Perkins News

SPRING EDITION 2025

Your support for research is changing lives

HARRY PERKINS INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH

CEO's Message

I'm thrilled to share some exciting news with you in this issue!

Many of you are deeply invested in the future of medical research–a field where good health and extending time with loved ones are invaluable gifts. Our new strategic plan, outlined on the next page embodies this vision with five core principles: Discovery, Community, Culture, Sustainability and Impact. These principles are interlinked and equally vital.

Our global health discoveries rely on the support of our dedicated community–people like you who enable our achievements.

We are committed to sustainability and expanding our capabilities to enhance clinical trials and patient care through the establishment of the Perkins WA Comprehensive Cancer Centre, a project I discussed in our last issue.

World Heart Day is September 29 and this issue highlights the remarkable efforts of our cardiovascular researchers.

I am also proud to introduce a new initiative, Lifeboat, designed to support our Perkins PhD students who face financial challenges. Lifeboat serves as a complement to our Safe Harbour Fellowship, providing a crucial safety net for those balancing research with financial needs.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue from start to finish!

Professor Peter Leedman AO

CEO, Researcher, Doctor, Donor

Perkins strategy 2026-2030

Purpose

To enable our community to live healthier, longer lives by discovering new ways to prevent, diagnose and treat life-altering diseases, with a focus on cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and rare diseases.

Values

We will achieve this through our values of **respect, innovation, passion and collaboration.**

You're helping make spare parts for our hearts

With your support, 3D printed heart valves are getting closer to the clinical trials phase.

These revolutionary “spare parts for your hearts” are made from a special biopolymer and are created with a 3D printer. This technique, invented by Associate Professor Elena Juan Pardo at the Perkins, intricately and exquisitely mimics the collagen formation of natural human heart valves.

Elena, who leads the T3mPLATE lab at the Perkins, works closely with Cardiovascular intervention specialist, Dr Abdul Ihdayhid, who leads the Perkins Cardiovascular Research & Innovation group.

Abdul performs heart valve replacement surgeries at Fiona Stanley Hospital, and the new 3D printed heart valves are likely to make a dramatic difference to his patients.

Currently, patients with aortic stenosis, or heart valve disease, only have two options–mechanical heart valves, which require open-heart surgery, or replacement valves made from animal tissue, which can start to fail in as little as five years. Both options require lengthy recovery times and a life-long reliance on anti-rejection drugs.

The 3D printed heart valves will radically change that. Because they are made of a polymeric tissue, patients will not need anti-rejection drugs. The 3D printed heart valves can be inserted with keyhole surgery, and because they are designed to be durable, they may never need replacing.

Associate Professor Elena Juan Pardo is developing 3D printed heart valves.

Thanks to a new heart valve wear testing machine at the Perkins, the team are now testing 3D printed heart valve prototypes for endurance. It will take around six months to test each valve–equivalent to five years of real-life use. This machine means we can progress to the clinical trials stage much quicker.

With your support, we are creating a healthier future for a disease that affects 1 in 8 Australians.

Your kind heart is giving millions of people the chance to live longer, healthier and better lives in the future.

You're with us from discovery to development

Your kind support has helped bring a world-first heart drug that reverses the build-up of deadly plaque in your artery walls, one step closer to reality.

Atherosclerosis is the condition when plaque builds up in artery walls. It can restrict blood flow causing heart attacks and strokes. This can also cause the artery walls to rupture, which can be fatal. Current treatments like stents just push blockages out of the way, and grafts simply bypass the problem, not fix it. Blocked arteries can also cause peripheral arterial disease, resulting in traumatic amputations, kidney failure and many other life-threatening conditions.

Perkins researcher Associate Professor Juliana Hamzah has invented a drug candidate called ATH01. This drug penetrates the walls of the artery and delivers a fat-dissolving protein to the buildup of plaque that often remains undetectable in conventional cholesterol tests. Juliana discovered this incredible breakthrough while she was investigating a way to get drugs into the tight sticky mass of veins surrounding cancer tumours.

