

NEWSLETTER

JULY 2020



FROM THE ACVA LEADERSHIP

The ACvA leadership has been active in developing strategic alignment and partnerships to:

- Better communicate the impact of CVD and the importance of research, with partners such as the Heart Foundation and people affected by CVD.
- Understand the impact of CoVID-19 on patient's use of medical and related services such as pathology services, screening, skin checks and dental services through the Continuity of Care Collaboration (CCC), facilitated by Pathology Awareness Australia.
- Understand how to strengthen consumer engagement in research – talking with industry, patients and researchers to scope this issue
- Support and celebrate the success of our members under the first round of Mission funding and advocating for stronger alignment between funding and the Roadmap for cardiovascular health.

ACVA RESEARCH RESOURCES MAPPING PROJECT

Beginning last month, the ACvA initiated a formal stakeholder engagement process seeking feedback on a previously identified strategic need by leaders of the ACvA and other organisations, including the Australian and New Zealand Alliance for Cardiovascular Trials (ANZACT), the Australasian Stroke Trials Network (ASTN), the Australasian Kidney Trials Network (AKTN), and members of the pharmaceutical industry.



These stakeholders felt that there was a deficit in fully understanding the scope of Australian research resources available, which could be harnessed in support of the MRFF Mission for Cardiovascular Health, help develop more competitive award applications, improve the quality of science and its translation, drive economic outcomes, with the ultimate goal of improving cardiovascular health.

ACvA is initially engaging more than twenty of its members through formal interviews to better understand their opinions on what research “resources” should be mapped to enhance Australian research, execution and implementation. A formal analysis and report based on these interviews will be written and considered by the ACvA Board. This project is being conducted by Michael Patrick Gray.

If you are interested in learning more about this process, please contact the ACvA at acva@ozheart.org

SPOTLIGHT ON OUR FLAGSHIPS – CLINICAL TRIALS

This month's spotlight is on our Clinical Trials Flagship. This flagship is led by Professor Christopher Reid and Professor Vincent Thijs.

Flagship Directors



Professor Christopher Reid is a cardiovascular epidemiologist with appointments as Research Professor in both the School of Public Health at Curtin University and the School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University. His major research interests include clinical outcome registries, randomised controlled trials, and epidemiological cohort studies. He has over 450 peer-reviewed publications, many of which are in leading journals including the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Lancet*, *JACC* and *the BMJ*. He has been Study Director for the ANBP2 Study and currently a Chief Investigator for the ASPREE Study, the Statins in Reducing Events in the elderly Trial and the Australian arms of the HOPE-3, REACH and CLARIFY Registries. He is a Principal Investigator for the Victorian Cardiac Procedures Registry Project, the Melbourne Interventional Group (MIG) registry, and the ANZSCTS National Cardiac Surgical Registry and currently is Chair of the ANZACT Network. He participates as a WHO consultant for prevention of cardiovascular disease in Mongolia, Vietnam and the West Pacific region.



Professor Vincent Thijs is a stroke neurologist and clinician researcher specialised in stroke with more than 15 years of experience in the field. In his career as clinician he has lead stroke units in Belgium and is now the Head of Stroke at Austin Health. He is the co-head of the Stroke Theme at the Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health. His main research topics include acute stroke imaging, genetics of stroke, atrial fibrillation and cryptogenic stroke. He has published more than 200 papers in the field of stroke, including co-authorship in top tier journals NEJM, *Lancet*, *Nature Medicine*, *Nature Genetics*, and *Lancet Neurology* and >30 articles in the leading journal of the field *Stroke*. He is/has been on the steering committee of ten randomised clinical trials (MITI-IV, WAKEUP, SCAST, TASTE, AXIS2, REACT-AF, DIAGNOSE-AF, SOCRATES, RESPECT-ESUS, TEXAIS) and was national coordinator of more than ten trials both in the field of acute stroke and secondary prevention of stroke.

