Perkins News

AUTUMN EDITION 2026

You're ensuring the future of medical research is bright.

HARRY PERKINS INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH

A note from Peter.

You're in for a treat in this issue of *Perkins News*. It's a bumper read featuring brilliant researchers, heartfelt supporter stories and some new faces you might spot around town.

Inside, you'll meet our newest Chair in Melanoma, Professor Elin Gray, as well as our new *MACA Cancer 200* Safe Harbour Fellow, Dr Rowan Sanderson. You'll also find a humble and personal reflection from one of our esteemed researchers, Professor Daniel Fatovich, on why research truly matters.

We're also sharing the remarkable story of a mother and daughter who are coming together because of a breast cancer experience to raise funds for women's cancer research.

I'm delighted to announce that the Perkins is entering a new era of supporter engagement with the introduction of our mobile fundraising team. They'll be visiting WA suburbs to talk with people like you about supporting local medical research.

There are so many incredible projects underway at the Perkins in 2026 – most of which wouldn't be possible without your generous support. Thank you for backing world-class research tackling the toughest diseases and helping keep families together longer.

Professor Peter Leedman AO
CEO, Researcher, Doctor and Donor

Knock, knock!

Coming to a neighbourhood near you.

This year, a team of passionate Perkins Community Champions have been knocking on doors and talking to the community about lifesaving research taking place right here in WA. The purpose? To connect, share stories and invite more people to be part of the journey to better treatments and cures.

The conversations have been a wonderful opportunity to share the inspiring work, discoveries and impact that researchers at the Perkins have on families.

The Perkins is home to hundreds of talented and dedicated researchers tackling some of the world's deadliest illnesses. But WA receives a disproportionately small share of national medical research funding. WA receives fewer than four in every 100 grants awarded across Australia.

By connecting with the community, we aim to grow a network of generous supporters who believe in the power of medical research. Many choose to support with a monthly gift, providing steady funding to invest where the need is greatest and support bold new ideas. The core purpose of the Community Champions is to support this vision.

Thank you to those people we've already met – we're looking forward to welcoming you to the Perkins family.

Why research matters.

Professor Daniel Fatovich shares his insights into why medical research is essential and his hope for the future.

You're a clinician and a researcher, how did that happen?

At school, I wanted to be an astronaut, so I suppose I was always interested in science. Astronauts are explorers – and so are researchers. We explore to discover new knowledge and understand what makes things tick.

I loved being an emergency doctor, but I kept finding myself asking 'why'. Why did we treat people a certain way? Why weren't common practices questioned? Why couldn't we do things differently?

When I delved into the evidence, I often found there wasn't much behind some of our approaches in emergency medicine. That curiosity pushed me toward research – I wanted to answer the whys.

Failure is a learning experience in research. How do you approach it?

I tell people that the road to success is littered with failures. I've had countless failures and rejections. But this teaches you persistence and resilience. I love the story of WD-40. Why is it called that? Because the first 39 didn't work!

What is your greatest challenge in research?

Survival. Funding is scarce and extremely competitive, and without it, we can't achieve our goals. Another challenge is overcoming our natural reluctance to promote our work. Researchers aren't great self promoters!

What is your greatest achievement – so far?

Leading the National Health and Medical Research Council project, the Emerging Drugs Network of Australia (EDNA). EDNA functions as a national early-warning system that helps hospitals detect new, harmful or unusual drugs appearing in emergency departments. I've called it 'the most fabulous project of my career', and I mean it.

What is your hope for research in the next five years?

The future doesn't belong to me – it belongs to younger people. Mentoring talented young clinicians and researchers is incredibly fulfilling. Watching them grow and realise their potential is one of the greatest joys of my career. In five years, I hope they're well on their way to achieving far more than I ever did.

Every step matters for the people you love.

Kellie Fellows and daughter Olivia share a strong bond. In 2024, Olivia joined the *New Town Toyota Walk for Women's Cancer*, run by the Perkins to support her mum as she underwent breast cancer treatment. Kellie was so moved by the event that she took part the following year. In 2026, they'll walk side-by-side as the official Walk Ambassadors with their team, *Boobie Bunch*, to support vital breast and ovarian cancer research.

Olivia

Mum is one of the most important people in my life. She's my rock, my biggest supporter and the person who has always believed in me, even when I didn't believe in myself. Her love, patience and strength have shaped who I am. She's not just my mum – she's my hero, my role model, my comfort and my best friend. Her kindness has a way of making even the hardest days feel lighter.

When Dad told me she had been diagnosed with breast cancer, my heart dropped. For a moment, the world felt fragile. With my uncle passing from cancer only weeks before, fear hit me hard. I didn't know what to say, and the thought of losing her was overwhelming. I felt sadness, fear and helplessness, but also a deeper, fiercer love.

Throughout her treatments and surgeries, Mum showed extraordinary strength. I watched her face brutal side effects and emotional battles, yet she never stopped fighting. Even after treatment, recovery took time, but her resilience never wavered.

