

2023-2024 Annual Report



YEARS

Feedback is important for improving the value of our future annual reports.

We welcome your comments which can be made by contacting us at:

enquiries@wesleyresearch.org.au

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Official Research Partner of UnitingCare

THE WESLEY HOSPITAL ST ANDREW'S WAR MEMORIAL HOSPITAL **BUDERIM PRIVATE HOSPITAL** ST STEPHEN'S HOSPITAL BLUECARE FAMILY AND DISABILITY SERVICES OTHER UCO COMMUNITY SERVICES

Acknowledgement of Country

Wesley Research Institute acknowledges this Country and its Traditional Custodians. We acknowledge and respect the spiritual relationship between Traditional Custodians and this Country, which has inspired language, songs, dances, lore and dreaming stories over many thousands of years. We pay our respects to the Elders, those who have passed into the dreaming; those here today; those of tomorrow. May we continue to peacefully walk together in gratitude, respect and kindness in caring for this Country and one another.

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Wesley Research Institute Overview

Founded in December 1994 by a group of doctors from the UnitingCare network, Wesley Research Institute (WRI) is Queensland's second oldest medical research organisation. Located at The Wesley Hospital and connected to one of Australia's largest and most comprehensive private health services, WRI benefits from direct access to a broad patient base and fosters collaboration between clinicians and researchers.

As the official research partner for UnitingCare, WRI conducts high-quality, ethical research across our research programs, Clinical Trials Centre, WRI Biobank and clinical research grants. We are dedicated to delivering impactful outcomes that enhance patient care and contribute to global medical knowledge.

WRI's collaborative model integrates doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, scientists, academia, patients and the community, all working together to improve health outcomes. Our work extends beyond hospital settings to rural and remote regions, such as the Bowen Basin, reflecting our commitment to broader community health.

Our strategic partnerships with universities, government and industry leaders enable us to leverage UnitingCare Queensland's resources - the largest non-government employer in the state - to drive forward cutting-edge health and medical research.

Ongoing community and donor support is crucial, funding our world-class research and innovation efforts. This support allows us to continue expanding our capabilities, focusing on innovations that lead to faster diagnoses, better treatments and ultimately, cures for serious diseases.

WRI remains focused on advancing patient-focused research, ensuring that our work has a tangible impact on health outcomes in Queensland and beyond.

Our Mission

A world leader in applied medical and health research, achieving excellence and innovation improving patient outcomes.





Encouraging, supporting and facilitating clinicians and other health professionals to undertake medical and health research to improve patient care and quality of life.

Our Patron-in-Chief, the Governor of Queensland

This has been another exceptional year for Wesley Research Institute - a fitting achievement to mark 30 years of medical and health research that has benefited both patients and the wider community.

Over the past 12 months, the Institute has experienced substantial growth, expanding its research capabilities and programs, while continuing to play a crucial role in translating research into practical, real-world outcomes and ensuring that its work has a meaningful and lasting impact on patient care.

The partnership with UnitingCare Queensland has further enhanced the Institute's ability to develop and implement innovative healthcare solutions that directly benefit Queenslanders, and significant levels of investment have ensured that research remains of the highest calibre and continues to drive healthcare advancements.

The dedicated Wesley Research Institute team of doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, scientists, patients and community members have together continued to make meaningful progress in research into autoimmune conditions such as coeliac disease, producing improved diagnoses and treatments. Similarly, it has been pleasing to see advancements in addressing the critical need to treat acute respiratory conditions in children.

During my long career in health administration and in my current role as Governor of Queensland and Patron-in-Chief of Wesley Research Institute, I have been particularly pleased to see research into the provision of health services as a growing focus. This will lead to new models of care that can enhance healthcare delivery and ensure patients, wherever they live in our vast State, receive efficient, optimal treatment.

I have also been pleased to see mental health in rural areas emerge as a focus through the expansion of Navicare in the Bowen Basin, and to see the Queensland Spatial Biology Centre established within the Institute. Its innovative research into personalised treatments for complex diseases is already gaining recognition.

The work of the Institute would not be possible without the passion of the researchers, the leadership of the Board and the management team, and the commitment of the Wesley Research Institute volunteers. All of them play a vital role in improving the health of their fellow Oueenslanders and I thank and acknowledge them for the achievements of the past year.

On behalf of all Queenslanders, I also extend my gratitude to the Institute's corporate partners and individual donors for their generosity and enduring belief in the value of that work.



Just long

Her Excellency the Honourable Dr Jeannette Young AC PSM **Governor of Queensland**



Celebrating 30 years ofimpact

Since its founding in 1994, Wesley Research Institute (WRI) has grown into a leader in health and medical research, consistently working to improve patient outcomes. Over the past three decades, WRI has made a lasting impact through its commitment to bridging the gap between clinical practice and healthcare research, ensuring that the latest advancements directly benefit patients. This 30-year retrospective highlights key milestones and the contributions that have shaped our journey.

The Early Years - Building a Foundation for Excellence

WRI was founded with a clear mission - to translate cutting-edge research into real-world medical solutions. In 1994, Mr Bill Brett Jnr was appointed as Chair of the Board, with Emeritus Professor Julie Campbell AO appointed as the first Director in 1996. In our early years, with the support of UnitingCare, we laid the groundwork for what would become a legacy of research excellence. Early successes in cardiovascular health and cancer research set the stage for



future initiatives, establishing WRI as a trusted partner in the healthcare community.

One of the notable achievements in the early years was WRI's first Scientific Symposium in April 1997, 'Recent Advances in Cardiology', which marked the beginning of our commitment to knowledge sharing and professional collaboration. During this period, WRI also commenced its first clinical trials, further cementing its role as a vital contributor to medical research and patient care.

A Decade of Growth and Collaboration

As WRI entered the 2000s, we expanded our reach through strategic partnerships with healthcare providers and research institutions.

In the early 2000s, we achieved significant milestones in our commitment to medical education and collaboration. Advocacy events such as symposiums and community engagements brought together donors, community members, allied health professionals and researchers, strengthening our ties within the medical and broader community.

