincent's for more than seven years.

"The difference that a dog can make in the day of someone who has been having one of the worst days of their lives is insane, you wouldn't believe what it can do," she said.

"That's an incredibly special feeling."



Volunteers Sonia and Xander

## Reducing our carbon footprint



St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne (SVHM) continues looking for ways to minimise environment impacts and become more environmentally friendly in its day-to-day functioning.

Earlier this year, our Pharmacy team sent off four months' worth of empty blister packs – approximately 26,000 packs – for recycling through Pharmacycle. The blister packs were from dispensed medications that would have ended up in landfill.

The discarded packaging was transported to a processing facility that separated the aluminium from the plastic. The aluminium was then combined with graphene to manufacture battery storage cells and the plastic was recycled into lower-grade packaging.

Our Theatre teams have implemented customised recycling processes for a variety of items used in their work from oxygen masks, disposable instrument tubing and fluid bags, device cables, anaesthetic bottles, suture packaging, polystyrene, batteries and pens.

Sterilisation wraps from SVHM and St Vincent's Private Hospital theatres are collected by an external provider, recycled and made into playground furniture, while sterile hand towels are sent to an external company that provides employment for people with

a disability who wash, dry, repackage and sell the items. Money raised goes towards funding breast cancer retreats through the Otis foundation.

Monitoring resource use and waste within the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) is the primary aim of the newly formed ICU sustainability group. Among the initiatives the group implemented was the introduction of a PVC recycling scheme in the unit, piloting a soft plastic recycling program, and auditing and eliminating unused items in procedure packs.



SVHM Chief Pharmacist Andrew with Jason from Pharmacycle

## Through my eyes



A little over a year ago, my life literally turned upside down. I'd been having headaches for a while, was constantly tired and struggling to sleep. Did I do anything about it? No, I just thought I was feeling this way because it was a busy time.

One night I went out with some friends and woke up the next day with what I can only describe as a 'lightening' headache – the pain was intense and travelled from one side of my head to the other.

I assumed I was hungover from the night before. Once again, I ignored the warning signs, choosing instead to try and sleep it off.

But as the week continued, the headache worsened. Work became increasingly challenging. My eyes throbbed; I found it difficult to concentrate; I struggled at times to find my words and was embarrassed as people started finishing my sentences for me – something just wasn't right.

Eventually, I made an appointment

to see a GP and when I described my symptoms, I was told to get myself to a hospital straight away. I was worried but as soon as I walked into the Emergency Department at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, I had a sense of calm – I knew I was in the right place.

I have worked at St Vincent's, on and off, for the past 10 years. However, I never expected to be on the receiving end of the compassionate care this hospital is known for.

My CT scan showed I had a golf-ball sized tumour that was close to the brain stem and that's when everything made sense.

I understood worrying wasn't going to change anything and tried to find humour in everything to help me get through. My wife and I discussed the options with my neurosurgeon and six weeks after diagnosis, I had surgery.

I remember repeating the words, 'thank you', as the anaesthetic took effect, and I slowly closed my eyes. It was a nine-hour operation and, luckily,

## A brain tumour diagnosis had life-changing impact for Richard Thayer

they were able to remove most of the tumour. I spent five days recovering in hospital where I was cared for by the incredible team in 10 West, and then returned home to rest and start my rehabilitation.

Over the years, I've talked with so many patients at St Vincent's who would tell me their stories. I never envisaged it would be me one day sharing mine. I hope this encourages others to never ignore the warning signs of potential health problems.

The long scar on the back of my head is a daily reminder that I have had more than luck on my side. I had some very special people at St Vincent's who got me through. Thank you doesn't even come close for the care I have received across both the Public and Private Hospitals and for the support from my team and countless people across the organisation. I will always be grateful for the gift of life they've given me.



Richard Thayer is the Corporate and Community Partnerships Manager for St Vincent's Foundation





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