



Supporting our researchers to tackle Australia's biggest killer

A survey of over 500 cardiovascular researchers found that less than 25% had secure employment and many had considered leaving the field.

This could have significant implications for tackling cardiovascular disease (CVD), which is Australia's biggest killer, causing one death every 12 minutes, and also leading to significant disability from the after-effects of stroke, heart attack and heart failure. CVD represents the nation's second largest direct health care cost at \$10.4 billion every year.

Yet, the survey by peak leadership body the Australian Cardiovascular Alliance (ACvA) paints a concerning outlook for the sector with many researchers considering leaving due to a lack of job and financial security.

The online survey, which was distributed in 2019 across Australian cardiovascular societies and councils, universities and research institutes found that of the cardiovascular researchers who responded:

- only 23 percent have permanent employment;
- as many as 68 percent have considered leaving CVD research, and
- a worrying 91 percent would leave CVD research in the absence of secure funding in coming years.

Professor Figtree said "the survey findings, published today in the journal *Heart, Lung and Circulation* clearly demonstrate that we need a more strategic, coordinated and diversified approach to funding and in-kind support and much closer collaboration with key government, health, philanthropic and industry stakeholders to create a more sustainable future for the sector, to ensure there is significant impact from the funding that is invested".

She continued "traditional approaches to research while beneficial are not sufficient to truly tackle our nation's biggest killer, retain the best and brightest, and attract new talent to this important area of research.

Professor Figtree said "Australian cardiovascular researchers have a strong reputation for delivering high quality outcomes and recent substantial investment by the Federal government (\$220 Million Mission for Cardiovascular Health), and by the NSW government (\$150 Million) provides a much-needed catalyst for the sector. Our researchers also need strategic approaches to create strong and enduring collaborations across the research pipeline, provide mentorship and leadership and enable an efficient and impactful research sector, which can continue to thrive".

Associate Professor Francine Marques, from Monash University's School of Biological Sciences, chair of the ACvA's Emerging Leaders' Committee and senior author of the study stated "the highly coordinated and strategic approach to research and translation we have seen during the pandemic could be used as a template for action and rolled out across other medical areas such as cardiovascular disease".

Associate Professor Marques said "a troubling finding of the survey was that job security and uncertainty were having a greater impact on female researchers, with almost 33% saying they were



unsure about ongoing employment, and as many as 80 percent considering leaving the field of CVD research altogether. This is compared to just under 20 percent of male respondents who had similar employment concerns, and 66 percent of men who were considering leaving the field”.

Not surprisingly, the top initiatives that CVD researchers perceived would help increase retention in the sector were greater job security (76 percent) and strategic and sustainable investment in CVD research (72 percent).

“More than 150,000 Australians aged 45 to 74 years will have a cardiovascular event like a heart attack or stroke over the next five years. Strategic investment in this sector will not only save lives but will also make a significant contribution to job growth and economic recovery,” Prof Figtree added.

Professor Figtree said, “the ACvA was established to provide a collaborative and whole of sector approach working with and building on support from Government, industry and philanthropy, driving both health and economic outcomes that would benefit all Australians, stressing that “prevention and better management of CVD will also reduce the vulnerability of Australians to COVID-19.”

As a response to the survey’s findings, and in consultation with the Emerging Leaders Committee, Professor Figtree announced that the ACvA is launching two new programs:

- the [Cardiovascular Champions program](#), to provide advanced communication skills to emerging cardiovascular researchers, in order to equip them with the tools to actively and effectively engage with the general public and the scientific community to raise the profile of cardiovascular research in Australia.
- A national mentoring program linking researchers with policy-makers, industry and research leaders.

Mid-career researcher and Centenary Institute-based CVD researcher Associate Professor Jodie Ingles welcomed the new initiatives, saying “the ACvA’s efforts to support young researchers, along with sustained advocacy for strategic approaches to research, signalled the possibility of a turning point in developing a more confident and impactful CVD research workforce”.

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About us

- The ACvA is the peak membership body for the Australian Cardiovascular Sector and a not for profit.
- Professor Gemma Figtree is an interventional cardiologist, researcher, parent and President of the ACvA.
- A/Professor Francine Marques is the Chair of the ACvA Emerging Leaders Committee (ELC).
- Professor Jodie Ingles is a lead member of the ACvA, ELC.

Media enquiries

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