Another major achievement during this period was the development of MRI-guided techniques for detecting prostate cancer. This innovative

Opening of WRI's first designated office space in 1998 The Wesley Resea approach significantly improved the accuracy of locating cancerous tissues, allowing for

more precise diagnosis and reducing the need for painful biopsies. The technique not only transformed the way prostate cancer is diagnosed but also led to better outcomes for patients, with fewer invasive procedures and earlier detection. Reflecting WRI's commitment to applied research, this project demonstrated the Institute's ability to translate cutting-edge scientific advancements directly into clinical practice. This coincided with the awarding of the first research fellowship, a milestone that marked the beginning of a long tradition of nurturing innovative Australian research at WRI.

Advancing Medical Research in the 2010s

The 2010s saw WRI make important advancements Our international collaborations, including in neurological research, supported by a \$5 million partnerships with Radboud University in the donation from the Brazil Family Foundation. This Netherlands, expanded our global impact and funding enabled research into conditions like enhanced our research capabilities. These Parkinson's disease and Motor Neurone Disease, collaborations have been instrumental in positioning WRI at the forefront of neurological advancing our understanding of complex diseases. studies. The MAGNIFI project, which investigates A pivotal moment during this period was the the use of MRI techniques to identify cancerous merger in 2014 of WRI and St Andrew's Medical lymph nodes, also launched during this time, Institute, which provided a stronger platform for offering new hope to patients. research. This merger allowed us to attract top researchers and clinicians, leading to a surge in innovative projects.

In 2007, Oueensland Premier Peter Beattie officially opened the new Clinical Trials Centre and WRI Biobank, previously known as the Tissue Bank, which was supported by a \$1.42 million grant from the Queensland Government's Smart State Research Facilities Fund.

In May 2009, the 8th floor, East Wing of The Wesley Hospital was officially opened, providing a state-of-the-art space for WRI's growing research activities. This expansion, enabled by a significant \$10 million grant, allowed WRI to enhance its research capabilities, facilitating advancements across various medical fields. This period also marked a significant milestone with the funding of our 100th research project, further solidifying WRI's position as a leader in applied medical research.

Recent Years – Innovation, Expansion, and New Frontiers

Over the past decade, Wesley Research Institute (WRI) has continued to grow in scope and impact. For example, the WRI Biobank, established in 2007, currently holds over 40,000 samples, including those collected as part of the Queensland Brain Tumour Bank, the Australian Autism Biobank and the Justin Cameron Sarcoma Collection. This expansive repository has been pivotal in supporting a wide range of research initiatives that have had a tangible impact on patient care.

The global pandemic in 2020 brought unprecedented challenges and WRI responded swiftly by launching the COVID-19 Rapid Response Research Centre. This centre was dedicated to supporting urgent research projects that addressed the immediate needs of the healthcare system during the pandemic, contributing to the global effort to combat COVID-19.

In 2021, WRI established the Isaac Navicare Program, a significant initiative aimed at expanding our research reach into rural Queensland. This program focuses on improving mental health service access and outcomes for patients in remote areas.

WRI's commitment to advancing healthcare was further demonstrated with the establishment of the Health Services Research team. As the world grapples with emerging health issues, such research is crucial to ensuring that healthcare

systems can adapt and provide optimal care to patients.

In 2021, WRI invested \$4 million into the Neurology Research Program, accelerating efforts to better understand and treat neurological conditions such as Parkinson's disease and Motor Neurone Disease. Additionally, \$1 million was invested into the Coeliac Disease and Immune Health Research Program, aiming to improve the understanding of coeliac disease, enhance diagnostic accuracy and ultimately improve the quality of life for patients and their families.

The expansion of the Clinical Trials Centre has also been a key focus, enabling the discovery of new therapies for rare diseases and other emerging health challenges.

In 2022, WRI underwent a significant rebranding, changing its name from Wesley Medical Research back to Wesley Research Institute. This rebranding was accompanied by a new logo, reflecting the Institute's evolution and ongoing commitment to advancing health research.

Earlier this year, WRI established the Queensland Spatial Biology Centre (QSBC), a cuttingedge research hub dedicated to transforming healthcare through advanced spatial biology techniques.



Looking Ahead - A Future of Promise

As we celebrate 30 years of WRI, we reflect on the extraordinary journey that has brought us to where we are today. From our founding in 1994 to our current position as a leader in transformative health research, our focus has always been on improving the lives of patients through innovative, patient-centred research.

The power of giving in this new era has been fundamental to WRI's success. The generosity of donors and partners continues to fuel groundbreaking research, enabling WRI to tackle some of the most pressing health challenges of our time. Support from longstanding partners like

COVID-19 Rapid Response **Research** Centre 24 Annual Report



Mitsubishi Development and JJ Richards & Sons has been crucial in sustaining our research efforts. Their multi-year commitments have provided the stability necessary for long-term projects that yield meaningful results and have allowed WRI to consistently push the boundaries of applied medical research.

As we look to the future, WRI remains dedicated to expanding our research capabilities and embracing new challenges in health research. With the continued support of our community, we are poised to make even greater contributions to global healthcare in the years to come.

Our Board



Mr Charlie Sartain Chair



Dr Shanthi Kanagarajah **Board Member**



Mr Andrew Barron Chief Executive Officer



Mr Neal O'Connor Board Member



Dr John Lumley Board Member



Ms Mairi McNeill **Board Member**



Mr Warren Bamford Board Member



Ms Shannon McDermott Company Secretary

Professor Mary-

Louise Fleming

Board Member

We recognise and thank our retiring board members



Mr Craig Wildermuth Board Member



Ms Karen Read Board Member



Ms Donna Shkalla Board Member



Dr John Rivers Board Member









Associate Professor John Allan



Emeritus Professor John Pearn AO

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Dr James Aylward AM Board Member



Mr David Hairsine Board Member

Our sincere thanks to our Patrons for their continued contribution and support



Mr Martin Albrecht AC

Message from CEO and Board Chair

As we mark our 30th anniversary for the Wesley Research Institute (WRI), we are proud to reflect on three decades of efforts to advance medical and healthcare research, with an unwavering focus on improved patient care and quality of life. This milestone is a testament to the dedication, resilience and diversity of our past and present researchers, community, partners, supporters, volunteers and staff who have tirelessly supported our mission over the years.

