



**The**  
**KIDS**  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE  
AUSTRALIA

WESFARMERS  
CENTRE OF VACCINES  
& INFECTIOUS DISEASES

# PARTNERSHIP REPORT

December 2025

# Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters of Australia. We acknowledge their Elders past, present and emerging, their people and their land upon which Wesfarmers Centre members engage with us. We seek their wisdom in our work to improve the health and wellbeing and development of all children.

Further, we prioritise partnerships with Aboriginal families and communities across Western Australia and beyond to improve the health and development of their children. We will not ignore, nor accept, the continued disparity in outcomes for Aboriginal kids compared with other Australian children.



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# Introduction

2025 has reminded us that we live in an ever-changing world and, as a Centre focused on vaccines and infectious diseases, we must remain nimble to respond to emerging threats. We observe rising misinformation and disinformation, the active undermining of science and evidence, a global rise in vaccine preventable diseases including measles and polio, and falling immunisation rates. There has never been a more important time for the Wesfarmers Centre to be a visible and vocal advocate for the importance of science and the power of vaccines. We must ensure that we remain true to the evidence whilst engaging with community members, governments and policy makers, pushing ourselves to realise our vision: *to reduce the impact of infectious diseases through excellent and innovative research, partnerships with families and communities, translation and advocacy.*

## Key highlights to celebrate include:

- Significant investment and progress in our efforts to prevent ear infections in children, with major funding boosts that will support Phase 1 clinical trials for a preventative nasal spray, significant recruitment into existing ear health trials and the Djaalinnj Waakinj Urban Aboriginal Ear Health program celebrating the 100th grommet surgery fast-tracked through the program.
- Completion of the Missing Piece Study, highlighting the frequency of asymptomatic Strep A infection and enabling us to explore new ways to prevent infections. The story of the study has been made into a storybook which has been made available through libraries, schools, health organisations and daycare centres.
- Further progress with RSV prevention strategies, demonstrating the effectiveness and impact of both maternal vaccine and infant monoclonal antibodies and recruitment to studies to understand the burden of RSV in the community.
- Recruitment of our first participants in trials focused on developing longer-lasting treatment for rheumatic heart disease (RHD) and the commitment of the WA Government to dedicate

\$25 million over five years to an inaugural program to improve research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of RHD.

- Hosting an interactive community engagement project with Noongar Yamitji artist, Kyle Morrison, with children exploring germs and vaccines through dance, movement and play, as well as the launch of our Aboriginal research cadet program, building the pipeline for future Aboriginal researchers.
- Celebrating the efforts of our own Val Swift, who is retiring at the end of 2025, and acknowledging her tremendous contribution to the Centre, to health, and to achieving Aboriginal equity.

I extend my ongoing thanks to everyone who has made the achievements of 2025 possible – Wesfarmers Ltd, our researchers, funders and partners, study participants, community members and supporters.

Your unwavering support continues to ensure the evidence generated by our research drives our work to reduce the burden of infectious diseases, enabling families to thrive.

**Professor Chris Blyth**  
**Head of the Wesfarmers Centre of Vaccines and Infectious Diseases**



# Highlights



**147**  
research papers  
published



**\$20M+**  
received in  
external  
research grants



**\$175,000**  
dedicated to  
seed funding  
for high quality  
research



**\$45K**  
spent on  
boosting the skills  
of early career  
researchers



**100**  
Aboriginal kids received free grommet  
surgery over the last 7 years thanks to  
the **Djaalinj Waakinj Urban Aboriginal Ear  
Health Program**



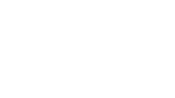
**88**  
assessments  
in the **HealthyEars Study**



**208**  
children recruited  
in 6 weeks for the  
**PATROL RSV Study**



Over  
**2000**  
people viewed the  
RSV immunisation  
guidance tool



Over  
**\$11M**  
secured for  
**Spritz-0M**



Recruited  
**65**  
babies for the **Pneumo 21**  
vaccine study, including the  
1st baby worldwide



