

# PERKINS NEWS

MARCH 2021

**“The future  
should not be  
something that  
just happens.  
We should  
work towards  
the type of  
future we wish  
to live in.”**

**HARRY PERKINS AO**

**Welcome to your  
Collaboration issue.**



HARRY PERKINS INSTITUTE  
OF MEDICAL RESEARCH

**ALONE WE CAN DO SO LITTLE,  
TOGETHER WE CAN DO SO MUCH.**



# Welcome to your Collaboration issue



**The Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research was named in honour of the late Harry Perkins AO, who played a pivotal role in its creation. Proudly West Australian, Harry was one of those rare individuals who, having identified a need, went out and did something about it.**

Harry's vision for the Perkins can be summed up in one word - collaboration. For him, it was about diverse disease researchers working side by side - cancer next to heart disease - next to rare genetic diseases. Because you never know when one conversation, one action, one idea could spark a breakthrough.

Today, the Perkins continues to honour Harry's legacy by extending this culture of collaboration to include you. You are integral to our ability to continue to research the diseases that affect most of our families.

Harry wasn't a scientist, but he understood that to advance medicine quickly, you need new ideas backed by strong advocates. Science and the community pushing forward together. You trust us to find the answers and we need you to support our efforts.



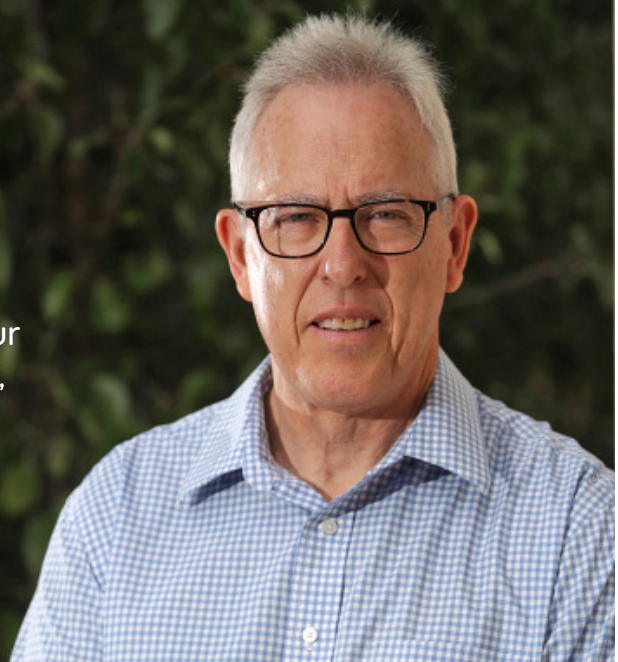
This issue is all about working together. Read about the power of collaboration and how you are driving research discoveries through your steadfast support of the Perkins.

*Thank you.*

## Professor Leedman joins Harry in Australia Day Honours

On Australia Day, Perkins Director Professor Peter Leedman was awarded an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO), a highly prestigious honour to recognise his distinguished service to medicine, health, medical research and tertiary education.

Will you join the staff and supporters of the Perkins in congratulating Peter's amazing contribution to WA science and health?



# Your support brings hope to families



## You'll be hard pressed to find a greater example of collaboration than Professor Nigel Laing AO and the families he's helped over the years.

Forty years hunting genetic diseases has provided long-awaited answers to families around the world.

You can imagine how Olivia Parkinson must have felt after losing two baby sons without warning or answers. "It nearly broke me," Olivia says.

Her grief was compounded by the mystery surrounding why she and her husband Charles lost Edward at 10 days old in 2011 followed by George who was stillborn five years later.

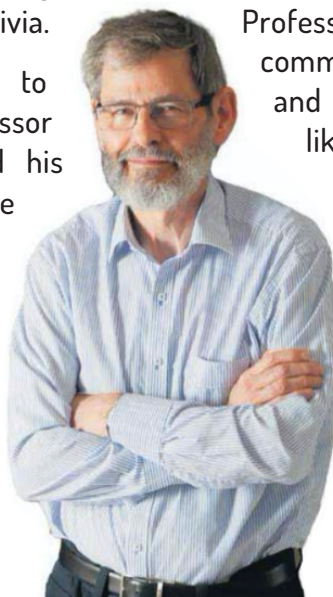
An unknown genetic condition was suspected to be the cause of George's death. Without knowing what it was and worrying it may reoccur, the Melbourne couple made the tough decision to not have more children.

Imagine if you were given a five per cent chance of finding out what it was that took away your precious child?

"We were left in a place where we thought we could never have another child," says Olivia.

But then the family was referred to world-renowned geneticist Professor Nigel Laing at the Perkins. Nigel and his 15-strong team of genetic disease detectives, galvanised via strong global collaborations, works to solve tragic mysteries suffered by families like the Parkinsons.