Embarking on our revised three-year strategy in 2024, we were guided by a bold vision and renewed focus. This strategy centres on expanding our research capabilities, fostering innovative collaborations, and ensuring sustainable growth aligned with the changing health needs of our community. This year has seen momentum building in all those key areas.

A Year of Growth, Impact and Collaboration

Reflecting on the past year, the creation of the Queensland Spatial Biology Centre (QSBC) and the growth of our internal research capabilities stand out as significant achievements, has enabled us



to take important steps on the path to becoming a leader in medical and health research. The QSBC, an initiative established at WRI in collaboration with the University of Queensland, has created an innovative research hub that is reshaping the future of clinical evaluations through cutting-edge spatial biology techniques. Initial philanthropic support from the VidyaJey Foundation, Albrecht Family Foundation, Brazil Family Foundation and others was crucial in realising this vision.

The past year has also seen significant advances towards the establishment of a research network and program at WRI focused on Coeliac Disease and Immune Health research. This work is enabling collaboration between coeliac disease experts, with the aim of progressing multidisciplinary research in this field.

As the official research partner of Uniting Care Queensland (UCQ), we continue to strengthen our engagement and research activities with UCQ. For example, through the expansion of our Health Services Research team, co-funded by UCQ and Irene Patricia Hunt Memorial Trust (managed by Equity Trustees), this year we undertook important work related to addressing the critical challenges of access and equity in healthcare.

In relation to our reshaped Clinical Trials Centre (CTC), over the past year we expanded the breadth and scale of a centre that focuses on conducting high-quality clinical trials essential for developing new therapies, techniques and medical devices, as well as exploring new applications for established treatments. The CTC team has continued to conduct work under carefully controlled conditions at our facilities. Over the past year, our team cared for 312 patients and their families across 35 clinical trials, assessing responses to new therapies, monitoring side effects, gauging tolerability, and determining improvements over existing options.

CEO Andrew Barron (left) and Board Chair Charlie Sartain

Growth and Building Capacity for Future Impact

Looking ahead, our commitment to sustainable growth remains central to our mission. Investing strategically in our research teams strengthens our capacity to innovate and address complex health challenges facing Australians.

To support our strategic goals, we established a new fundraising and philanthropy team dedicated to fostering meaningful relationships with our supporters. We also welcomed new members to our Executive Leadership Team, whose experience and passion will be instrumental as we navigate this journey together.

We have also restructured the Research Advisory Board, a key committee that offers guidance to align our research with strategic goals. This group also provides a rigorous review process for academic research submissions and promotions, strengthening our foundation for future growth, impact, and sustainability.

Facing Challenges with Resilience and Purpose

Every year brings its own set of challenges, and this year has been no exception. We have navigated the complexities of growth-balancing financial sustainability with our expanding research initiatives. As we brought together diverse teams from across medical, academic, research, and corporate backgrounds, our commitment to our purpose has kept us united even in the "storming" phase of collaboration. Our ability to overcome these challenges reflects the resilience and adaptability of our team, and we are especially proud of their creative approaches, like those of the team leading the WRI Biobank, who took on the critical task of placenta collection for research. Such dedication exemplifies the spirit that drives WRI forward.

Andrew Barron Chief Executive Officer

Looking Ahead: A Vision for Greater Impact

As we progress into 2025, we will continue our focus on launching new programs aligned with our strategy that address critical health challenges, such as the new Pulmonary Hypertension Research Program. By leveraging existing partnerships, like those within St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital and The Wesley Hospital, as well as creating new ones, we aim to bring advanced clinical research directly to patients, enhancing our ability to improve health outcomes.

In the long term, we remain committed to pursuing discoveries that enhance patient outcomes and shape the future of healthcare. The role of our valued donors and partners in this journey is pivotal, and we invite you to continue building this legacy with us. Your support—whether through contributions for vital scholarships, equipment, technology, or infrastructure—enables us to tackle pressing health challenges with expertise and compassion.

Thank You for Your Partnership and Vision

Reflecting on the past year, we recognise the collaboration between ourselves as CEO and Chair of the Board in guiding WRI toward its strategic goals. We strive to empower our people and engage our stakeholders, ensuring that we remain focused on driving innovation and enhancing health outcomes in our communities. We extend our heartfelt thanks to each of you who have supported us this year. You have been an essential part of our 30-year story, and we are excited to continue this journey together. As you read through this report, you will see the impact your generosity has made on patients, families, and communities. From all of us at Wesley Research Institute, thank you for your trust and your dedication to advancing health research.

Charlie Sartain Board Chair

2023-2024 Highlights

Clinical Trials Centre



through investigator-led and industry-sponsored trials

The WRI Biobank

safely houses and

WRI Biobank

In 2023-2024, for investigatorinitiated trials alone, the WRI Biobank handled over

biospecimens

manages over Б biospecimens

QSBC QUEENSLAND SPATIAL BIOLOGY CENTRE





- Tissue samples were scanned, mapped and analysed.
- Ongoing projects include research into ovarian cancer, breast cancer, lung cancer, head and neck cancer, cardiac disease and infectious diseases.

Health Services Research

People nterviewed to gather insights on improving chronic wound and virtual healthcare.

ISAAC

Navicare



Ove Since 2021, have been connected with mental health services through Navicare

Grants Program



UnitingCare clinicians received funding for research

Investment into Mission

\$5,891,791

total investment into advancing diagnostics, improving treatments, and enhancing care, made possible by the incredible support of our community.

Capital



Involving patients, their families and the allied health community in our research enables us to design healthcare systems that ensure better patient experiences and continuity of care.

Rural Australians

This year, funding was provided to innovative projects across cardiovascular health, cancer therapy, neurology and pandemic preparedness, supporting research directly relevant to areas of excellence at our UnitingCare Health hospitals.