Nine members make up the Advisory Group from across the Clinical Trial sector, ranging from researchers, clinicians to industry members, many of whom have been involved or conducting trials of their own. Working together with the Flagship Directors, they bring their invaluable experience and knowledge to the Flagship.

The Flagship Advisory Group

John Beltrame



Jonathan Sen



Tony Keech



Seana Gall



Carmel Hawley



Ken Butcher



Bruce Neal



Anita van der Meer



Ana Svensson

By creating a collaborative, supportive and sustainable landscape for clinical trials, the Flagship aims to transform Australia into an attractive destination to conduct cardiovascular clinical trials and for the sector to flourish. Key roles for the Flagship include providing leadership, influence and advocacy to overcome existing barriers and challenges for conducting high quality cardiovascular clinical trials in Australia and to facilitate effective collaboration by building strong relationships with diverse stakeholders, understanding stakeholder capabilities, facilitating regular communication and collaboration opportunities and building cross-sector capacity.

Below are some of their thoughts and aspirations for the Flagship:

“The ACvA Clinical Trials Flagship provides Australian clinical cardiovascular researchers with the opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues thereby strengthening national clinical trial productivity and improving outcomes for our patients.” - Prof. John Beltrame.

“Clinical trials unlock the answers to questions we strive to comprehend. ACvA is key to establishing research networks to drive innovation across Australia, producing research that revolutionises healthcare worldwide.” - Dr Jonathan Sen

“The ACvA is playing an important role in advocating for cardiovascular research and clinical trials specifically through the Mission for Cardiovascular Health and Flagship. Clinical trials are the universally accepted way we can get high quality information on new ways to prevent and manage cardiovascular disease. It is critical that we boost investment in clinical trials in cardiovascular in Australia if we want to continue to drive down the incidence and improve the outcomes from CVD.” - Dr Seana Gall

“High-quality clinical trials provide the best evidence for advancing prevention and treatments for Cardiovascular diseases (CVD). People with kidney disease have a high burden of CVD and a cross-disciplinary collaborative approach as proposed by the Australian Cardiovascular Alliance will enable efficiency and effectiveness of trials in cardiovascular diseases.” - Prof Carmel Hawley

“Having improvement in patient outcomes at the core of cardiovascular research driven by both clinicians and the industry, it is very important to understand and address challenges in cardiovascular research in order to enable not only the development of new and innovative treatments and interventions but also earlier patient access to new treatments and improvement in CVD management.” - Dr Ana Svensson

“Investigator driven clinical trials are essential to addressing clinical questions that matter to patients and health care providers.” - Prof Ken Butcher

Celebrating the Clinical Trial Flagship initiatives and successes

Join Us – a new digital solution to recruitment challenges



Recruiting participants into their studies has long been a challenge for Australian researchers and has led to delays and occasional budget blow-outs in the pursuit of recruitment targets. The knock-on effect is that while Australia has world class researchers, its ability to deliver on its research potential and stay globally competitive is being held back.

Despite the recruitment challenge, evidence suggests most Australians are actually interested in and willing to participate in health and medical research. The problem is connecting the two.

Professors Bruce Neal, Chris Reid, Dr Clare Arnott from the Clinical Trial Flagship, Professor Louisa Jorm and A/Professor Tom Briffa from the Big Data Flagship as well as Professor Gemma Figtree

(ACvA President) and Kerry Doyle (ACvA Executive Director) form part of an executive group helping to steer the development of the *Join Us* register, a new digital resource designed to solve this problem by engaging large numbers of Australians in research to address priority health issues, including CoVID-19.

Modelled on similar platforms overseas, *Join Us* is an initiative of The George Institute for Global Health and UNSW Sydney.

In signing up to the register, Australians aged 18 years and over will be invited to consent to having their routinely collected health data accessed in order to assess their eligibility for approved research studies and/or for ongoing use of de-identified health data in research.

