

impossible

NEWS | SPRING 2025

World-first trial

Hope on the horizon

Closer to home

Trial has great impact

Skin in the game

Fire fighters help out



theAlfred
FOUNDATION



Director's report

Patrick Baker

As always, it's an exciting time at The Alfred, and I'm pleased to welcome you to another edition of impossible.

With major developments unfolding across research and treatment, we are witnessing the impact of new discoveries and innovative approaches that are pushing the boundaries of what is possible in care, every day.

This momentum is driven by a powerful culture of curiosity and commitment, where our staff are continually encouraged to go further, think bigger and strive for better outcomes. These breakthroughs aren't just happening in our labs or clinics, they are transforming lives.

Our Occupational Respiratory Clinic is embarking on a world-first trial aimed at halting the progression of the deadly lung disease, silicosis.

You may also have previously heard about the bioengineered skin being developed at the Victorian Adult Burns Service, for patients with complex major burns – something which is being bolstered thanks to some targeted support.

And then there is the vastly quicker treatment now available for patients with prostate cancer in the Gippsland area, which has greater availability thanks to local fundraisers.

But none of this would be possible without the remarkable generosity and commitment of our supporters, including at events such as the recent Run Melbourne, which attracted a record turnout for Team Alfred.

On behalf of our team, thank you for standing with us. Your support doesn't just help us deliver better care – it inspires us to keep reaching for what's next.

If you have any feedback for us, it is always welcome. Please email us at foundation@alfred.org.au or phone (03) 9076 3222.

Warmest regards,

Patrick Baker
Group Director, Philanthropy and Health Innovation, Alfred Health

Cover image: Members of the Fire Fighters Charity Fund got a first-hand look at some of the developments at the Victorian Adult Burns Service at The Alfred.

Lifesaving breakthrough for leukaemia patients

Leukaemia patients who undergo stem cell transplants may now be three times more likely to be cancer-free and avoid deadly complications post-procedure, thanks to a clinical trial led by clinicians at The Alfred.

Blood stem cell transplants are often lifesaving for leukaemia patients, but can be high risk, especially in the first year after transplant.

The breakthrough, which has changed 40 years of standard practice, significantly reduces the risk of graft-versus-host-disease (GVHD) and death, Alfred haematologist and senior bone marrow transplant physician Professor David Curtis said.

"These results are game-changing for stem cell transplant patients, offering a new standard of care for prevention of GVHD for patients with aggressive blood cancers undergoing transplant from a matched related blood stem cell donor," Prof Curtis said.

"The trial showed the new treatment combination is simple, safe and more effective than current methods in preventing GVHD, which contributes to death or life-long illness in 20 per cent of patients undergoing a blood stem cell transplant."

Led by Prof Curtis, Director of Malignant Haematology Research at the Australian Centre for Blood Diseases, Monash University, with Alfred haematologist Dr Sushrut Patil, the trial ran across 10 hospitals in Australia and New Zealand, with hospitals adopting the new treatment as standard care for matched related stem cell patients.

The trial was funded by the Australian Government's Medical Research Future Fund, the Cancer Society of New Zealand and the Auckland Medical Research Fund, and was sponsored by the Australian Leukaemia and Lymphoma Group, a local not-for-profit blood cancer clinical trial research group.

Professor David Curtis said the trial results are "game-changing" for patients.



Trial hope for silicosis sufferers around the world

New hope is on the horizon for advanced silicosis sufferers, with experts at The Alfred set to embark on a world-first trial aiming to halt progression of the deadly lung disease.

The trial has been made possible by a three-year funding commitment from Zaparas Lawyers.

"The funding has enabled us to undertake this important research and may have huge benefit for Victorians and others impacted by silicosis around Australia and the world," Dr Ryan Hoy, lead respiratory clinician at The Alfred's Occupational Respiratory Clinic, said.

Respiratory specialists at The Alfred are investigating whether the use of a targeted anti-inflammatory drug is the key to turning the tables on the debilitating illness, hoping it will suppress and ultimately stop inflammation in the lungs caused by inhaled silica particles, he said.