QSBC QUEENSLAND SPATIAL BIOLOGY

CENTRE



In January 2024, Wesley Research Institute launched the Queensland Spatial Biology Centre (QSBC) which is transforming healthcare through advanced spatial biology techniques.

Each patient is unique, and through our research, we are unlocking the intricacies of their biology to personalise therapies for a range of debilitating diseases, leading to improved quality of life.

The new technology we are harnessing through QSBC will help provide the answers for why some people respond to specific treatments, and others don't.

Under the leadership of Clinical Director Professor John Fraser and Scientific Director Dr Arutha Kulasinghe, QSBC is leading research that lays the groundwork targeting some of Australia's deadliest illnesses including cancer, heart disease and sepsis.



Pathology Innovations

OSBC is driving significant advancements in pathology that have far-reaching implications for personalised medicine. By employing cutting-edge spatial mapping and digital pathology tools, QSBC is deepening our understanding of life-threatening diseases and refining diagnostic accuracy, paving the way for more targeted treatment options.

Spatial Biology Insights

QSBC's work in Spatial Phenotyping and Spatial Omics focuses on analysing the distribution of cells and molecules within patient tissue samples. This detailed analysis reveals the intricate organisation and interactions of cells within the body, offering valuable insights for future treatment strategies. The centre's innovative approach, inspired by Professor Fraser's involvement in the international COVID-19 Critical Care Consortium, functions like a Google Maps for tissue analysis, allowing researchers to explore the complex cellular environments that influence disease progression and treatment responses.





Future-Focused Research

OSBC researchers utilise the advanced PhenoCycler®-Fusion System, generously funded by the VidyaJey Foundation, to map millions of cells within tissue sections. These comprehensive cellular maps are essential for understanding why patients respond differently to treatments. They are being used to create digital atlases with predictive signatures for various diseases. While the full realisation of personalised treatment plans is ongoing, these atlases represent a significant step forward and are expected to play a crucial role in enhancing patient care.

Spanish Flu Project



This world-first research project aims to create a blueprint for developing more effective vaccines and therapies tailored to protect children and young adults during global health crises.

Publications



- Professor John Fraser, Dr Arutha Kulasinghe, Dr Meg Donovan and Naomi Berrell (QSBC): Protocol for high-plex, whole-slide imaging of human formalin-fixed paraffin-embedded tissue using PhenoCycler-Fusion
- Naomi Berrell, Dr Meg Donovan and Dr Arutha Kulasinghe, Spatial resolution of the head and neck cancer tumour microenvironment to identify tumor and stromal features associated with therapy response
- Dr Meg Donovan and Dr Arutha Kulasinghe, Spatial dynamics of tertiary lymphoid aggregates in head and neck cancer: insights into immunotherapy response

Ongoing Research

QSBC's projects focus on critical health challenges, such as breast and lung cancers, as well as heart disease. The addition of a full-time Data Scientist, supported by the Harding Family Scholarship, will further expand QSBC's capabilities to accelerate the development of new treatment approaches.

Through collaboration with clinicians, scientists and biomedical engineers, and by leveraging access to a large patient population, QSBC is positioned to make meaningful contributions to healthcare. This commitment is exemplified by the Centre's latest collaborative research project focused on the analysis of a 100-year-old Spanish Flu tissue sample.

Utilising innovative technology at QSBC, the team is analysing historical lung tissue from the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic. This truly collaborative effort brings together virologists, clinicians, technologists, immunologists and PhD students from Queensland and around the world.

The research is focused on making a tangible impact by ensuring that the most vulnerable in society are prioritised in the fight against global health threats.



The project was prominently featured on the cover and in a multi-page spread of The Weekend Australian magazine and was funded as part of our 2023 Grant Round.

In collaboration with



Health Services Research

Health Services Research at Wesley Research Institute (WRI) is a rapidly expanding, multidisciplinary field dedicated to enhancing the design, implementation and delivery of health services to achieve optimal outcomes for patients and healthcare providers.

Led by Associate Professor Elizabeth Martin, the team employs evidence-based methods to understand health service challenges, co-design, implement and evaluate innovative solutions. Associate Professor Martin oversees a wide array of projects and is spearheading new research initiatives that will shape WRI's contributions in 2025 and beyond.

The team adopts a novel approach to evaluating and improving models of care and healthcare policies, ensuring that these meet the diverse needs of all stakeholders. Leveraging a unique relationship with UnitingCare Queensland, including BlueCare, the team collaborates with universities, health services, governments, not-for-profit organisations and other key stakeholders to enhance the quality of both public and private health services.

The team's experienced researchers take a system-wide perspective, considering factors such as social and environmental influences, policy and legislation and individual and group behaviours that impact healthcare delivery. Their expertise spans implementation science, health economics, and a range of research methods, including quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods research.

The Health Services Research Program is underpinned by the importance of amplifying consumers' voices to improve healthcare delivery, with most research projects currently focusing on services within the UnitingCare Queensland portfolio.

Chronic Wounds Research Program

Lead Researcher: Associate Professor Wendell Cockshaw

Nearly half a million Australians suffer from chronic wounds, including leg and foot ulcers, skin tears and pressure sores. These slow-healing wounds can lead to serious complications such as infections, sepsis, and even death, significantly impacting quality of life.

Associate Professor Cockshaw and his team are innovating health service delivery to improve outcomes for patients with chronic wounds. In partnership with UnitingCare Queensland, the Health Services Research team is working to break down barriers to effective prevention and treatment. The program aims to enhance quality of life and reduce preventable deaths amongst all people at risk of chronic wounds - from neonates to the elderly.





Virtual Healthcare Research Program

Lead Researcher: Dr Olivia Fisher

WRI has launched a research program that will inform the design and implementation of virtual hospitals and healthcare nationally.

Led by Dr Olivia Fisher, the research team has identified the health system, service and community changes needed to deliver virtual hospitals and healthcare. The research will enable digital and future focused healthcare to occur in more accessible locations such as peoples' homes and rural/remote communities. The results and recommendations have been successfully targeted towards hospital and healthcare funders.

