

President's Report

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June 2022 saw a return to 'business as normal' for the ASMR with our first face-to-face ASMR Medical Research Week® since 2019. Enormously successful events were held in Perth, Brisbane, Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart, and I congratulate all State Committee members on a roaring return to ASMR MRW® events. Our members are our lifeblood, and in each State we visited, you did yourselves and your sector proud!

We were privileged to tour our 2022 ASMR Medallist, Professor Fiona Wood, around the country. Those who heard Fiona speak at one of her many addresses during the week will undoubtedly come away inspired and energised. As we travelled together, Fiona, I and our President-Elect, Dr Emily Colvin, had many conversations about Australia's amazing talent in health and medical research. We witnessed that first-hand in many cities, and it reinforced the vital work of the ASMR to advocate for better support for our sector.

Throughout Fiona's tour, she emphasised to all who listened the importance of talking about your research — to colleagues, friends and family, policymakers and budget holders, community and consumer groups. We should all be shouting from the rooftops about how fantastic Australian researchers are and how much we all do, often on shoestring budgets.

When I joined the Board of the Australian Society for Medical Research in 2019, I did so at a time when the phrase "the big C" carried no ambiguity about which medical issue was being referred to. All the problems we experience today with inadequate funding for the health and medical research sector were as obvious then as they are now. Job security was at the front of everyone's minds, and grant success rates were continuing a downward spiral. Fast forward to today — same issues but now with a layer of COVID on top. As I write this, infection rates from the Omicron strain are beginning to



Associate Professor Tony Kenna

fall, and people are using language that makes the pandemic seem like a thing of the past. But the tail of COVID-19 continues to cast a menacing shadow. Unrestricted access to patients remains problematic for many researchers, global supply chains are still imperfect, and the national debt delivered by COVID provides an excuse not to fund new things. But we argue that now is the exact time to fund health and medical research. Now is the time to give back to a sector that has done so much to help Australia navigate the pandemic. Now is the time to prioritise health and realise that research is critical to a healthy future.

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Our new Federal Government has set a goal to build a bigger, better trained and more productive workforce; boost real wages and living standards, and create more opportunities for Australians. The ASMR's long-held view is that health sits at the centre of an equitable and opportunistic future and that future health prosperity depends on a strong research pipeline.

In recent weeks we have seen the announcement by the Prime Minister that an onshore vaccine manufacturing hub will be developed at Monash University. This is welcome news for our sector and will create onshore vaccine manufacturing capabilities and generate new jobs. But initiatives such as this must go hand in glove with renewed

investment in discovery sciences to build the research needed to allow Australia to translate its own innovations rather than manufacture those developed overseas.

A lot has changed in the last two and a half years, but the ASMR's messaging around the importance and value of health and medical research has not wavered. We remain fierce advocates for the sector, with our current primary focus being on the career stability and longevity of early-mid career researchers within the sector. In recent weeks we have met with the new Health Minister, Hon Mark Butler MP and the Shadow Health Minister, Hon Ann Ruston MP, to advocate in the strongest terms for an injection of funding

into the NHMRC. Our advocacy is picking pace. In the coming weeks, we'll meet with other Albanese cabinet members and turn our attention to the vibrant and important Teal Independents. Our message is simple — we need support, and we need it now.

As my year of ASMR Presidency begins to close, I look forward to the 2022 National Scientific Conference. I know it will be another chance for us to showcase some amazing Australian science. I'm also thrilled to be succeeded by Dr Emily Colvin and understand that the ASMR will be in excellent hands in 2023.

President Elect 2023 — Dr Emily Colvin

Dr Emily Colvin is a mid-career researcher based at the Kolling Institute, University of Sydney.

Emily has over fifteen years of cancer research experience, particularly in the role of the tumour microenvironment and biomarker discovery. Her current research is focused on improving personalised treatment options for women with gynaecological malignancies, including ovarian and endometrial cancers. Despite an increased understanding of the genetic drivers of these cancers, there are limited targeted treatment

options for these patients, especially for those women with recurrent diseases. There is also a lack of adequate biomarkers for early detection and monitoring treatment response in patients.

Emily's research characterises the tumour microenvironment's role in the initiation and progression of gynaecological cancers. In particular, she investigates the role of certain genes switched on in the local microenvironment to help tumours evade destruction by the immune system and spread. She is interested in whether

levels of these genes may be used in the clinic to help guide treatment selection for patients.