**162**  
PNG students taking part in  
the **Goroka School Ear Study**



**1650**  
samples analysed  
for the  
**Missing Piece Study**



**817**  
babies recruited  
in the **ORVAC**  
rotavirus study  
over 6 years



Tonsil collection  
for Strep A  
research now  
underway from  
tonsillectomies  
at PCH

**14**  
litres of blood received from  
**900**  
participants in the **Acute Rheumatic Fever  
Diagnostic Collaborative Network.**



**102**  
kids enrolled in the  
**Aboriginal Sore  
Throat Study**



# Reducing the burden of childhood infections

*Infectious diseases are the most common reason for hospitalisation of young children in Western Australia and a leading cause of death in children worldwide.*

*We are continually advancing our bench to bedside, pathogen to policy approach to prevent and reduce the impact of infections in children and families.*



## Reduce vaccine preventable diseases, preventing hospitalisation and morbidity

- ④ Our RSV research received a \$3.4 million funding boost to assess the epidemiology of the virus throughout the country and optimise Australia's immunisation strategy. Thanks to support from the National Health and Medical Research Council, the WA Government's Future Health Research and Innovation Fund, WA Department of Health, Child and Adolescent Health Service, PathWest Laboratory Medicine WA and the Immunisation Foundation of Australia, researchers from the Wesfarmers Centre will be able to harness world-class data, assess the impact of current immunisation strategies, and develop evidence-based tools to guide future policy.
- ④ We led an Australian-first study demonstrating the effectiveness of a long-acting monoclonal antibody, Nirsevimab, which was provided to babies as part of WA's nation-leading RSV immunisation program in 2024. Funded by Perth Children's Hospital Foundation, the REVIVE Study found Nirsevimab to be almost 90 per cent effective in reducing hospitalisation rates and helped more than 500 WA families avoid a hospital stay.
- ④ A second long-acting monoclonal antibody for RSV, Clesrovimab, investigated by the Vaccines Trials Group, has been licensed in the US and Europe, with plans for it to be available in Australia soon.
- ④ A maternal RSV vaccine called Abrysvo was included on the National Immunisation Program for the first time in 2025 – this vaccine was evaluated at the Wesfarmers Centre for safety and effectiveness in Phase 3 trials. We are now leading a national study recruiting hospitalised children in every state and territory to provide real-world effectiveness of the maternal vaccine and compare this to Nirsevimab.