Since 2019, more than 200 workers in Victoria, predominantly men in their 20s and 30s, have been diagnosed with silicosis, primarily as a result of exposure to silica dust generated during the manufacturing and installation of artificial stone kitchen benchtops.

The physical and psychosocial impacts of silicosis can be debilitating, with many patients unable to return to work due to shortness of breath, chest pain, extreme fatigue and persistent cough.



Dr Ryan Hoy (standing) with Kehela Vandenburg and Yianni Zaparas of Zaparas Lawyers.

There are currently no approved treatments for silicosis, which is why the team at The Alfred is continuing the fight to find one.

Zaparas Lawyers Partner, Yianni Zaparas, said his firm was proud to be supporting local research, and the health and safety of the community.

"To contribute in any way to the improvement of the wellbeing of individuals suffering from silicosis potentially around the world is humbling," he said.

The Alfred's Occupational Respiratory Clinic, which operates in partnership with WorkSafe Victoria, is an Australian-first clinic for workers exposed to silica or diagnosed with silicosis. It is the only service of its kind in a public hospital in Australia.

Community members seeking more information about the trial can email aorc.research@alfred.org.au

Thanks to our corporate sponsors



We were excited to welcome 3AW back to The Alfred hospital for this year's Critical Care Appeal. The live broadcast kicked off the event on 5 September, coinciding with the annual staff breakfast.

Thank you to 3AW alongside corporate partners WH Smith, Bulla Family Dairy, Jayco and QMS Media for their ongoing support.

This year the appeal focused on the groundbreaking ECPR (extracorporeal cardiopulmonary resuscitation)

pilot program, which brings lifesaving equipment from the hospital to the patient in the community – often their only chance of survival.

Thank you also to Bank First, for their ongoing support of the Alfred Nursing Scholarships and for the Nurses Lunch.

We would also like to acknowledge the contributions of Sage and Clare to our newly refurbished Eating Disorders Facility, and Adairs who have supported our Emergency and Trauma Centre.

If your organisation is interested in advancing medical research, investing in critical care and partnering on innovative health initiatives, please email The Alfred Foundation at foundation@alfred.org.au to get the conversation started.

Gippsland men get treatment closer to home



Hundreds of men with ‘intermediate-risk’ prostate cancer from across Gippsland will soon have greater access to the newest and arguably most convenient radiation therapy treatment option in the world – thanks in part to the fundraising efforts of the Latrobe’s Biggest Ever Blokes BBQ (LBEBBBQ).

The fundraising is supporting a joint Alfred Health and Latrobe Regional Health research project which is expected to provide vastly quicker treatment and positively impact local men and their families.

Every year more than 250 men in Gippsland are diagnosed with prostate cancer, with about half diagnosed as at ‘intermediate-risk’, which requires treatment through either surgery or radiation therapy.

Until recently, Gippsland men undergoing radiation therapy had to travel to the Gippsland Radiation Oncology (GRO) centre in Traralgon for 20 or more separate daily treatment sessions, each lasting 30-45 minutes, over a four-week period – something which is now vastly reduced.

Better understanding of radiobiology and advances in radiation technology have allowed shorter and more efficient courses for patients, while maintaining the safety and effectiveness of the longer version.

Dr Therese Kang, a Clinical Research Fellow who splits her time between The Alfred hospital in Melbourne and the GRO, said that about 30 men have had the reduced five-session treatment at GRO. It is hoped that a clinical trial involving only two treatments will be available in Gippsland before the end of the year.

“The traditional long treatment presents a significant challenge, with a lot of commuting time adding to the physical and emotional toll of cancer treatment,” she said.

Traralgon man Wayne Barnes, who was the first patient treated with prostate stereotactic ablative body radiotherapy (SABR) at GRO, said it was a huge help being able to access his treatment so close to home.

“It makes it easy for me, because I don’t have to travel as much and take time off work,” he said. “The treatment is easy and straightforward. I don’t feel any side effects over the course of treatments and after that.”

LBEBBBQ chairman Ian Nethercote said the group had raised more than \$1 million for research, awareness and support of prostate cancer patients in the Latrobe Valley Gippsland region since its inception in 2013.

“We have worked with The Alfred in the past regarding the incidence of prostate disease in men in the area, and now likewise with this current SABR technology,” he said.