They analysed DNA from Edward, George and the rest of the family and, thanks to their global network of collaborators, compared it with the DNA profiles from similar cases around the world.



Almost a year after George's death, the team identified the mutation that caused both sons' deaths in a gene affecting the ability to relax or contract muscles.

The discovery enabled the Parkinson family to confidently have another child who would be unaffected by the disease.



Olivia with daughter Ellie

This trust in the science and commitment to helping in whatever ways they could ensured the Parkinsons were active participants in finding answers that eventually led to the birth of their beautiful baby girl.

Professor Laing has a strong base of loyal, committed supporters who follow his work and regularly contribute to his lab because, like Olivia and her family, they understand the importance of providing answers for families who desperately need them.

"I am humbled and thankful for the donors to my work," says Professor Laing.

"Your support gives my lab reassurance so we can continue to work on discovering more genes and providing more answers to the community. Thank you. You know who you are!"



## Margaret's 'cancer makeover'

**It's people like YOU and Margaret Hemsley right here in WA, who impact global research discoveries.**

Perkins supporter Margaret Hemsley, a medical professional for over 30 years, lived through being a cancer patient and became a Walker in the Perkins Walk for Women's Cancer directly after finishing radiotherapy. She is also a proud member of The Spark – the Perkins Institute's popular monthly giving program.

At the 2018 Breast Cancer Dragon Boat Festival in Florence, Italy, Margaret looked out over a crowd of 3,500 participating breast cancer survivors and thought, "If this was 1968, all of us would be dead – medical research has made it possible for us to survive."



She says, "I was literally made over by cancer and research. I came out of the treatment much fitter, committed to changes in lifestyle and supporting medical research at the Perkins."



When Margaret began her nursing training in 1968, diagnostic cancer tools were basic and there was little talk about preventative measures, early intervention or managing health and lifestyle.

Even in the late nineties, working as part of the cancer facilities development team at St John of God Subiaco, Margaret recalls that the best that people could hope for – in most cases – was more time with their loved ones.

Fourteen years after leaving the health industry, Margaret attended the same cancer facility she'd helped set up at St John's for her own breast cancer treatment. She found herself being treated by a team of specialists using research-backed treatment plans and was astonished that doctors now talked of cures.

"I am now a six-year cancer survivor, and I silently thank people at the Perkins like Director, Professor Peter Leedman, and his teams of researchers," says Margaret.

She learned of the Perkins, as many people do, through a brochure she'd picked up in her oncologist's waiting room. It included information on the Walk for Women's Cancer and she said to her good friend, Jo 'we should do this!' She agreed on the spot.

"My radiotherapy specialist had also mentioned that research was showing that exercise and healthy life choices were beneficial during and after treatment."



"Three weeks after finishing my radiotherapy in early 2015, I participated in the Walk with Jo and my son Daniel to raise funds for the Perkins."

While walking is unsuitable at this point for Margaret, she says that "active support serves as a statement for research." So, she found another way to be involved.

"This is why I joined the Perkins 'Spark' program as a member and monthly giver – I am committed to ongoing support for Perkins in any way I can."

"The treatment available today thanks to medical research, has given me the joy of becoming a grandmother two years ago."

"In the times past, I may not have survived long enough to have this wonderful experience," she says.

You can become a member of The Spark for as little as \$15 a month. The program is tax deductible and allows the Perkins to plan ahead – safe in the knowledge that a kind group of people are consistently backing WA research and supporting our future sustainability.

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"If this was 1968, all of us would be dead – medical research has made it possible for us to survive."

## YOU CAN SPARK HOPE FOR THOSE WHO NEED IT MOST.



**The Spark is a group of like-minded Perkins supporters just like you who understand the importance of uninterrupted research to guarantee better health outcomes. Established just over a year ago, the Spark community has grown to over 400 members. Will you become part of The Spark?**

Spark members contribute a manageable monthly gift – the amount is entirely up to you – to support WA medical research. Your generosity fuels vital research and the collaboration between Spark members and the Perkins allows the researchers to focus on the science not just on grant writing.

To join The Spark, call Amelia on 08 6151 1220 or email [amelia@perkins.org.au](mailto:amelia@perkins.org.au) today.

# Are you a BioDiscovery Centre fan?



If you or your kids have ever visited the Lotterywest BioDiscovery Centre at the Perkins, you know what a remarkable place it is. This fully functioning lab offers you a chance to be a researcher for a day.

A genius collaboration between university students with a passion for STEM education and high school students and community groups is providing a window into the wonders of medical research.

Bek James first heard about the Lotterywest BioDiscovery Centre through her mother, a high school science teacher who regularly brings students to the Perkins.

"When my mum initially told me about the work the Perkins does with schools in particular, I was eager to get involved in any way that I could!" says Bek.

She immediately got in contact with Community Education Manager, Judi Lane and began volunteering shortly after.