Emily has been involved with ASMR since 2018, first as a member of the NSW committee before joining the Board in 2021. She is looking forward to following in the footsteps of past ASMR Presidents in supporting health and medical researchers at all career stages by advocating for a sustainable, well-coordinated funding system that supports Australia's diverse and talented health and medical research workforce.



Dr Emily Colvin

Albanese Government's strong commitment to research

The Hon Mark Butler MP
Minister for Health and Aged Care

The importance of health and medical research in advancing health care cannot be overstated.

Australia has long punched above its weight in health and medical research — and Australian Labor has long valued and supported Australia's health and medical researchers.

One of my key priorities is to invest in our people, nurture local talents and support the world's best and brightest to reach our innovation goals.

Earlier this year, I had the privilege of hearing first-hand about the brilliant work of some of our top researchers at the Science Meets Parliament event. It was a wonderful opportunity to learn about the great research happening in Australia from the researchers themselves. Their passion, dedication and expertise in their chosen fields were truly inspiring and made me feel optimistic about the future of research in Australia.

Those researchers also told me about the difficulties of staying in research and building a long-term career. Looking towards that future,

an Albanese Labor Government will support and nurture our world-class health and medical researchers, particularly our early and mid-career researchers — they are our future leaders and will be at the forefront of delivering the research needed to tackle Australia's health challenges.

A particular research priority is improving equity in health care outcomes for all Australians, including First Nations people and people who live in rural and remote Australia.

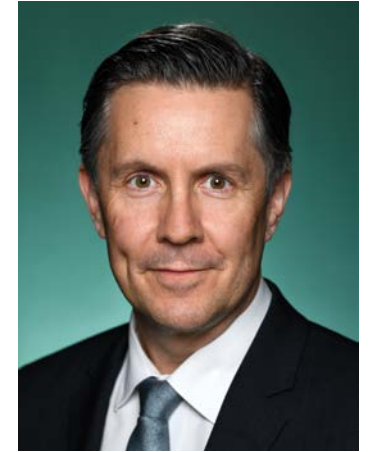
An Albanese Labor Government will invest in programs and research that improve our ability to prevent and manage chronic diseases. We will also support and encourage evidence-based health promotion and education while embedding prevention into everyday primary care.

I will also bring a stronger, sharper focus on quality, independence and integrity to the NHMRC and MRFF. Current and emerging health needs will be prioritised. The burden of the disease will be confronted head-on. Gaps in translation, commercialisation and health outcomes will be identified and closed, and opportunities realised.

The research will be crucial in tackling global health challenges, including health impacts from infectious diseases and climate change. Climate change poses a risk to public health, with bushfires and the steady southern creep of tropical diseases. Australians are familiar with these dangers, with many already experiencing impacts on health, particularly those in regional areas.

The health and medical research ecosystem is complex, incorporating basic and applied research, research and development, public and private investment, and an economy that capitalises on innovation and new technology. The Australian Government will foster this ecosystem by encouraging governments, industry, the higher education sector and other research institutions to work collaboratively in overcoming barriers to innovation and commercialisation and meet the challenges of global competition.

The Government's approach to health and medical research will ensure that today's research is tomorrow's health care. It will be a win for the Australian research sector and all Australians.



Mark Butler MP

Updates from **ASMR Medical Research Week**[®]

ASMR Medical Research Week[®] was held from June 1st to 10, 2022. It is the flagship activity for The Australian Society for Medical Research and a major highlight of the Australian health and medical research calendar, bringing the message of the benefits of health and medical research to the Australian public.

This was the first year since the coronavirus pandemic we were able to host in-person events across the whole country. The events of ASMR MRW[®] enable researchers within each state to come together to share

their research and ideas, network with others and progress their career development.

ASMR Medical Research Week[®] Events for 2022

ASMR WA Gala Dinner

at The Westin Hotel on June 1st and **Scientific Symposium** at Harry Perkins Institute, held on June 10th.

ASMR Qld Postgraduate Student Symposium

at Translational Research Institute and **Gala Dinner** at Cloudland, held on June 3rd.

ASMR VIC Student Research Symposium

held on June 3rd at Jasper Hotel, Melbourne, and **Gala Dinner** on June 9th at The Victorian Arts Centre.

ASMR SA Scientific Meeting

at Adelaide Convention Centre held on June 9th, and **Gala Dinner**, Adelaide Pavilion, held on June 6th.