Developing a new drug usually takes decades, but your support has helped Juliana and her team in the Targeted Drug Delivery, Imaging and Therapy lab at the Perkins reach an important milestone.

Together with Professor Shirley Jansen, Joint Head of the Cardiovascular Science & Diabetes Program at the Perkins, Juliana is

Associate Professor Juliana Hamzah and Professor Shirley Jansen.

now preparing ATH01 to be manufactured to the highest standard–ready for clinical trials in patients.

ATH01 will help fight chronic cardiovascular disease, helping people with inherited high cholesterol from familial hypercholesterolaemia (FH) or lipoprotein (LP(a)), both conditions that are passed on genetically. Most people with either of these conditions don't know they have it, and it takes a simple blood test to find out. As many as 1 in 5 people have elevated levels of LP(a). The only treatment available today, even for children, is statins.

With your support, Juliana and Shirley are creating a new treatment for these people that melts the plaque built up in their arteries, freeing them from having to take statins every day for the rest of their life.

Your generosity is giving millions of people around the world more precious time with their families.

You're safeguarding the future of research

The Perkins is home to over 45 PhD research students from universities across WA, including Darcy featured on the opposite page.

The Perkins provides training, guidance and real-world experience. Each student is given a stipend from their university to support them while they write their thesis, which can take up four years.

This stipend is barely enough to keep students above the poverty line. Many students have significant financial responsibilities, such as rent, bills and families to support–making the stipend insufficient. Students are also not permitted to work more than eight hours a week on top of this stipend.

Many students fall into equity groups that have no other means of support. That's why we launched Lifeboat. It provides peace of mind that students in need can access funding to continue their studies–no matter what.

Who will Lifeboat help?

Students selected for Lifeboat typically meet at least one of these diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) criteria:

- First-in-family to attend university
- Identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Living with a recognised disability
- Represent a gender that is under-represented in research (e.g. women in STEM)
- Person with caring responsibilities (parent of young children, or a recognised carer)
- International student
- Culturally or linguistically diverse background
- Able to demonstrate financial disadvantage that impacts their education goals.

How you can help

The Perkins Partners program is a tax-deductible giving circle for businesses. One of its key aims is to fund Lifeboat.

You can find out more about this initiative by using this QR code.

Why is it called Lifeboat?

The incredible Safe Harbour Fellows program–funded by generous supporters like you–is protecting Early-to-Mid-Career Researchers at the Perkins. It only makes sense to add some smaller but equally important life-saving "lifeboats" to that protected harbour!

Darcy Pirotta

PhD Student

Why did you decide on a career in medical research?

I wanted to help people in a way that has long-term impact. I also enjoy solving complex problems, and research provides that challenge every day.

What area of research are you interested in and why?

I focus on rare disease genetics, specifically developing disease models for testing potential treatments before they reach patients. Rare diseases are often neglected despite collectively affecting hundreds of millions worldwide.

What is your biggest challenge as a PhD or Masters student?

Disease biology is extremely complex, and experiments often fail or take much longer than planned. This process is part of discovering new knowledge, but it means long hours and many weekends spent in the lab. No one begins a PhD expecting it to be easy.

What is your hope for your future?

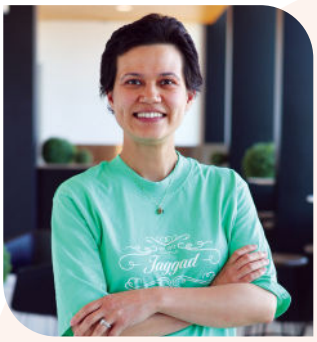
I hope my research leads directly to treatments for children with rare diseases. If my work helps make a therapy available to a child where none existed before, I would consider that a success.

How will Lifeboat support equity groups at the Perkins?