Researchers who have ethics approval of their study will be able to apply to use the register and all participants found eligible for their study will be sent an invitation to take part and to connect with the researcher directly.

The *Join Us* register will go live in the second half of 2020.

The Colchicine After Stroke to Prevent Event Recurrence (CASPER) Study

Earlier in the year, the ACvA celebrated the success of Prof. Tony Keech as a grant recipient of the MRFF Mission for Cardiovascular Health. Prof. Tony Keech and his team were awarded \$2,997,908 for their study that will go towards supporting a multi-centre randomised controlled trial. This trial will test the effects of colchicine in addition to optimal medical therapy to reduce stroke morbidity and mortality in patients with persistently high C-reactive protein after a stroke event. It is hoped that colchicine will represent a cheap, safe alternative for these patients with persistent inflammation. For more information on the Study, please see our LinkedIn post [here](#).

Register your interest: HeSANDA – Consultation with clinical trial researchers on development of a national data asset

As the first step in developing a national health data asset ([HeSANDA](#)), the Australian Research Data Commons ([ARDC](#)) will be conducting consultations with the clinical trials research community to build consensus about their research uses and data standards for data sharing and reuse. ARDC wishes to invite clinical trials researchers interested or involved in data sharing to a series of consensus-building workshops to discuss how they would use a national data asset to support and improve their research activities.

The 90-minute online workshops will be held every 3 weeks starting on August 11th and concluding in October. Those who can't attend the workshops are still encouraged to register their interest as they will be able to provide written submissions and feedback.

For more information and to register your interest, please visit the [Eventbrite registration page](#).

Registrations will be open until 11.30am AEST, August 4th.

INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE WORKING GROUPS UPDATE

Our two industry-partnered working groups are:

- Industry and Academic Partnerships chaired by Professor Jason Kovacic and Mr John Crothers. Due to impacts of CoVID much of the group's activity has been via consultation with its members, with a view to holding a virtual roundtable in August. The focus of work has been to develop a framework for discussion and review at the August roundtable, outlining:
 - the significance of clinical trials in facilitating successful outcomes but also in building strong industry/academic partnerships and what CVD specific action is needed
 - the importance of consumer engagement in trials and clinical research and how we can make this happen
 - our capabilities as a sector, how we match this with industry and consumer needs
 - capability gaps and how we fill them.
- Evidence based Care, chaired by Professor Stephen Worthley and Mr Kieran Schneemann. This group is currently mapping real world examples of challenges and opportunities associated with getting evidence-based treatments in practice to enable a more pragmatic understanding of the system from a user perspective. This group is also working towards providing an interim report in August.

REVIEW OF MSAC GUIDELINES



Australian Government

Department of Health

The Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC) Guidelines are undergoing review and the Department is preparing to seek public consultation on the Draft in September. Our Evidence and Value-based Care Working Group will provide advice to the ACvA on the MSAC Review.

The Department welcomes detailed feedback on the Guidelines and is planning to hold a number of webinars throughout September to help facilitate this. An 'Introduction to MSAC' webinar is planned, as are a range of webinars tailored to consumers and technical users of the Guidelines. The Department would welcome member's views about matters they would like to see addressed in the tailored webinars. In addition, once the details are confirmed, information about the public consultation process will be published on the MSAC website and circulated through the MSAC bulletin [here](#). The Department encourages all interested parties to subscribe.

The Department is also conducting user research to facilitate the Department's Health Products Portal (HPP) program. The HPP Program is a multi-year program of work in the Department. The program vision is to provide a single, secure and easy to use online portal where Industry can interact with the Department to apply, track, pay, and manage listings for regulated and subsidised health related products and services. Interested parties are welcome to volunteer for the user research. Please refer to the link [here](#) for further information on the HPP.