ASMR Medical Research Week[®] NSW Annual Scientific Meeting

University of Technology Sydney, held on June 3rd, and **Gala Dinner**, Leighton Hall, UNSW, held on June 7th.

Hunter Region Satellite ASMR Scientific Meeting

University of Newcastle, held on June 6th.

ASMR Medical Research Week[®] National Press Club Event

followed by a **Medallist mixer** at John Curtin School of Medical Research, held on June 8th

Tasmania ASMR Medical Research Week[®] Symposium

at the University of Tasmania and Government House and **Gala Dinner**, The Old Woolstore, held on June 10th.



ASMR MRW[®] Tasmania



ASMR MRW[®] Gala Dinner South Australia



ASMR MRW[®] Gala dinner Perth



ASMR MRW[®] Gala dinner NSW



ASMR National Press Club



ASMR MRW[®] Victoria



ASMR MRW[®] Gala dinner Queensland



ASMR MRW[®] Hunter Region Satellite Meeting

ASMR Medallist 2022 — Professor Fiona Wood

It was a great honour for me to accept the Australian Medical Research Society medal for 2022 with the opportunity to share my journey in medical research and highlight the challenges of the future.

Robust funding of research at every step of the medical journey is essential if we want to patients to benefit from the incredible innovations that Australian researchers and clinicians produce.

Medical research is a long and complex journey, requiring passion, tenacity and support. However, it is more than worth it to see the significant improvements in patients' lives. We can treat patients more effectively and reduce the overall cost of treatment by using therapies developed through Australian medical research.

In burn care, we understand that every intervention from the point of injury will influence the scar worn for life, inside and out. When we consider the health system, universities, research institutes and innovative entities linked to the wider community, we are all in this scientific journey together.

We need to support researchers and clinicians with the capacity and curiosity to build a medical system of excellence. Every decision we make as an individual has an impact on the community and is reflected in the health system.

It has been a privilege to work linking the clinical team with an interdisciplinary research team

focused on improving care. To continue to build a medical system of excellence into the future requires an intelligent approach based on integrity with a holistic long-term strategy.

We also need to build capacity to measure the impacts of our research, both large and small. For example, it has been demonstrated that supporting clinical trials across the whole health system to drive improved outcomes has both a positive clinical and economically outcome. The focus on successful commercialisation of research is warranted. However, we should not forget value of incremental gains that can influence both the quality of care and clinical outcomes.

The health and wellness of our country is intimately tied to a vibrant medical research work force with access to developing technologies. Adequate funding is the key to achieving this. I see the energy of the young researchers and clinicians I work with, and I see that fade with the challenges they face. I would like to work with governments and our community to provide funding that provides attractive and rewarding career pathways. We need to harness their enthusiasm to create our next generation of medical visionaries.

I would like us all to see the value of medical research and collaborate on how to embed this in all parts of our health system. It might be easy to see this as an impossible task and to walk away. But that's not the way to strive for excellence and that's not



Professor Fiona Wood speaking at the National Press Club

the way to build a health system supported by a vibrant medical research community.

I would like us all to stand back and say yes, say we can do and collaborate to work out how to! It may be easy to say no, to walk away but that's not the path to improvement and that's not the way to build a health system supported by a robust medical research community, that's not the way we will see a society based on wellness into the future.

We need to put a lens on our capacity and resources, say YES and collectively grow our passion and shape a future we are proud of.

ASMR Research Awards

Established in 1961, the ASMR is the peak professional society representing Australian health and medical research. The Society has a long-established role in scientific, political and public advocacy.

In order to facilitate and promote learning and collaboration in early career researchers, the ASMR offers two Research Awards each year, enabling early career researchers to travel to another laboratory either within Australia (Domestic Research Award) or overseas (International Research Award) to learn new techniques and establish research collaborations. Applications are now open for "The ASMR Research Awards".

Each award (\$5000 international or \$2000 domestic) will support a postgraduate student member of the Society nearing completion of their studies or a recently graduated (3 years maximum) postdoctoral member to undertake a short period of research in a laboratory outside their home city.

The award specifically excludes support for conference attendance and travel for an extended period of postdoctoral studies.

**APPLICATIONS CLOSE AT 4PM ON
THE 7TH OF OCTOBER 2022**

These ASMR Research Awards are made possible by the generosity of ASMR members who make

donations to the ASMR Research Fund. Without the continued generosity of ASMR members, the ASMR would not be able to continue to build strength and expertise in Australian Health and Medical Researchers, via its support of early career researchers with the ASMR Research Awards.