The Walk is important to me because every step is for Mum, for my uncle, and for all the brave women and families touched by cancer. It's backing the only thing that will help end cancer – research. Walking is connection, remembrance, hope – a way to honour those we love and stand with those still fighting.

Kellie

Walking into my appointment for my biopsy results, I already sensed I had breast cancer. After a long day of scans and multiple biopsies, no one hinted at anything, but my gut told me the truth. My mind went straight to my children, my husband, my parents and my sisters – hoping for a diagnosis I could survive so I could stay with them. The timing felt unbearable. We had lost my younger brother Neil to cancer just two weeks earlier, and the thought of putting my family through another battle was devastating. I knew too well the emotional toll it brings.

Chemotherapy was incredibly tough. The brainfog days during each cycle were the hardest – frustrating, emotional days when all I wanted was to sleep until I felt like myself again. The nausea after treatment and the deep bone pain were relentless. Even now, I still have days when the fog returns. Endocrine therapy brings daily leg and joint pain that never truly disappears. Exercise and all the walking I'm doing for training help, but I'm usually stiff and sore the next day and need time to recover.

The Walk means so much to me. I hope future cancer treatments continue to improve so more lives can be saved – far too many have already been lost. By walking, we're raising vital funds for the research at the Perkins, helping build a brighter future for those who will face a diagnosis.

I'm walking in honour of my brother Neil, who fought so bravely, and my Aunty Lilian, an inspiring breast care nurse who supported so many, including me. Their strength guides every step I take.

We'd love you to meet your...

Latest Safe Harbour Fellow.

Dr Rowan Sanderson has been announced as the recipient of the *MACA Cancer 200* Safe Harbour Fellowship, a three year program supporting early and mid career researchers. Rowan's Fellowship is fully funded by participants and donors of the *MACA Cancer 200 Ride for the Perkins*.

Trained as an electrical and electronic engineer, Rowan studies how tumour stiffness differs from healthy tissue – an important factor that can influence tumour growth, spread, treatment response and surgical outcomes. His work also helps surgeons identify clearer margins during tumour removal, reducing the likelihood that patients need additional surgery.

Rowan has helped develop, and is now applying, advanced imaging tools that create detailed 3D maps of tumour stiffness. These insights are improving our understanding of cancer progression and supporting the development of more accurate diagnostic techniques.

"I'm grateful to the riders in the Cancer 200 ride and their supporters for giving me this life-changing opportunity. It means I have peace of mind so that I can focus on making better cancer diagnostic tools faster."

Rowan joins the growing cohort of seven Perkins Safe Harbour Fellows supported by you.

New Melanoma Discovery Chair.

A big Perkins welcome to Professor Elin Gray, the new Melanoma Discovery Chair and the first joint appointment with Edith Cowan University (ECU).

An internationally recognised leader in melanoma research, Elin brings deep expertise in developing liquid biopsy technologies. These pioneering blood tests can detect and monitor cancer through tumour cells and DNA circulating in the bloodstream. They are less invasive and have the potential to identify cancer earlier and help clinicians better track disease progression and treatment response.

Elin also plays a leading role in the Western Australian Melanoma Initiative (WAMI), working to establish tumour-infiltrating lymphocyte (TIL) therapy in WA. This exciting, cutting-edge therapy takes your body's own cancer-fighting antibodies, duplicates them millions of times and puts them back into your body to fight cancer. This is a stellar example of the power of personalised medicine.

For Elin, the inspiration behind her work is deeply personal.

"Over the many years of my research, I've met many people affected by melanoma – either personally or through a loved one. Their stories remain my greatest source of inspiration."

Your impact - closer than you think and further than you'd imagine.

The BioDiscovery team in Jigalong, a remote community in the Pilbara region of Western Australia.

Western Australia is home to 1,133 schools. Some have as many as 3,000 students. Others have just two.

More than a third of these schools are in regional and remote communities. Some are so remote that commercial airlines and public roads can't safely reach them.

But talent, curiosity and promise are distributed equally, irrespective of where they live.

A spark of inspiration in a school student in Jigalong may lead to them making a discovery that will change lives.

That's why each year the Perkins BioDiscovery Team – a small group of in-house science educators – hits the road. If you can't come to the science, we'll bring the science to you.

Last year, the BioDiscovery Team at the Perkins travelled to 13 regional and remote communities – from Pemberton in the south-west, all the way to Wyndham in the far north. The team brings hands-on science experiments and education experiences directly to primary and secondary students.

The exciting part? The impact is instant!

Students from Merredin Senior High School who took part in BioDiscovery Centre workshops in 2024 have now enrolled in biomedical science degrees at the University of Western Australia (UWA). They are on their way to one day possibly discovering new treatments for cancer, heart disease, diabetes and rare genetic diseases right here at the Perkins.

This is just one of many stories, illustrating the power of education and the impact it will have on the future of medical research – and it's only possible because of community support and people like you.

Vital heart health checks anywhere, anytime.

Dr Nikhilesh Bappoo, Professor Girish Dwivedi from the Perkins, and a team of biomedical engineers, scientists and data analysts, created Lubdub.