This world-first applied health services research program is building a critical evidence base for virtual healthcare adoption across Australia, addressing the risks of rising healthcare costs and underserved populations.

Older people, Aged Care and Dementia Research Program

Lead Researcher: Dr Caroline Grogan Supported by: Irene Patricia Hunt Memorial Trust

Led by Dr Caroline Grogan, this program focuses on enhancing the quality of life and dignity of older adults by addressing key issues in healthcare, aged care services, community respite, and residential care. In partnership with UnitingCare Queensland's BlueCare, the team conducts inclusive research across people with diverse social, economic, and cultural backgrounds.

Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the program evaluates current practices and translates findings into evidence-based recommendations to improve care and inform policy.

Dr Grogan is especially skilled in including the opinions of people living with dementia in her research. Her methods and results have been showcased in national research publications and invited opinion pieces. The real-world impact of this research program on quality of care is strengthened by raising the voices of older people.

Both my wife and I are long-term clients who rely on in-home respite. Being asked to participate gives us a chance to contribute and is a significant step forward in this research.

- Patient and research participant





Learn more about Health Services Research



Transforming mental health care in regional Australia

One in five Australians experience mental illness annually^{*}, yet access to mental health support remains a significant challenge in regional and remote areas. Isaac Navicare addresses this gap by offering a free service to residents and workers in the Isaac region, linking them with essential mental health care. Located at the Moranbah Youth & Community Centre (MYCC), Navicare provides care navigation, a dedicated phone line and supported telehealth services.

This innovative model, underpinned by research, was made possible through the support of Founding Partner Mitsubishi Development. The company's commitment to improving healthcare access in rural areas has been vital in realising and sustaining Navicare.

*According to Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023

Progress and Impact

In the past two and a half years, Navicare has transformed mental health care in rural Queensland, creating a comprehensive database of local and outreach providers, partnering with telehealth services and advocating for bulk-billed mental health referrals. Since its launch in November 2021, Navicare has connected over 650 people with vital mental health support across the Isaac region, with user numbers steadily increasing.

Without Navicare, we would still be waiting for my daughter to access mental health support. It's been a huge relief for her to finally receive the help she desperately needed.

- Parent of a Navicare healthcare client

Publication

Fisher, O. J., McGrath, K., Grogan, C., Cockshaw, W., & Leggatt-Cook, C. (2024). Care navigation addresses issues of tele-mental health acceptability and uptake in rural and remote communities. Published in Public Library of Science (PLOS ONE).

FOUNDING PARTNER:



Since 1994, Mitsubishi Development has been a valued partner of Wesley Research Institute, supporting various initiatives, including the Navicare service in recent years. This long-standing partnership is a testament to the power of collaboration and our shared commitment to delivering lasting impact in the community. Through this connection, we demonstrate the effectiveness of a partnership model that drives positive outcomes, particularly in addressing mental health needs in rural and remote areas.

Research and Evaluation

Wesley Research Institute, alongside founding partner Mitsubishi Development, played a crucial role in ensuring Navicare's success. Kelly McGrath, Service Manager & Mental Health Navigator and Dr Olivia Fisher, Senior Research Fellow, led an evaluation of Navicare's first year, demonstrating the program's ability to reduce healthcare inequities in rural and remote Queensland. The findings, published in PLOS ONE in February 2024 and presented at national conferences and regional meetings, showcased how care navigation improves mental health outcomes.

The Bridging Study

The Bridging Study, led by Queensland University of Technology (QUT), is a separate initiative running until 2026, funded by a National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) grant. This study evaluates Navicare's impact and works to expand services across the Greater Whitsundays area, collaborating with researchers from QUT, James Cook University and the University of California San Diego. Consultations with local communities are guiding the establishment of new sites, with Clermont as the first expansion.

Additional Highlights for 2023/24

- 7.35% of clients returned for additional support, highlighting Navicare's ongoing value.
- Engaged in community education, including careers expos and local high school visits, to inspire the next generation of mental health professionals.



ighlighting Navicare's ongoing value. rs expos and local high school visits, to inspire th





Coeliac Disease and Immune Health Research

Led by Dr James Daveson, this program is a multidisciplinary collaboration involving patients, medical practitioners, hospitals and researchers. The research aims to deepen our understanding of autoimmune disease onset and progression, develop new diagnostic tools, create more effective interventions and ultimately find cures.

Coeliac disease is one of the most common autoimmune disorders affecting between 0.7-1.4% throughout the world* and 1 in 70* Australians. The disease is triggered by an intolerance to gluten found in wheat, rye and barley. Despite its prevalence, over 80% of sufferers remain undiagnosed, leading to increased risks of nutrient deficiencies, osteoporosis, malignancy and unnecessary healthcare costs.

The research program at WRI is focused on discovering new treatments and interventions to improve the lives of those with coeliac disease, including both investigator-led studies and sponsored clinical trials.

Gluten Threshold Study

Currently, the only treatment for coeliac disease is strict, lifelong gluten avoidance. However, the exact amount of gluten that triggers symptoms and gut damage remains unknown.

Dr Daveson's Gluten Threshold Study has determined the lowest amount of gluten that elicits a blood immune response in patients with coeliac disease, addressing a critical gap in food labelling guidelines and contributing to global attempts to define a treatment for coeliac disease. The study's findings have been presented orally at the International Coeliac Disease Symposium held in Sheffield UK, and Australian Gastroenterology Week in Adelaide both held in September 2024. The publication of the gluten threshold research is expected in early 2025.



Coeliac Disease Microbiome Study

How can gut microbes help with the diagnosis and symptom management of coeliac disease?

The microbes that live within our gut are now known to influence immune cell behaviour and have been associated with several disease of the gut, like inflammatory bowel disease. However, their role in coeliac disease is not yet understood. This project aims to better understand the relationship between gut microbes and the immune response to gluten that lead to changes in the clinical symptoms of coeliac disease.