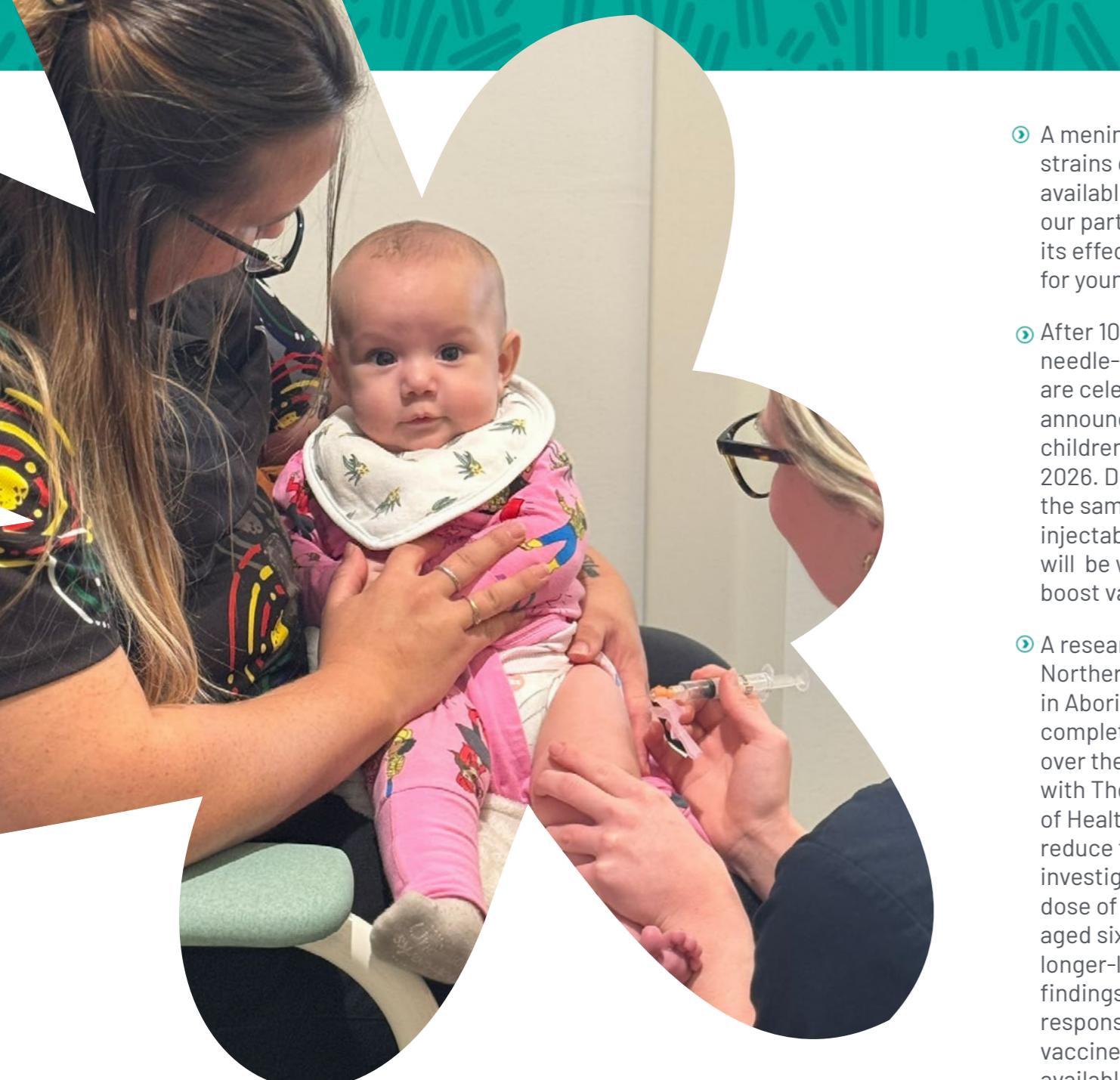
- ④ An online immunisation guidance tool was designed to help families and health-care providers in WA learn the best way to protect babies and young children against RSV. The tool clarifies which vaccines or immunisations parents are eligible for according to answers such as stage of pregnancy, time of year and family background, and empowers community members to make their own decisions for protecting their babies against RSV.

- ④ The STAMP RSV program launched the [PATROL Study](#) – 'Parents Actively Tracking RSV in Little Ones' to investigate how many RSV infections with mild or zero symptoms occur in the community each year. The team recruited 208 children aged four and under who attend day care or kindy and will monitor them over the 12-month study period thanks to parents taking nasal swabs when their child is unwell.

- ④ Our research into improving pneumococcal vaccines saw the introduction of the Prevenar 20 program to the National Immunisation Program in 2025. The new vaccine provides broader protection for Australian babies by covering seven additional strains of pneumococcal bacteria.

- ④ We were first global site to begin recruitment for the latest pneumococcal study, recruiting 65 babies to help evaluate a new higher valency 21-valent pneumococcal vaccine. A second pneumococcal vaccine study is set to begin in 2026.