“The objective is to provide a service to men and their families who are impacted by prostate disease without the need for extra travel and accommodation costs associated with travelling to Melbourne.”

LBEBBBQ funding supports essential trial setup, staff training and community engagement through their support for the program.

“Their contribution has been critical to accelerating the SABR rollout and new clinical trials locally, bringing cutting-edge treatments to regional individuals sooner than would otherwise be possible,” she said.

“I am deeply grateful for their support and proud to translate their support into tangible improvements in local patient experience and outcomes.”

Seeing the impact that the fundraising has brought to the region has been “extremely worthwhile”, Mr Nethercote said.

“We’ve seen the number of people here tested increase and that’s due to increased levels of awareness,” he said. “It’s also fair to say that we are detecting prostate disease

“Continued collaboration between community organisations, researchers and clinicians is essential”

Dr Therese Kang, Clinical Research Fellow

earlier than before, which is important if we are to minimise its impact and hopefully eliminate it before it has detrimental impacts on the people involved.”

Dr Kang encourages anyone in the Gippsland area diagnosed with prostate cancer to meet with radiation oncologists to discuss SABR options and clinical trial participation.

“Continued collaboration between community organisations, researchers and clinicians is essential if we are to advance prostate cancer care in regional Australia,” she said.

Donate today

Scan the QR code or head to donate.alfredfoundation.org.au



Above image: Dr Therese Kang and Professor Wee Loon Ong with members of the Latrobe Biggest Ever Blokes BBQ at their recent event.



Dr Therese Kang and Professor Wee Loon Ong with patient Wayne Barnes (centre), who was the first person to receive the treatment in the area.

New skin potential exciting for burns patients

A glimpse of an exciting future for patients with complex major burns injuries via bioengineered skin is more advanced than ever before thanks to a burgeoning partnership between the Victorian Adult Burns Service (VABS) at The Alfred and the Fire Fighters Charity Fund (FFCF).

Bioengineered skin – a breakthrough more than 10 years in the making when first used on a patient in 2023 – is the focus of an ongoing trial at VABS, led by reconstructive plastic surgeon at The Alfred, Associate Professor Heather Cleland.

The Alfred is already a world-leader in burns treatment, innovation and development, and projects such as this only further the impact and benefits that patients and staff can experience.



Members of the Fire Fighters Charity Fund on a tour of the Victorian Adult Burns Service.



Despite many advances in treatment options, the traditional split skin graft as a main method of closing burn wounds has not changed in more than 150 years. For those patients needing something better suited to deep burns, this is where engineered skin sheets are starting to show far-reaching effects.

In a first-of-its-kind phase 1 clinical trial, a Melbourne patient had burn wounds repaired using The Alfred bioengineered skin in late 2024, decreasing the need for skin grafting. A major step forward in the treatment of burns, patients' extensive full thickness burns are successfully treated with new skin grown from their own skin cells in a laboratory based at The Alfred.

This trial, a collaboration between The Alfred and Monash University, is funded through the Medical Research Future Fund.

"Almost half of severe burns survivors live with pain and disability caused by scarring and infection, made worse by the need to use traditional skin grafts," A/Prof Cleland said.

"With this technique, we are cultivating skin that is practical and safe, thereby eliminating the need for grafting using the patient's unburnt skin for donor sites. This will significantly improve the outcomes for patients with very serious burns."

Currently, it takes four weeks to produce enough skin for one patient while they stabilise in hospital. Thanks to the support of the FFCF, the trial can expand, forging new paths in burns care and offering hope to patients with severe burns.

"The donation has allowed us to expand our manufacturing capacities and treat more than one patient at a time, which is huge – because we don't know when the next patient will come through our door," Group Leader at the Skin Bioengineering Laboratory, A/Prof Akbarzadeh, said. "We are grateful and honoured to receive this support from the FFCF – we feel that they understand the problem and are a big supporter of burns research and treatment."

Further benefits include a 'smoother-looking' skin in the months post-grafting, while patients also experience 'less pulling' as they recover.

FFCF board member Andy Morton said being able to support projects such as this was one of the central tenets to the Fund's aims.