Most PhD students rely on stipends that are well below the median Australian income, making it incredibly hard to cover living costs, especially during the current housing and affordability crisis. Students who are the first in their family to attend university or who have a migrant background face even more barriers. Extra support could help reduce this pressure.

How would a Lifeboat grant assist you in life and your studies?

It would help with rent, bills and basic expenses. Having some financial security would let me concentrate on my research without constant financial stress.



Sharlyn, Christmas Appeal and Cancer 200 Ride Ambassador

Sharly rode for the first time last year and shared her personal cancer journey as a Ride Ambassador and in our Christmas Appeal.

Carol and Nina, Volunteers

Carol and Nina are long-time volunteers and committed supporters of the Perkins. They recently shared their reasons for volunteering for the Perkins to encourage others to consider volunteering.

You're at the heart of everything we do

This year, many of you selflessly shared your personal stories to help bring research to life, here are a few...

Danni, June Appeal and Walk for Women's Cancer Ambassador

Danni and her mum were diagnosed with breast cancer at the same time. Thanks to medical research, they both made it through treatment. Danni walks every year to give back and help raise money for life-changing research.

Kelly, Tyler and family, Rare Disease Day Ambassadors

Kelly and Tyler lost their son Charlie when he was just four months old. They're passionate advocates for research into rare genetic diseases like the one that took their son's life. They shared their story in support of Rare Disease Day earlier this year.

Rohan, Walk for Women's Cancer Ambassador

Rohan walks in memory of his wife Annie, who passed away from cancer after many years of fighting. His team, Annie's Angels, are fuelled by hope for better treatments and healthier futures for the women they love.

Daryl, World Heart Day Ambassador

Daryl volunteers at many Perkins events and is a passionate advocate for medical research. He underwent emergency open-heart surgery to replace a leaking mitral valve. He shares his story each year to support World Heart Day and cardiovascular research at the Perkins.

Thank you for sharing your stories

Will, Community Fundraiser

Will is running in the Melbourne Marathon for his mum, for his Nanna and for every family touched by Huntington's Disease, a devastating genetic condition with no cure. With each step, he'll be raising funds to support vital research into rare diseases at the Perkins.

Michael, Silver Linings Member

Michael is sharing his passion for supporting medical research by talking about his commitment to including a gift in his Will to the Perkins. He shares the story of how he came to decide to give a gift in his Will to the Perkins and to encourage others to do the same.

TWO OF YOU HAVE JOINED THE PERKINS

Meet Mick Bunting and Brad Glover—two Riders who recently joined the Perkins as Official Ride Guides for the Cancer 200 Ride for the Perkins. Not content raising significant funds for cancer research at the Perkins, these two will also help solo riders and teams to meet their fundraising and training goals.

Mick (below left) who is also employed by long-term corporate partner, Mineral Resources, will be looking after corporate teams and Brad (below right), a cancer survivor, will be looking after individual Riders and community teams. We asked them to tell us why they joined Team Perkins.

MICK

WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO APPLY FOR YOUR ROLE?

Through the Ride I have seen the amazing work that the Perkins does and like many other Riders, I finish the Ride in October feeling privileged to be a part of it and wanting to do more for research.

WHAT MAKES THE CANCER 200 RIDE FOR THE PERKINS SO SPECIAL?

The Ride is purpose and power against cancer. It's thousands of my best friends, Riders and supporters—some of whom I haven't even met yet—coming together with a single aim. It's the people who participate and support year after year. But most importantly—once you have ridden, volunteered or supported this event, you're a part of the Perkins Ride Community forever.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE IN YOUR ROLE?

I would like to get to know all our corporate teams, understand more about their businesses, why they've formed a team and how we can we can support each other to achieve our goals.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE BRAD IN ONE SENTENCE?

Brad is a friendly and genuine bloke who inspires me with his passion for cycling, leading his community fundraising team, supporting community Riders and personally kicking cancer's butt!

BRAD

WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO APPLY FOR YOUR ROLE?