Coeliac Disease Industry-Sponsored Trials

Industry-sponsored trials are a significant focus of our program, bringing together a diverse range of clinicians, biotechnology companies and pharmaceutical firms. These collaborations aim to explore and test new therapies and treatment options for coeliac disease, offering patients access to the latest advancements in disease management.

Below are some key coeliac disease trials underway:

Chugai Study: This trial evaluates DONQ52, an investigational drug designed to suppress gluten-specific T-cell. The study assesses its safety, effectiveness and immune response.

Lead Investigator: Dr Jennifer Schafer.

Dr Falk Study: This Phase IIb trial is testing the efficacy and tolerability of ZED1227, an oral capsule for patients who experience symptoms despite a gluten-free diet. The study explores different dosages to determine their effects on the small intestine and overall symptom improvement.

Lead Investigators: Dr James Daveson and Dr Jennifer Schafer.

Coeliac Research Network

WRI established the Coeliac Research Network to advance research in coeliac disease and immune health. This network unites experts, including gastroenterologists, dieticians, nutritionists, nurses, immunologists and patients to drive forward the multidisciplinary research agenda.

*According to Coeliac Australia Research, 2023 Linfors et al, Nat Rev Dis Primers 2019 Caio etal. BMC Med 2019. Anderson et al. BMC Med 2013

Topas Therapeutics GmbH Study: This Phase 2a study investigates TPM502, a treatment aiming to restore immune tolerance to gluten in adults with coeliac disease. The trial evaluates its safety, tolerability and ability to reduce gluten sensitivity.

Lead Investigators: Dr James Daveson and Dr Jennifer Schafer.

TEVA Study: This Phase 1b trial examines the safety and tolerability of TEV-53408, a subcutaneous injection intended for adults with coeliac disease. The study compares the treatment to a placebo to assess its potential as a new therapeutic option.

Lead Investigator: Dr James Daveson.



Clinical Trials Centre

The Clinical Trials Centre at Wesley Research Institute (WRI) has been managing clinical trials since 1997, offering patients access to new and emerging treatments for a wide range of illnesses. Clinical trials are essential in the development of new medicines, medical devices and finding new uses for existing treatments. The centre supports national and international phase IV trials, focusing on evaluating therapies, drugs and diagnostic tools to drive new discoveries into standard clinical practice.

Our work is supported by specialist research teams within the clinical trials centre, including Clinical Research Manager, Clinical Trial Coordinators, Investigators and Clinical Research Assistants. Without the dedication and expertise of our staff, these life-changing trials would not be possible.

Clinicians and patients across The Wesley Hospital, St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital,

Ethics & Compliance and Startup Team

The success of our clinical trials is closely tied to our commitment to ethics and compliance. Wesley Research Institute works closely with UnitingCare's Human Research Ethics Committee to ensure that every trial meets stringent ethical standards before commencing. Our exceptional startup team also plays a crucial role in ensuring that trials are safely initiated and set up for success, coordinating all aspects of trial preparation and launch. This includes working with industry sponsors and stakeholders to ensure all trials are conducted with the highest level of safety and integrity.

Working with Sponsors

WRI collaborates with health professionals from UnitingCare Hospitals and global biotechnology, pharmaceutical and medical device leaders. Our partnerships with industry sponsors help bring breakthrough treatments to market, investigating new therapies and technologies on an international scale.



Buderim Private Hospital and St Stephen's (Hervey Bay) can participate, ensuring both metropolitan and regional access.

At WRI, our patients are at the heart of everything we do. We provide participants, researchers and sponsors with a first-class experience, supported by a dedicated team of nurses and coordinators who drive our research forward. We acknowledge the critical role of our nurses, whose compassionate care and expertise are central to advancing our research.

During 2023/24, 35 clinical trials were conducted, with 312 patients participating in investigator-led and industry-sponsored trials.

We welcomed four new Principal Investigators: Dr Karl Poon (Cardiology), Dr John Feenstra (Pulmonary Hypertension Research Program), Dr Jennifer Schafer (Coeliac Disease & Immune Health) and Dr Luke Garske (Respiratory).

Focus Areas

Coeliac Disease & Immune Health:

World-class multidisciplinary research program for coeliac disease. The program relies on participation from the coeliac community to progress clinical trials and advance treatment options.



Cardiology & Critical Care:

Groundbreaking cardiac trials aim to offer safer and more effective alternatives to traditional open-heart surgery.

Orthopaedics: Research assesses treatment durations for musculoskeletal

injuries, aiming to reduce pain, swelling and recovery time following major surgeries.

Opening doors to change lives

Eddie from Townsville, participated in a cardiac trial at St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital earlier this year. The trial tested the benefits of a transcatheter heart valve, an artificial heart valve for people with symptomatic, severe calcific aortic stenosis.

Eddie's aortic stenosis diagnosis followed several years of living with atrial fibrillation and after being referred to Dr Karl Poon, he was able to trial one of the newest types of TAVR valve.

"Being part of this trial and receiving the valve has drastically improved the quality of my life. I am extremely confident that the valve will continue to serve me for many years to come," said Eddie.

Since the procedure, Eddie has lost 25 kilograms, follows an exercise program at his retirement village's gym, and feels healthier than ever.

"This kind of research is extremely important. Look at how much longer we're living now compared to 100 years ago," he said.

Eddie will have his next trial follow-up in February 2025 and expects his good health to continue.



Learn More About Our Clinical Trials

For more information on clinical trials and to participate, scan the QR code or visit our clinical trials page: www.wesleyresearch.org.au/clinical-trials





Pulmonary Hypertension &

Respiratory: Our team is dedicated to tailored treatments for pulmonary hypertension and respiratory conditions, aiming to improve therapies and help patients breathe more efficiently.



Neurology: Clinical trials in this area focus on improving brain function for patients with neurological disorders.



Rare Diseases: Our trials for rare diseases offer patients and families hope by slowing disease progression and exploring new treatment options.