Lubdub is a Heart Health in a Box solution which includes three critical heart function tests – an electrocardiogram (ECG), cardio biomarkers and an echocardiogram. Data from these tests is instantaneously acquired and indexed using advanced data analytics before being sent to specialists who review the results for screening and diagnosis. This means doctors and health care providers in remote locations have equal access to the best technology for their patients' health.

Finding your vein first time, every time!

How many times have you had to go for a blood test where they had trouble finding your vein, resulting in painful bruising?

Dr Nikhilesh Bappoo, a former biomedical engineer researcher at the Perkins, invented a small device that uses patented ultrasound technology to map and visualise veins deeper under your skin. This will help doctors and nurses in every hospital, clinic and surgery around the world insert IVs much more easily, saving time, but most importantly, saving their patients from unnecessary stress.

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Fighting deadly infections in hours instead of days.

Did you know that more than 1.3 million people died from antimicrobial infections last year?

Getting the right antibiotic is a time-critical emergency, but current pathology tests can take up to five days to return results. Dr Kieran Mulroney from the Translational Renal Research lab at the Perkins has invented an AI-powered tool using FloCAST™ diagnostic technology that can deliver results in hours, not days, giving doctors the exact combination of antibiotics to prescribe, saving millions of lives a year.

Better surgery outcomes for breast cancer patients.

Surgeons at Perth's Fiona Stanley Hospital were the first in the world to treat a breast cancer patient with a new specialised camera invented by researchers in the BRITELab at the Perkins.

The camera uses a combination of optical coherence tomography imaging and elastography to help surgeons tell the difference between dense cancer tissue and softer healthy tissue, to ensure they remove enough of the tumour in one operation. This breakthrough discovery will save a quarter of breast cancer patients from having to have repeat surgery.

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Working together to find answers for you.

Perkins researcher Gavin Monahan travelled to India earlier this year to participate in the annual *Undiagnosed Hackathon.*

This remarkable event brings together around a hundred researchers, AI scientists, clinicians and families. Over several intensive days the group worked together to find answers for families living with an undiagnosed disease.

Working alongside other experts in the field of rare genetics, Gavin provided bioinformatics support and variant curation – the painstaking process of pinpointing the exact genetic change causing each person's condition.

Of the 25 cases reviewed, six families received a diagnosis on the very first day. A seventh followed the next day, with three more strong leads emerging since.

For one young girl with a severe neurodevelopmental disorder, receiving a diagnosis meant identifying a treatment option. Thanks to the work done at the Hackathon, she now has access to care that could transform her life.

This is what your generosity makes possible – answers, hope and in some cases, a completely different future.

Calling all medical research enthusiasts!

Are you passionate about medical research and want to know about the latest developments and breakthroughs?

This year, the Perkins launched Research Matters, a bimonthly medical research e-newsletter. In it, we share the latest news and breakthroughs in medical research from right here in WA and across the globe, and the stories of the incredible researchers making it happen. Visit **perkins.org.au** and scroll to the bottom of the page to subscribe.

You're powering rare disease research.

The last day of February every year is *International Rare Disease Day* – a powerful reminder of the more than 7,000 different rare diseases and an estimated two million-plus Australians living with the long-term impacts every day.

In fact, more people are living with a rare disease than people living with Asthma.

Dr Joshua Clayton, a researcher in the Perkins Rare Disease Genetics and Functional Genomics Program, sat down to share his work and his hopes for rare disease research in the future.

What kind of research do you do?

I research a class of rare diseases called congenital myopathies, which are muscle diseases that are present from birth and typically quite severe. I aim to try to develop cell models so that we can better understand these diseases and advance treatments for them.

Can you share something you're proud of?

I'm particularly proud of bringing new technologies and techniques to our team that have allowed us to do modelling of 3D muscle tissues using patient cells.

What is your hope for rare diseases?

My ultimate hope is that there would be treatment options for all rare diseases. Realistically, that's probably not possible, but I really hope that we can get to a point where we do have treatment options for a lot of the diseases that are very severe or common and then move from there to tackle some of the harder ones.

Is there something you'd like to say to the supportive community?

I'd like to say a big thank you. Our team has been very fortunate to get funding from patients, families and the Perkins' community. This has really helped us maintain and build on our work. This ongoing support has allowed us to maintain continuity and drive the work forward in a meaningful way.

Dates for your calendar.

02 May

New Town Toyota Walk for Women's Cancer

HBF Run for a Reason
24 May 2026

Supporter Tour & Tea
18 Jun 2026

Run For Research
1-31 Jul 2026

RUN FOR RESEARCH

TCS Sydney Marathon
30 Aug 2026

tcs SYDNEY MARATHON presented by asics

Supporter Tour & Tea
16 Sep 2026

17-18 Oct

MACA Cancer 200 - Ride for The Perkins

Silver Linings Lunch
19 Nov 2026

Silver LINING

21-22 Nov

Perkins Plunge

Supporter Sundowner
3 Dec 2026

Scan for more information.

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