If you would like to contribute to the ASMR Research Fund, and support the development of Australian Health and Medical Researchers, please click below. (note all donations to the ASMR Research Fund are tax deductible).

Visit <https://asmr.org.au/research-awards/> for more information.

Bruce Campbell — ASMR Peter Doherty Leading Light Award Winner 2021

Professor Bruce Campbell MBBS(Hons) BMedSc PhD FRACP FAHMS is a consultant neurologist, Head of Neurology and Stroke, Royal Melbourne Hospital. He is a Professor of Neurology in the Department of Medicine, the University of Melbourne, an honorary professorial fellow at The Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health and a fellow of the Australian Academy of Health and Medical Science. He is Chair of the Clinical Council and a director of the Stroke Foundation and co-chairs the Australian stroke "living" guidelines working party. He has been an inaugural member of the Victorian stroke telemedicine project and chairs the Victorian

Statewide Stroke Reperfusion Therapy Committee. In training, he is the coordinator of the National Brainschool education program for Australian and New Zealand neurologists.

Professor Campbell's research interests focus on the imaging and treatment of acute stroke. He was the co-principal investigator and medical coordinator of the EXTEND-IA randomised trial (Campbell et al. New England Journal of Medicine 2015), demonstrating the disability-reducing benefits of minimally invasive clot removal via angiogram for patients with stroke due to a large blocked blood vessel in the brain.

This treatment is now recommended in guidelines globally and is standard practice. The EXTEND-IA TNK multi-centre randomised trial (Campbell et al. New England Journal of Medicine 2018) was the paper submitted for the Leading Light award and established a genetically modified tissue plasminogen activator tenecteplase was more effective in restoring brain blood flow than the traditional agent alteplase. Part 2 of the trial (JAMA 2020) established the preferred dose of tenecteplase. As a result, tenecteplase has entered treatment guidelines in the US, Europe and Australia as an alternative to alteplase.



Professor Bruce Campbell

Healthy Ageing

Contributed by **Leon Flicker AO**
Professor of Geriatric Medicine
Director, Western Australian Centre for Health & Ageing, The University of Western Australia

Australia is now one-third through dramatic ageing of the population. This societal ageing was delayed due to disproportionately large immigration numbers and a baby boom after the second world war. Australia is now in the midst of catching up to many other high-income nations with the dominant 'Baby Boomer' generation aged 55–74 years. Unwarranted concerns about the economic burden of this generation have now been put to rest, and this generation continues to be major contributors to the community, even after the cessation of paid work. They are the generation most likely to volunteer and provide unpaid assistance to others. However, with advancing ageing, Australia will need to recalibrate our systems to meet the health and social needs of Boomers, with the most dramatic proportionate increase in those aged over 85 years.

Our understanding of the physiological changes and diseases associated with ageing has increased dramatically over the last 25 years. Unfortunately, the focus has often been on the negative aspects of impairment and disability rather than on positive health views in old age. Increasingly our focus

has been on what ensures successful or positive ageing. There have been many attempts to define these entities, but the World Health Organization 2015 produced a unifying approach for low, middle and high-income countries. They have defined healthy ageing as the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables well-being in older age. In turn, the functional ability is made up of

1. Intrinsic capacity of the individual,
2. relevant environmental characteristics and
3. interactions between the individual and the environment

Intrinsic capacity is an amalgam of an individual's ability to muster the energy, movement, cognitive and psychological resources, and special sensory functions. Although our understanding of the science underpinning these areas has increased greatly, the interplay between these domains is, by nature, complicated. Genetic and environmental factors predispose to both diseases and physiological changes with ageing, but these changes are stochastic with extreme heterogeneity in an individual's function. This heterogeneity increases with age and is accompanied by diverse socioeconomic factors that may play a dominant role.

As individuals age, the incipient loss of capacity may be countered by different interventions. Many of these interventions will be medical, but others may be health-promoting, e.g. group exercise classes for over 80-year-olds. Other strategies might include psychological interventions or environmental modifications that allow individuals to maintain active lifestyles. The use of digital technology has great promise to help monitor and detect small negative perturbations in activity and direct support for older people in their own homes.