ACVA ACTIVITIES

Research Catalyst Grants Program Outcome

Thank you to all those who took the time to apply for the Research Catalyst Program. The Research Catalyst Program was established in partnership with Bioplatforms Australia (BPA) to support our cardiovascular researchers with acquisition of data for upcoming significant collaborative grant applications. In line with BPA's mission to support innovation and help transform scientific outcomes in Australia, this support also aimed to develop long-lasting collaborations between researchers and BPA's network partners. With an allocated budget of \$250,000, we achieved a success rate of ~50%. Six applications were successful and include:

- Professor Diane Fatkin, on her project "Development of a custom genotyping array to detect cardiomyopathy gene mutations"
- Dr Simon Foster, on his project "Decoding monocyte signalling networks"
- Professor Jonathan Golledge, on his project "Abdominal aortic aneurysm genomics"
- Professor Richmond Jeremy, on his project "Epigenetics of Vascular Aging"
- Professor Mary Kavurma, on her project "Single cell transcriptome profiling of diabetic peripheral artery disease"
- Professor Peter Meikle, on his project "Early Detection of Coronary Artery Disease: An opportunity to start secondary prevention without a coronary event"

It has been a great pleasure working with BPA on this initiative and we look forward to working with them in the future. In the meantime, ACvA is consistently searching for additional funding schemes that can to support our Flagship work and benefit our members so please watch this space for future opportunities.

OZHEARTS Song Competition

The OZHEARTS song competition ended late last month with a number of varied, diverse and interesting submissions. We had a panel of 5 judges consisting of musical and CV experts, who had the difficult task of ranking all the songs.

The top three were:

First place: Nine Year Sisters – Let the Heart Win



The Nine Year Sisters say "Song writing is our passion and we thought this song contest would be a great opportunity to get involved and collaborate on a song to spread a positive message about heart disease through our music"

They have won:

- \$2000 cash
- 3 tracks EP professionally stem mastered by Suture Mastering
- A pair of JBL Club ONE Headphones

Second place: Joel Havea – It all starts in the heart

Joel found out about the Ozheart Song Contest on the APRA newsletter, he says “I thought it was a great cause to get behind and also never knew that heart disease impacted so many people across such a wide age range”. Joel has won:

- 1 track EP professionally stem mastered by Suture Mastering
- A pair of JBL Club 950 Headphones



Third place: Chelsea Ellway – In A Heartbeat



Chelsea is an upcoming singer working with Gaynor (lyricist), Robert (manager) and Stefan (musician/producer) on original songs to bring her career to new heights. Chelsea and her team found this opportunity as a great way to gain exposure at a time when the music industry is really suffering but also from knowing someone who had lost their father from cardiac problems as well as a partner who died suddenly at home from a heart attack.

Chelsea has won:

- A pair of JBL Club 750 Headphones

We felt that all submissions were equally impressive and did that little bit extra in raising awareness for CVD in the public eye! To hear a short clip of our three winners and their songs, click [here](#).

Emerging Leaders Committee Mentoring Program

The ACvA Emerging Leaders Committee has launched its cross-sector mentoring program for early and mid-career researchers. Mentees can select to be paired with a mentor across a range of sectors and research fields. This will provide the opportunity for mentees to gain insights from other industries, enhance their skill set, seek professional development and career guidance amongst other things. These interactions are likely to be of particular importance during the additional challenges we are facing in the current climate. This is also a great opportunity to facilitate interaction, growth and development both within the ACvA community and the greater cardiovascular community.

A booklet on mentoring that provides tools and a framework to establish and foster a mentee-mentor relationship will be available. We will also be holding a workshop to guide mentees through the process of developing a mentor-mentee relationship and enhance the opportunity for successful interactions between mentee-mentor pairings.

We encourage anyone interested to sign up using the links below.

To register as a mentee, please click [here](#). To register as a mentor, please click [here](#).

For further details and enquiries, please contact anna.calkin@baker.edu.au

Expressions of Interest

Call for speakers!