I've loved the Ride as a participant, I am super impressed about what the Perkins and West Australian cancer research has achieved—I literally owe my life to it—and I wanted to be able to add more value to the Ride and to the Perkins.

WHAT MAKES THE CANCER 200 RIDE FOR THE PERKINS SO SPECIAL?

The sense of community, family, riding and raising money for a united purpose is magical. Unfortunately, we do have terrible stories that link us all. The Ride and the culture that has grown around it creates an amazing bond between us all for that one weekend each year.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE IN YOUR ROLE?

I want to help the community teams grow. I want more people who are going through their own personal cancer battle to give it a go and reap the benefits of setting the Ride as a goal to focus on and tick off. I also want to see more people who are scared by the daunting idea of the 200km+ Ride weekend commit to it and enjoy the elation of experiencing the event and everything that comes with it.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE MICK IN A SENTENCE?

Mick is the big guy, in the big truck (Mick builds a truck around his bike), with the big smile determined to make the big corporate teams grow into huge corporate teams by whatever means possible.

You're taking on challenges to beat disease

This year, the Sydney Marathon was recognised as a World Marathon Major event joining London, New York, Chicago, Boston, Tokyo and Berlin. Long distance runners from across Australia and around the world are now adding the Sydney Marathon to their bucket list. And the event sells out in just months.

The Perkins had 42 runners signed up this year. And they have raised over $140,000 for WA research. This put Team Perkins as the 15th highest fundraising team out of 439 charities.

There were runners from WA, NSW and VIC, as well as New Zealand and the USA–including Ella and Nikki who both have deeply personal reasons for running.

Ella, VIC, raised over $22,000

I grew up on a farming property at Walwa, Northeast Victoria.

My father, David, has recently been diagnosed with Multiple System Atrophy, a rare, progressive neurodegenerative disorder that affects the brain and functioning of the body.

Dad's initial diagnosis was Parkinson's Disease, however with further progressions and a lack of responsiveness to medications, a new diagnosis has been made.

Currently there is no cure for Multiple System Atrophy, Parkinson's Disease and many other neurological conditions. This demonstrates the complexity of these conditions and the need for more research.

I am running this marathon to raise funds not only to support Dad and all the sufferers of Multiple System Atrophy and Parkinson's Disease, but for all Australians affected by deadly diseases.

Nikki, USA, raised over $6,000

We lost our son Samson in 2019.

He was six weeks old when he suffered a sudden cardiac arrest, brought on by a rare, silent, inherited gene mutation and mitochondrial disease called PPA2 that we had no idea existed. For over a year after he died, no one could tell us why.

Perkins researchers on the opposite side of the world to us were part of the small scientific team that first identified and documented PPA2 in 2016–the same year that our Declan was born.

Because of their research, we have our daughter. Because of their research, maybe one day another mother may not have to say goodbye to her child.

I am so grateful to be a part of the Perkins race team, and so grateful for any donations anyone is willing to make on behalf of all our loved ones who deserve information, treatments and cures.

If you would like to go on the waitlist to run for the Perkins in the 2026 Sydney Marathon, please contact Community Fundraising Partner, John Springate at **john@perkins.org.au.**

You can be a cancer champion like Chris

Chris Reichstein was a remarkable man. An Esperance farmer who unfortunately passed away from cancer.

Chris loved his community and accepted that he could do nothing more to prolong his life. So, he made a plan to give back to the people he was close to and the causes he believed in through setting up the Mt Burdett Foundation.

Part of this generous legacy was a significant gift to the Perkins to assist in establishing a screening program to find natural treatments for cancer.

We have named the project Biota, representing animal or plant life from a certain region. Western Australia has a rich supply of potential cures in our own backyard. WA's South-West is a designated Global Biodiversity Hotspot–there are only two in Australia. These areas contain the highest concentration of rare and endangered species. And many of those species have medicinal properties.