There have been major strides in our understanding of risk factors and diseases that produce decrements in intrinsic capacity. We also have increased knowledge about which environmental changes are required to make our world more age-friendly. Our greatest challenge is integrating many disparate interventions for individuals, including appropriate medical and social services. The risk is that we will waste precious resources on innovative but ultimately futile activities that will never actually benefit the older people for whom they are targeted. There will be no single silver bullet here. Instead, we already have a large armamentarium to choose from, one that is expanding rapidly. We now need to learn how to effectively direct the appropriate interventions to the right people to allow people to reach a healthy old age.



Professor Leon Flicker AO

ASMR National Scientific Conference 2022



61st ASMR NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE
**HIGHLIGHTING
EXCEPTIONAL
PEOPLE** IN MEDICAL RESEARCH
10-11 NOVEMBER 2022, SYDNEY



Join us for the ASMR's 61st National Scientific Conference on 10-11th November at the University of Technology, Sydney.

The NSC is a great opportunity to present at a National conference, hear the latest in multidisciplinary research and network with peers from across Australia.

This year's conference aims to highlight researchers, advocates and consumers from a wide range of topics including Indigenous health, personalised genomics, rare and invisible illnesses, environmental impacts on health and consumer advocacy.

Conference highlights include:

Firkin and **Edwards Orations** and inspiring plenary speakers

Peter Doherty Leading Light Award presentation

Oral and poster presentations selected from abstracts

Professional development workshops on **Creating an Impact CV** and **Mentoring** (with Franklin Women)

Panel discussion on **Increasing Consumer Involvement in Health and Medical Research**

Student and ECR awards for best oral and poster presentations and the prestigious

Campion Ma Playoust Award for the best overall presentation

Registrations and abstract submissions are now open at

asmr.org.au/asmr-nsc

Early Bird Registrations extended to 14th October

\$75 ASMR Student Members, \$170 Student Non-members, \$150 ASMR Members, \$325 Non-members



AWT Edwards Orator
Professor Jenny Graves, AO

Institute for Molecular Science, La Trobe University

Professor Jenny Graves is one of the world's top evolutionary and comparative geneticists and has spent her career using marsupials, monotremes, birds and lizards to transform our understanding of how humans and all vertebrate animals evolved and function.

Infamous for her prediction that the human Y chromosome is disappearing, Prof. Graves' work was pivotal in the search for the sex determining gene *SRY*.

A leader in the field of epigenetics, Prof. Graves describes her "most spectacular experiment" to be the seminal discovery that mammalian X-inactivation occurs via transcriptional inhibition and is mediated by DNA methylation.

Firkin Orator

Professor Matt Brown

Chief Scientific Officer, Genomics England



Matt Brown is a clinician-scientist who trained initially in medicine and rheumatology in Sydney, Australia before completing a Doctorate of Medicine based at University of Oxford, focusing on genetics of ankylosing spondylitis. He was appointed Professor of Musculoskeletal Sciences at University of Oxford in 2004. In 2005 Matt returned to Australia, firstly to University of Queensland, and since 2016, at Queensland University of Technology, where he was Professor and Director of Genomics. In 2013 he was elected to Fellowship of the Australian Academy of Sciences in recognition for his achievements in genetics research. In 2019 he moved to King's College London and Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals NHS Trust to direct their NIHR Biomedical Research Centre, and in 2021 moved to the position of Chief Scientific Officer of Genomics England. He continues to work in genetics of human diseases, with a particular focus on common and rare bone and joint diseases, and in cancer genomics and personalized medicine. He continues to practice rheumatology, with a particular focus on spondyloarthritis.

PLUS plenary and keynote talks by:

Professor Sotiris Vardoulakis

HEAL Network and ANU

Mrs Azure Hermes

National Centre for
Indigenous Genomics, ANU

Dr Emma Palmer

Rare Voices Australia, Sydney Children's
Hospitals Network and UNSW

Professor Allison Jaure

Sydney School of Public
Health, USyd

Professor Marcel Dinger

Genome.One and UNSW

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Lions Eye Institute Limited
 Mater Research
 Menzies Health Institute Queensland
 National Association of Research Fellows
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 Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
 Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists
 Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
 Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia
 Society for Redox Research Australasia (formerly Society Free Radical Research Australasia)
 Society of Mental Health Research
 Society for Reproductive Biology
 Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand
 Transplantation Society of Australia and New Zealand
 University of Queensland Diamantina Institute
 Westmead Institute for Medical Research

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