- ④ A meningococcal vaccine covering all five common strains of the deadly disease is expected to be available in Australia within the next five years after our participation in global research demonstrating its effectiveness in providing universal protection for young adults and teenagers.
- ④ After 10 years campaigning for the Introduction of a needle-free nasal influenza vaccine, our researchers are celebrating the Cook Labor Government's announcement of the 'Flu Mist' vaccine for all children aged between two and under 12 years old in 2026. Delivered as a spray via the nose and offering the same level of protection as the traditional injectable vaccine, it is hoped this new initiative will be welcomed by children and families and help boost vaccination rates against flu.
- ④ A research initiative in communities across the Northern Territory, the Optimising Rotavirus Vaccine in Aboriginal Children (ORVAC) Study, is closer to completion after recruiting 817 Aboriginal babies over the last six years. Working in collaboration with The University of Sydney and Menzies School of Health Research, researchers are aiming to reduce the global burden of diarrhoeal disease by investigating if administering an additional booster dose of oral rotavirus vaccine to Aboriginal babies aged six to 12 months could provide stronger, longer-lasting protection against rotavirus. Early findings have already indicated enhanced immune response from a booster dose of the oral rotavirus vaccine, and final results are expected to be available in mid-2026.



## Develop, trial and evaluate new infection prevention and treatment strategies and vaccine schedules



- ④ A Perron Partnership grant of \$9.7 million will see the Phase 1 clinical trials for [Spritz-OM](#) begin in 2026. A world-first nasal spray vaccine to prevent childhood ear infections, Spritz-OM aims to prevent over 50 per cent of the 70 million middle ear infections experienced worldwide each year. Initial studies will assess the safety and tolerability of Spritz-OM in healthy adult volunteers before moving on to paediatric Phase 2 trials.

Our work to reduce repeat grommet surgery for middle ear infections received a major funding boost in 2025, securing over \$2.4 million in National Health and Medical Research Council and WA Child Research Fund grants. After first discovering that bacterial biofilms were the culprit for chronic and recurrent ear infections back in 2004, the Blitz-OM team partnered with CSIRO to use Dornase alfa, an enzyme commonly used to clear mucus in lungs of cystic fibrosis patients, to 'break down' the biofilm in the ear and prevent further infections. Follow-up is continuing with the 125 children who participated in the ATOMIC Ears Study and received Dornase alfa as a single-dose, slow-release gel-based medicine administered to the ear during grommet surgery.

A unique study purposely giving participants *Streptococcus pyogenes* (Strep A) to learn how much penicillin it takes to prevent infection has found the amount needed is much lower than previously thought – a discovery that will transform thinking on treatment for people living with rheumatic heart disease. Findings from the [Controlled Human Infection for Penicillin Against Streptococcus \(CHIPS\) Trial](#) found that the concentration of penicillin required to fend off infection is less than half the amount used in treatment protocols delivered to patients for the past 75 years. Working alongside Linear Clinical Research, Curtin University and Murdoch Children's Research Institute, researchers used cutting-edge science to evaluate patient responses to various levels of penicillin. This outcome will now be used to accelerate development of new, long-acting injections that are considerably less painful and can be given at three-month intervals instead of monthly.

- We are working on three new formulations of long-acting penicillin to address global supply issues. Pre-clinical animal trials began in 2025, with promising data for all formulations found in early analysis.
- A \$600,000 WA Child Health Research grant has funded an expansion of laboratory capacity for the development of antibody assays that measure the response to multiple infant vaccines in less than a drop of blood, as well as antigen-specific B and T cell assays to measure cellular immunity. This will enhance our ability to investigate the immune mechanisms that drive optimal vaccine responses in children and adults and evaluate new vaccines and immunisation schedules in the pipeline.
- We published a landmark paper in *Nature* in collaboration with South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute, demonstrating that early-life antibiotic exposure reduces antibody responses to routine childhood vaccines, particularly pneumococcal vaccines. This has informed a new \$1.9M clinical trial to evaluate whether probiotics can restore immunity in affected children.



- Skin care for extremely preterm born babies is a key focus area for prevention of infection, and we have three research projects in progress:
  - Silicone gel for extremely preterm infants** – researchers are trialling a silicon film-forming gel to protect against skin injury and infection.
  - Newborn skin check** – this prospective observational study uses cutting-edge skin imaging and assessment tools to learn more about neonatal skin. It will determine if skin injury can be determined earlier by imaging technology than by visual assessment.
  - Preterm Allergy Study** – this research found no evidence of allergic sensitisation to coconut for babies treated with topical coconut oil during their neonatal intensive care stay.