"My time in the BioDiscovery Centre was so enjoyable that I decided to complete a work placement unit as part of my university degree. Then I was lucky enough to be offered a job as a lab demonstrator working primarily with high school students," says Bek.

"There's often a misconception that medical research is conducted by crazy scientists,

in isolation, in dark and gloomy basements – so it's a fantastic opportunity to show the community how exciting and important medical research is!"

Similarly, Lein Dofash first joined the BioDiscovery Centre as a volunteer while studying at Curtin.

"It's incredible to be part of a strategic program that upskills everyone involved. Seeing the students' progression throughout the term and knowing you've played a part in that is very rewarding!"

Lein's volunteering for the BioDiscovery Centre provided her with the opportunity to attend Perkins networking events and connect with some inspiring staff and researchers. She's now completing her Masters alongside Professor Nigel Laing AO and Dr Gina Ravenscroft's team with a focus on disease gene discovery. Lein is also now a BioDiscovery Centre lead demonstrator!

Collaboration is key when it comes to unlocking a young mind's love of research. By allowing students and the community to immerse themselves in the experience for the day, the Perkins is creating lasting memories that may lead to groundbreaking discoveries. Who knows, your children or grandchildren might?

Your donations contribute to ensuring the BioDiscovery Centre can continue to host young and inquiring minds who may one day in the future be responsible for a breakthrough we've all been waiting for.

**To experience the BioDiscovery Centre for yourself, go to [perkins.org.au](http://perkins.org.au) and search BioDiscovery.**

**Community groups:** Experience a talk & tour and "Live in the Lab" experience.

**Teachers:** Book an experience for your high school.

**Individual students:** Enrol in a school holiday or immersion lab program.

*Bookings subject to availability – it's very popular!*



# Your Brave Shave for cancer research



**How far would you go to end cancer? Meet seven courageous individuals who recently lost their locks to help boost a cancer research breakthrough at the Perkins.**

Late last year, Perth Rotary and Crawley Rotary joined forces to hold the 'Bald and the Beautiful Brave Shave' to benefit the Perkins.

In February last year, Perth Rotary Club President, Jill Dawson committed to a group head shave with President of Crawley Rotary, Karin Cable and members from both clubs. "Five days later I found myself in a doctor's surgery being told I had cancer," Jill says.

While Jill's cancer journey has not been smooth for her, it brought an extraordinary determination to help others.

"The Brave Shave for me is personal. I saw it as an opportunity to lead by example and to make a difference.

"For me personally I want to have a hands-on practical difference. I don't want to raise awareness, I actually want to do something."

On 26 November 2020, each of the seven wonderful Brave Shavers underwent their head shave, raising an amazing total of \$113,510 to help Perkins researchers develop innovative new treatments for our family, friends and loved ones facing cancer.

Thank you to each and every Brave Shaver who committed to shaving their heads and raising funds for the Perkins to help keep families like yours together for longer.

## You can support the Perkins and help your health.

**This year, you can commit to a happier, healthier future by joining our free Habit Tracker program.**

Designed by the Perkins, this program guides you through the process of breaking bad habits and developing healthier new ones. Each month, challenge yourself to improve on one habit such as doing regular exercise, drinking more water or getting better sleep.

Take the first step and sign up today at [perkins.org.au](https://perkins.org.au)







# Dates for your calendar



## Walk for Women's Cancer Saturday 29 May

### Want to support WA women's cancer research right here at the Perkins?

You can help beat women's cancers this year by joining the Walk for Women's Cancer. It will be held on Saturday 29 May 2021, with 100% of donations supporting medical research at the Perkins. All Walkers have the option to complete their 35km challenge over the 7 days leading up to Saturday 29 May, or on the day itself. You will be supporting breast and ovarian cancer research at the Perkins. Register or donate today at [WalkForWomensCancer.org.au](http://WalkForWomensCancer.org.au)



## MACA Cancer 200 Ride for Research Sat 16 & Sun 17 October

### It's a milestone year for Australia's most loved cycling fundraiser.

The MACA Cancer 200 is turning 10 and we'd love you to join us for the celebrations. On the weekend of 16 & 17 October 2021, over 1200 riders will line up at Optus Stadium. You'll ride down to Mandurah where you'll camp overnight (tents and dinner are on us!). And then you'll ride back up to Perth the next day – finishing right here at the Perkins for a birthday blowout. This event is much loved and life changing. Will you help beat cancer on your bike this year? Register or donate today at [cancer200.org.au](http://cancer200.org.au)



## Perkins Community Q&As

### Look out for some very interesting Community Q&A talks later this year.

**May** You can listen to a panel of Perkins experts discussing the 'Importance of Nature in Medical Research.'

**August** We will bring together a group of young researchers eager to share their experiences of medical research with high school students looking to get into the profession.

**September** The Perkins biomedical engineers will be centre stage sharing with you their amazing out of the box solutions to some of our most pressing medical issues.



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### Get in touch

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