WRI Biobank

Founded in 2007, the Wesley Research Institute (WRI) Biobank plays a pivotal role in breakthroughs for cancer, autism, wound care and rare genetic diseases.

It provides a diverse collection of ethically obtained blood and tissue samples for biomedical research.

These samples, sourced from across Queensland, are used to improve the detection, diagnosis and treatment of diseases.

With over 40,000 samples, including those forming

the Queensland Brain Tumour Bank, the Australian Autism Biobank and the Justin Cameron Sarcoma Collection, the WRI Biobank supports critical research. The facility ensures long-term protection and storage for these invaluable specimens, enabling researchers to explore innovative ways to improve patient care.

"Research on these samples helps us better understand the human body in health and disease and find new ways to diagnose and treat medical conditions," says Dr Michael Hodges-Langford, WRI Biobank & Clinical Laboratory Manager.

Supporting Clinical Trials

In the past year, the WRI Biobank supported 10 clinical trials by managing biospecimen processing, storage and distribution.

For investigator-initiated trials alone, over 1,000 biospecimens were handled.



Australian Autism Biobank

The WRI Biobank houses the Australian Autism Biobank, which is Australia's largest collection of biospecimens from autistic children and their families. With over 25,000 biospecimens currently stored, this resource is crucial for understanding how biological and environmental factors impact autistic health.

In 2024, the WRI Biobank dispatched over 800 samples and incorporated a further 300, highlighting the ongoing utility of this collection. High-impact studies using these samples have advanced knowledge in areas like diet, gut health, sleep and chronic stress.

mbiomics Partnership

WRI Biobank is in partnership with German biotech company mbiomics to explore the human microbiome's role in disease. The WRI Biobank collects stool samples from healthy donors, which mbiomics analyses to catalog microbiome diversity using advanced technologies. This project aims to understand the healthy microbiome and identify microbial imbalances linked to disease, potentially leading to new microbiome-based therapeutics.

Centre for Personalised Analysis of Cancers (CPAC)

At CPAC, researchers use tumour tissue and blood samples to tailor cancer treatments. The WRI Biobank, in collaboration with Wesley Hospital orthopaedic surgeons Dr Scott Sommerville, Dr Philip Rowell and Dr Martin Lowe, supports CPAC by providing fresh tissue and blood from patients with primary and secondary bone tumours, including osteosarcoma.

These samples enable researchers to develop assays to predict patient responses to therapies and test novel treatments, advancing personalised cancer care.

Transforming Birth Tissues into Medical Solutions

With invaluable support from the Wesley Hospital maternity team and obstetricians, the WRI Biobank allows expectant mothers to donate placentas after elective caesarean sections.

These generous donations are transformed into life-saving medical products, like allografts for chronic wound healing and cell therapies that aid stroke recovery. This initiative reduces medical waste and also advances vital research in regenerative medicine, bringing hope and healing to those in need.



For more information on WRI Biobank, scan the QR code or visit our clinical trials page: www.wesleyresearch.org.au/biobank



Learn More About WRI Biobank

Clinical Grant Round projects

In early 2023, Wesley Research Institute proudly announced the successful applicants for its prestigious 2023 Grant Round, reinforcing our commitment to advancing medical and health research.

Six innovative projects were funded, focusing on cardiovascular health, cancer therapy, neurology, and pandemic preparedness. These grants

provided crucial initial investment for early-stage research, particularly in areas directly relevant to our UnitingCare Health hospitals.

By supporting these exceptional projects, we ensure that essential research can progress toward securing additional funding and delivering impactful outcomes.



Associate Professor David Wong and Dr Sepinoud Firouzmand

Evaluating the added benefits of amyloid-PET scans in Alzheimer's disease assessment for early and accurate diagnosis.

I-MED Radiology Network at The Wesley Hospital



Dr Janine Porter-Steele and Professor Alexandra McCarthy

Aiming to test the feasibility of telehealthdelivered exercise therapy for cancer-treated ostomates, with a goal to improve their physical and emotional well-being.

The Wesley Hospital Choices Cancer Support Centre



Dr James Winearls and Professor John Fraser

Creating artificial intelligence solutions for the early detection of complications associated with mechanical ventilation.

Intensive Care Unit, St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital



Dr Luke Garske and Professor Ian Stewart

Exploring the acceptability and feasibility of inspiratory muscle threshold load training after surgical procedures for malignant pleural effusion.

The Wesley Hospital



Professor John Fraser and Associate Professor Kirsty Short

Pioneering research analysing Spanish Flu tissue from 1918, using cutting edge spatial biology tools at the Queensland Spatial Biology Centre to advance pandemic protection for youth.

St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital, The University of Queensland



Dr Christopher Raffel and Professor John Fraser

Focused on developing advanced cardiac assessment techniques to enhance treatment outcomes for patients undergoing transcatheter edge-to-edge repair.

St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital

Our giving community

In this year of progress and innovation, we are deeply grateful to all our supporters who have furthered our work through their generosity.

Philanthropy remains the cornerstone of our work empowering us to drive meaningful change and advance our shared vision for a healthier future.

Every donation, small or big is helping us deliver our mission of encouraging, supporting and facilitating clinicians and other health professionals to undertake medical and health

A Special Thank You to:

Supporters:

Dr John Allan and Dr Janet Allan

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Mick Cranny

Dr Jon Douglas AM

Louise Etlin

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Dr Troy Gianduzzo and Karelia Gianduzzo

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Dr Tony Rafter

research to improve patient care and quality of life.

impactful philanthropic partnerships and the joy of

As we look to the future, our focus on building

Only by working together, can we continue to

reality, and deliver life-changing outcomes for the

Please know that each contribution has made a

push boundaries, transform bold ideas into

giving back has never been stronger.

communities we serve.

significant difference.

Peter Robinson

Rob Ross

Cheryl Skene

Dr Duncan Walker

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The Donald and Joan Wilson Foundation

Gifts in Wills and Memorial Donations

This year, we had the honour of receiving significant gifts from some supporters who included Wesley Research Institute in their Wills. We extend our deepest condolences and heartfelt gratitude to their families and loved ones. Additionally, we are thankful to the growing number of supporters who have shared their plans to leave a gift in their will that will help advance our research in the years to come.