- Researchers are continuing to focus on improved treatment outcomes in pregnant women with syphilis, including reducing the impact of mother to child transmission and adverse pregnancy outcomes. A new Phase 1 clinical trial using subcutaneous injection of benzathine penicillin (SCIP) is currently underway involving healthy adults and, if successful, Phase 2 will see clinical trials established in Papua New Guinea and Zimbabwe where SCIP can be used to treat pregnant women with syphilis.



## Enhance sepsis recognition and treatment to improve childhood outcomes

- We are leading The One Project Study (TOPS) in partnership with PathWest, Fiona Stanley Hospital and King Edward Memorial Hospital. TOPS is a validation study of a new combined molecular microbiology and metabolomics test for sepsis. Recruitment is now complete with 247 adults and 80 neonates taking part, and the study is on track to be completed by mid-2026. With funding secured from the WA Child Research Fund and the Stephan Peron Charitable Foundation, planning is well underway to launch KIDS-TOPS in 2026. This will be conducted in partnership with the emergency departments at Perth Children's Hospital and Fiona Stanley Hospital and will recruit 200 children with suspected sepsis over a two-year period.



- ④ Future Health Research Fund innovation seed funding awarded this year in partnership with Biotome Pty Ltd will accelerate our work using existing biomarker discoveries in neonatal sepsis to develop point of care tests for sepsis blood samples.
- ④ We are collaborating on the international Staphylococcus aureus Network Adaptive Platform trial (SNAP), which aims to establish best practice antibiotic treatment for people of all ages with golden staph bloodstream infections.
- ④ Paediatric recruitment into SNAP is being led from Perth Children's Hospital by researchers from the Wesfarmers Centre. SNAP is already the biggest clinical trial studying golden staph blood stream infections ever undertaken.
- ④ We are participating in an international biomarker validation study alongside a network of neonatal intensive care units across Australia, Europe and North America. This work aims to improve accurate and early detection of neonatal sepsis – a critical issue for improving sepsis outcomes in preterm babies.





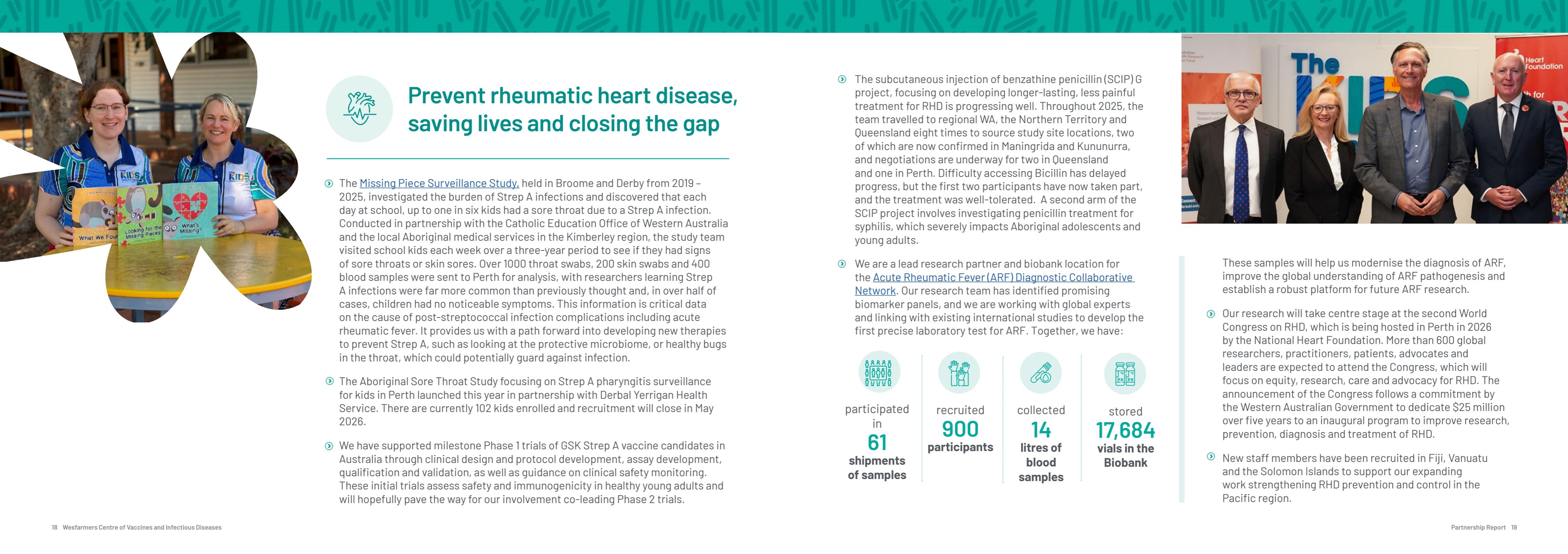
## Aboriginal Health: ensuring equity and reducing health disadvantage in Aboriginal populations