The Perkins has long looked to nature for potential cures for diseases. The Biota Project will be investigating promising research in honeybee venom, sea sponges and sea cucumbers, to name a few.

The first project has already begun. It involves investigating the venom in several WA sea sponges to see if they have anti-cancer properties to combat one of the world's toughest diseases, liver cancer, which is alarmingly on the rise.

Did you know that including a gift of just 1% in your Will to the Perkins can truly change lives?

It's a small act that will have a huge impact on the health of future generations. Once you've made sure your family is looked after, imagine how wonderful it would be to enrich the lives of others through vital research.

By including a gift to the Perkins in your Will, you can help advance medical breakthroughs to keep families together longer.

To find out more, please contact Gifts in Wills Specialist, Ann Hunter **ann@perkins.org.au** or visit **perkins.org.au/support-the-perkins/gift-in-will**

Stopping childhood cancer in its tracks–thank you, Molly!

Molly Croft was just 12 years old when she was first diagnosed with a rare form of childhood cancer, osteosarcoma.

During Molly's treatment she met Australian netball player, Amy Parmenter, and a powerful friendship was born.

Together, they launched The Tie Dye Project with the aim of transforming a simple idea into a movement of hope, colour and purpose.

What began with hand-dyed t-shirts to raise awareness and funds, quickly grew into the Annual Tie Dye Festival, which since its inception has raised over a million dollars for sarcoma research and family support. Thousands of tie-dyed items later, their impact is widening.

"When we connected with the team at the Harry Perkins Institute earlier this year, we were honestly in awe of the incredible sarcoma research happening in the Cancer Epigenetics Lab. It was clear straight away that we wanted to play a part in helping push that work forward," says Molly.

A transformative donation of $50,000 from the Tie Dye Project will enable Associate Professor Pilar Blancafort, Dr Charlene Waryah and PhD student Ash Tie to progress groundbreaking sarcoma research at the Perkins.

Sarcoma is driven by abnormal genetic changes that produce rogue proteins and fuel tumour growth. Using cutting-edge CRISPR technology, Associate Professor Blancafort's team is working to precisely silence these faulty genes without cutting the DNA itself, reducing the risk of harmful side effects.

"Our initial lab studies have shown promising results, successfully silencing these harmful gene fusions in cell models," says Ash. *"We are now working to understand how long lasting this suppression is and how it affects cells over time."*

This research will be crucial to creating therapies to prevent the recurrence of sarcoma. Our sincere thanks to Molly, Amy and everyone at The Tie Dye Project–your support is helping to pave the way for a brighter future for children with sarcoma!

Upcoming Events

MACA Cancer 200 Ride for the Perkins
4-5 October 2025

The Ride is a fully supported 200km journey from Perth to Mandurah and back, over one weekend, raising critical funds for cancer research in WA. Fuel the best and brightest minds as you help Perkins researchers find kinder treatments and better health outcomes for our loved ones.

Visit **cancer200.org.au** or scan the QR code to find out more.

Perkins Tougher Trek
18 October 2025

You've seen the impact that disease can have on the people you love. Their path can be long, painful and pretty damn tough, but together we can change that. Join us for a trek through the Darling Ranges to support medical research at the Perkins.

Visit **toughtreks.perkins.org.au** or scan the QR code to find out more.

The Perkins Plunge - Powered by Mineral Resources
22-23 November 2025

Get your team together for this 12-hour overnight swim relay fundraiser event and make a splash for medical research in WA! Register now, start training, and get ready for a fun all-night marathon relay to support the labs!

Visit **perkinsplunge.org.au** or scan the QR code to find out more.

New Town Toyota Walk for Women's Cancer
2 May 2026

We walk in unity to send a message to the cancers that rob us of our daughters, sisters, mothers, aunts and friends that we're coming for you and we're tougher together. Join us to walk 35kms in one day or choose to walk a few kilometres each day and end your Walk week at the official event.

Visit **walkforwomenscancer.org.au** or scan the QR code to find out more.

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