- The Estate of the late Michael Burke
- The Estate of the late Melda Markwell

The power of giving

For more than 13 years, Meg (Margaret) from Auchenflower, has been part of the Wesley Research Institute regular giving family who help sustain our vital research through monthly donations.

In 2007, Meg underwent heart bypass surgery at The Wesley Hospital and couldn't speak more highly of the care she received. During her recovery, Meg met many people going through similar health journeys at the hospital's cardiac gym, some of which became good friends. So much so that almost 17 years later, the group still gets together for regular workouts at a PCYC gym.

"They have become precious to me. They are an eclectic group from different backgrounds, but we're connected because of our experience at The Wesley", explains Meg.

The Wesley became Meg's second home from 2009 to 2019, when she volunteered in the hospital's cardiac ward to help ease patients worries and show them that there is life after heart surgery.

During her 10+ years volunteering at The Wesley, Meg was introduced to WRI through a friend who worked here. Soon after attending one of our events, Meg was inspired to become a supporter and for the past 13 years has been donating monthly to allow us the certainty to innovate and plan ahead.

they get. I donate to help researchers get closer to finding cures for terrible diseases, being able to claim my donations on tax is a bonus!", says Meg.



We are incredibly lucky to have a community of people who commit a small amount each month, like Meg, enabling more long-term planning for a greater impact. For more information on becoming a regular donor please email giving@wesleyresearch. org.au, scan the QR code or visit:

www.wesleyresearch.org.au/get-involved/donate

Commitment to Professional Standards

As organisational members of the Fundraising Institute Australia (FIA), we are dedicated to upholding the highest standards of practice in the sector. This membership underscores our commitment to self-regulation and adherence to the FIA Code of Conduct, ensuring that our fundraising practices are ethical, transparent and aligned with best practices.

SCAN



Fundraising



"I'm a great believer in research and education and I'm very proud to be able to help through my monthly donations. The advancement of research is tricky and so dependent on the money

2024-2026 Strategy

Our 2024-2026 Strategy marks an exciting new chapter for Wesley Research Institute, built on the collective insights of our stakeholders.

This ambitious roadmap reflects our commitment to driving innovation and impact, with a focus on advancing high-impact research and fostering collaboration across healthcare sectors.

With a clear vision for the future, WRI is poised to continue delivering transformative research that benefits communities across Queensland and beyond.

As we continue to implement our strategy, we are charting an exciting new direction that will underpin our growth over the next few years. Our focus on innovation, research engagement, and our people will ensure we are positioned for future impact and long-term sustainability

We are: person centred / agile / curious / collaborative / accountable / respectful. We are a leading research institute known for high impact health and medical research outcomes and social contribution.

- Andrew Barron, CEO



People and Culture/Committees

Our board and its committees play a crucial role in upholding the highest standards of governance arrangements and practices to maintain compliance with regulatory requirements and sector practice and to ensure organisational objectives.



Executive Leadership Team



A CONTRACTOR

Andrew Barron Chief Executive Officer

Leading the Executive Leadership Team, Andrew is the Chief Executive Officer at Wesley Research Institute. Andrew is responsible for the achievement of the strategic goals of Wesley Research Institute and oversees its various operations.



As the Chief Financial Officer, Nicole is responsible for the overall financial management of Wesley Research Institute. Nicole plays a vital role in facilitating economic sustainability, encouraging efficient use of financial resources, and contributing to corporate strategy.

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Develop commercial partnerships by undertaking

research that has high value

to the community.



Sherman Leung Head of Research Operations

Sherman is the Head of Research Operations at Wesley Research Institute and is responsible for the strategic planning and operation of the Clinical Trials Centre, WRI Biobank, Research Office and Research Programs.



David Sloan Head of Philanthropy

David is the Head of Philanthropy at Wesley Research Institute and is committed to advancing the organisation's goals by cultivating strategic partnerships, implementing effective fundraising strategies, and fostering a culture of philanthropy.

Financial summary

Income

Total Revenue in 2023-24 was \$5.4M, compared to \$5.2M in 2022-23.

- **41%** Gifts, Donations & Sponsorships
- **7%** Grants
- **6%** Bequests
- **16%** Fee for Service Income
- **30%** Investment Income



Expenditure

Total expenditure for the 2023-24 year was \$6.1M, relative to \$5.1M in 2022-23.

The total reported deficit was \$759,000 compared to a surplus of \$171,000 in 2022-23.

- 85% Research
- **2%** Investment Activity
- **10%** Fundraising & Marketing
- **3%** Corporate Services



Research Expenditure



Assets

Total assets as of 30 June 2024 were \$25M, relative to \$25.5M in 2022-23.

Total liabilities were \$1.3M, with net assets totalling \$23.8M as of 30 June 2024.



33% Property, Plant & Equipment

Research Funding Commitments

Wesley Research Institute has \$2.7M in research funding commitments to Boardapproved research projects.











Our vital work starts with your generosity

The people we help through our translational research and Clinical Trials Centre, rely on the generous support of the community. By making a donation or setting up monthly donations, you will play a vital part in ensuring more patients get effective treatment, leading to improved outcomes and more time with their loved ones.

I would like to give a gift of:					
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<u>or</u>	I would like to make a monthly	/ donation of \$			
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Card hold	ler's Name:		Signature:		
	Bank transfer Reference: Your surname	BSB: 014 272 A/C Number: 8365 649 6	A/C Name: Wesley Research In Bank: ANZ Bank	stitute Ltd	
	Phone (07) 3721 1500 Mon- Fri 8:30am to 4:30pm	Website (or s wesleyresear (get your recei	can QR code) cch.org.au/get-involved/donate ipt straight away via email)		
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Pleas upda	e ensure I continue to receive research tes from Wesley Research Institute	and fundraising	Wesley Research Inst	titute	
Tha	nk you for seeing the value	of our work!	PU Box 499, Toowong	J VLD 4066	







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