"About 80 per cent of our firefighters donate weekly, with the four key areas being cancer, children's health, mental health and burns," he said. "If everyone gives a little, it adds up to a lot."

"This research is an extension of why we do what we do as firefighters. Our firefighters are invested people who are part of the community and all the money that we raise goes back to the community."

"It is a source of great pride for all our board to show our members 'look what you've done'. It's amazing that we can see that difference in the community."

Above image: The FFCF are excited to support research that will ultimately go back to the community.

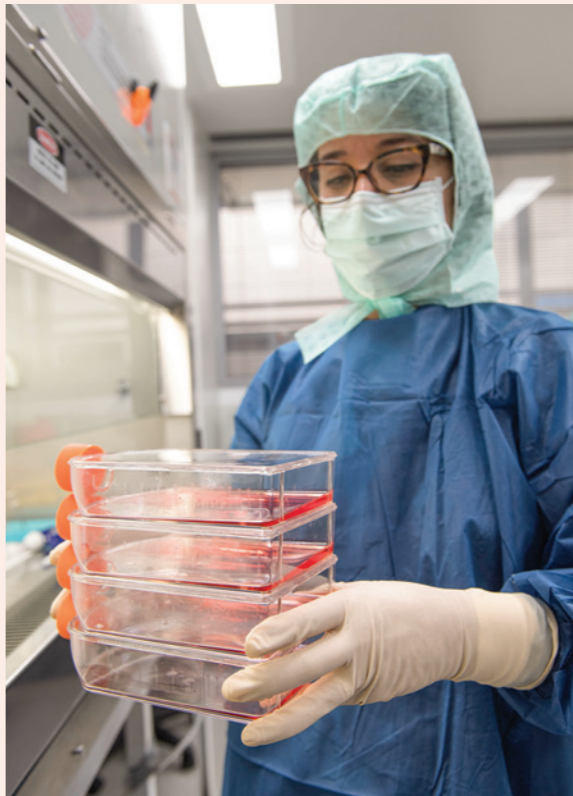
How the bioengineered skin is made

When trial patients with severe, full-thickness burns arrive (burns which have gone through the top two skin layers and into the underlying muscle, bone or fat below), a small sample of their healthy, unburnt skin is taken.

The patients' own skin cells are isolated and expanded, allowing them to form new skin in sheets in the lab's incubators.

From skin cell harvest, it takes about four weeks to grow the mature skin. While this is happening, the patients' burns are covered with another Australian invention, BTM (biodegradable temporising matrix), which acts like the top layer of skin and buys time for the engineered skin to be produced.

The engineered skin is then surgically grafted onto the patient, over the BTM matrix, which eventually breaks down.



It takes about four weeks to grow mature skin.

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*Our community making
the impossible possible*



Run Melbourne

It was a huge effort by all involved at Run Melbourne in July, as more than 300 people signed up to represent Team Alfred at the event in the half-marathon, 10km and 5km events.

With staff on hand at the marquee and at the finish line for our wonderful supporters, we were thrilled to see so many staff, patients and their families and friends.

More than \$32,000 was raised for The Alfred, and we thank all of our supporters for their efforts.



Mt Aspiring Challenge

It has been more than 20 years since David Roberts passed away from non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, when he was aged just 25.

Named after a New Zealand mountain that David summited, it is in his memory that his mother Betty has continued to raise funds, which is now approaching a milestone of half a million dollars.

The funds are directed towards blood cancer research at The Alfred.

To make a donation online to the Mt Aspiring Challenge, please visit fundraising.alfredfoundation.org.au/mt-aspiring-challenge



Dry July

Thank you to everyone and congratulations to all the Team Alfred members who took part in Dry July in 2025, as more than \$18,000 was raised.

An impressive 53 people signed up to raise funds for The Alfred Foundation to support programs for our patients, their families and carers in Alfred Cancer.

The money this year will go towards an energy pod for The Alfred – a comfy, calming spot for cancer patients and carers to recharge.

*Make the
impossible
possible*

See reverse for details on how to donate to The Alfred Foundation, or scan the QR code below



Are you interested in creating your own fundraiser?

Scan the QR code or head to **fundraising.alfredfoundation.org.au** and create your own page today.



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