Since the advent of the joint ISHR-ACvA Asia-Pacific Cardiovascular Webinar Series in April, we have garnered great interest and attention from several international investigators across the globe, with a number of them locked in to present in the coming months.

However, we are always keen for more speakers and would love for any interested CVD researchers or clinicians to nominate themselves or someone they know to present. Please contact Dr Kate Weeks (kate.weeks@baker.edu.au) if you are interested in giving a presentation as part of the webinar series.

Environmental impacts on heart disease interest group



EOI: Interest Group Environmental Determinants of Cardiovascular Health

- The ACvA is coordinating EOI for our research, industry and consumer members and friends to join an interest group on climate change and CV health
- Please let us know if your interests and expertise include the impact of heat stress, air pollution, heavy metal contamination, PFAS exposure, changing exposure to infections or immune challenges, green space and urban design, rural health.
- To join or for more info: please email Meng Hsu (meng.hsu@ozheart.org)



The ACvA is calling for EOIs to form an interest group on the environmental impacts on heart disease.

The influence and effect of environmental determinants such as climate change, heat and air pollutants on health is under-developed in the cardiovascular literature. The bushfires earlier this year is a good example of why this matters.

The purpose of this group is:

- To enable a better understanding of who is working in this field and priority areas of interest.
- To define the environmental determinants of cardiovascular health.
- To consider research models that integrate cardiovascular and environmental health considerations.
- To identify possible funding pathways and other mechanisms to support work in these areas.

If you are interested in joining this group, please email Meng Hsu meng.hsu@ozheart.org

WA representative for the Emerging Leaders Committee

The ACvA Emerging Leaders Committee is currently looking for a representative from Western Australia. If you are a senior PhD student or early-career researcher from WA and are interested in joining the Committee, please fill out the form [here](#).

Hurry, EOIs close 1 August 2020.



Follow us on Twitter and LinkedIn

Did you know that ACvA has both a Twitter and LinkedIn account? Follow us for the latest updates at the ACvA! Click on the icons to join.

Come work with us

The ACvA is recruiting a Project Manager to strengthen our ability to support our Flagships. Are you passionate about cardiovascular research? Do you have the skills to help us make a sector-wide impact? Then click [here](#) for further information.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Biomedical Translation Fund (BTF)

The BTF provides companies with venture capital through licensed private sector fund managers to help translate biomedical discoveries into tangible products, services and outcomes to deliver long term health benefits and national economic outcomes. Applications are currently open, with a total of \$501.25 million allocated for the BTF. Find out more below:

<https://www.business.gov.au/Grants-and-Programs/Biomedical-Translation-Fund>

Snow Fellowships

Applications for the next round of Snow Fellowships are now open. Snow Fellowships provide emerging leaders the independence, funding and time to develop a bold research program, build their research team, and establish leadership experience. Each Snow Fellowship will be valued at approximately \$8 million over eight years. Earlier in the year, we celebrated A/Prof James Hudson as a recipient of one of these prestigious awards. Find out more below:

<https://snowmedical.org.au/snow-fellowships/>

Norvatis Grants Program

Novartis provides funding opportunities for supporting healthcare initiatives from scientific and charitable organisations that directly support patients, improve healthcare and enable ongoing education. Applications for studies in the Therapeutic Area of Cardio-metabolism are now open. Find out more below:

<https://www.novartis.com.au/about-us/corporate-responsibility/corporate-responsibility-australia/grants>

CVD and COVID-19 Grant

Applications for the Heart Foundation's CVD and COVID-19 grants are now open. As a novel virus, limited research and evidence shows that people with CVD are at a higher risk of severe illness or death with COVID-19. Early data also suggests that cardiac arrhythmias and cardiac dysfunction are common complications of COVID-19. These grants aim to address gaps in knowledge of why people with CVD appear to be more vulnerable to severe outcomes, and gaps in treating the cardiac complications of COVID-19. Find out more below:

<https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/research/cvd-and-covid-19-grant>