*We commit to ensuring that our research occurs in partnership with community and is guided by a strong Aboriginal voice*



**Prevent ear and lung disease, thereby improving short and long-term symptoms and developmental outcomes**

- ④ The Djaalinj Waakinj Urban Aboriginal Ear Health program celebrated a milestone with its 100th grommet surgery thanks to access to the free, fast-tracked urgent specialist treatment available through the program. Recruitment completed in 2025, with a total of 435 children enrolled over the last seven years.
- ④ The Healthy Ears Study commenced recruitment, enrolling 13 children with history of otitis media and completing 8 assessments to investigate if health promotion initiatives can help improve outcomes for children with middle ear infections.
- ④ The Goroka School Ear Study, evaluating the burden of otitis media amongst year one students in Goroka, Papua New Guinea, now has 162 participants. Our researchers visited the schools involved in June this year, providing training for the local research nurses and field workers, and data collection will continue through to April 2026.

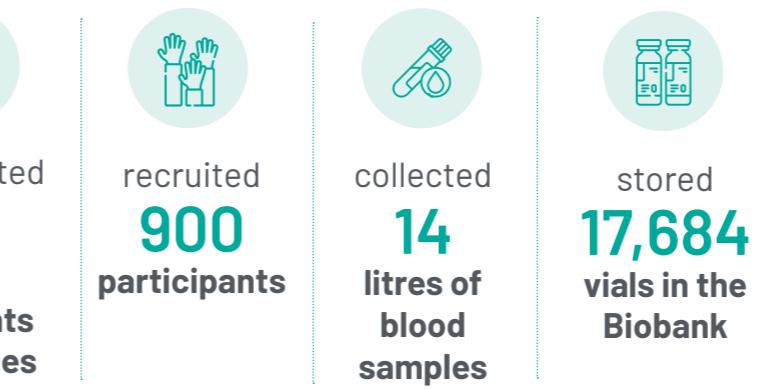


## Prevent rheumatic heart disease, saving lives and closing the gap

- ④ The [Missing Piece Surveillance Study](#), held in Broome and Derby from 2019 – 2025, investigated the burden of Strep A infections and discovered that each day at school, up to one in six kids had a sore throat due to a Strep A infection. Conducted in partnership with the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia and the local Aboriginal medical services in the Kimberley region, the study team visited school kids each week over a three-year period to see if they had signs of sore throats or skin sores. Over 1000 throat swabs, 200 skin swabs and 400 blood samples were sent to Perth for analysis, with researchers learning Strep A infections were far more common than previously thought and, in over half of cases, children had no noticeable symptoms. This information is critical data on the cause of post-streptococcal infection complications including acute rheumatic fever. It provides us with a path forward into developing new therapies to prevent Strep A, such as looking at the protective microbiome, or healthy bugs in the throat, which could potentially guard against infection.
- ④ The Aboriginal Sore Throat Study focusing on Strep A pharyngitis surveillance for kids in Perth launched this year in partnership with Derbal Yerrigan Health Service. There are currently 102 kids enrolled and recruitment will close in May 2026.
- ④ We have supported milestone Phase 1 trials of GSK Strep A vaccine candidates in Australia through clinical design and protocol development, assay development, qualification and validation, as well as guidance on clinical safety monitoring. These initial trials assess safety and immunogenicity in healthy young adults and will hopefully pave the way for our involvement co-leading Phase 2 trials.

④ The subcutaneous injection of benzathine penicillin (SCIP) G project, focusing on developing longer-lasting, less painful treatment for RHD is progressing well. Throughout 2025, the team travelled to regional WA, the Northern Territory and Queensland eight times to source study site locations, two of which are now confirmed in Maningrida and Kununurra, and negotiations are underway for two in Queensland and one in Perth. Difficulty accessing Bicillin has delayed progress, but the first two participants have now taken part, and the treatment was well-tolerated. A second arm of the SCIP project involves investigating penicillin treatment for syphilis, which severely impacts Aboriginal adolescents and young adults.

④ We are a lead research partner and biobank location for the [Acute Rheumatic Fever \(ARF\) Diagnostic Collaborative Network](#). Our research team has identified promising biomarker panels, and we are working with global experts and linking with existing international studies to develop the first precise laboratory test for ARF. Together, we have:



These samples will help us modernise the diagnosis of ARF, improve the global understanding of ARF pathogenesis and establish a robust platform for future ARF research.

④ Our research will take centre stage at the second World Congress on RHD, which is being hosted in Perth in 2026 by the National Heart Foundation. More than 600 global researchers, practitioners, patients, advocates and leaders are expected to attend the Congress, which will focus on equity, research, care and advocacy for RHD. The announcement of the Congress follows a commitment by the Western Australian Government to dedicate \$25 million over five years to an inaugural program to improve research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of RHD.

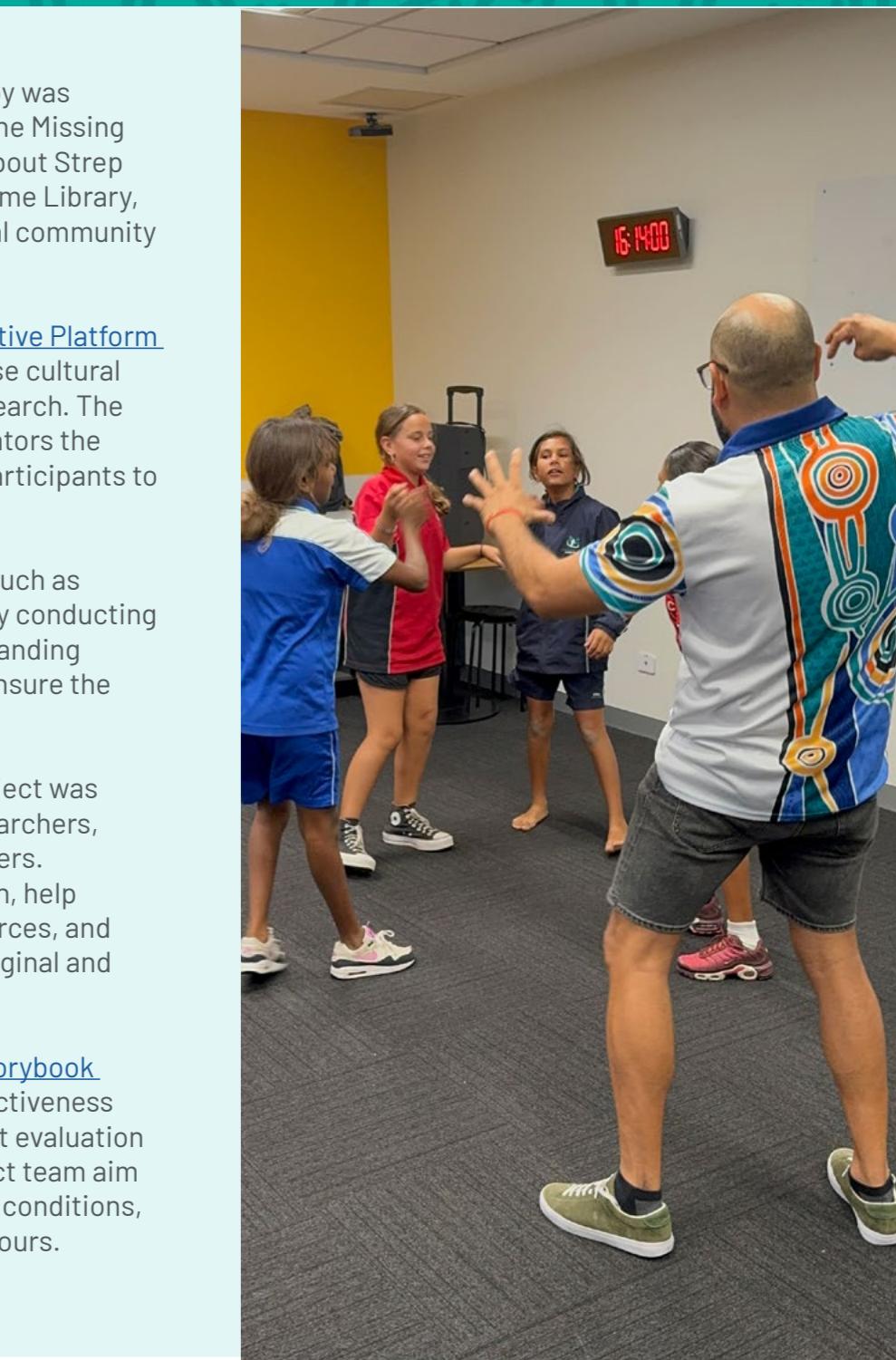
④ New staff members have been recruited in Fiji, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands to support our expanding work strengthening RHD prevention and control in the Pacific region.



## Ensuring all research occurs in partnership with community and is guided by a strong Aboriginal voice



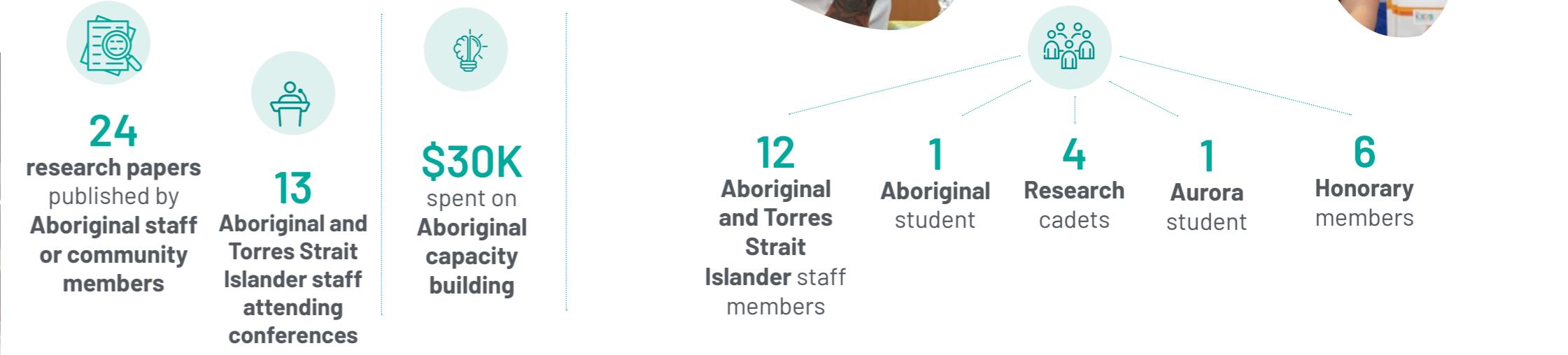
- ④ A \$965,000 NHRMC Partnership Project grant and \$600,000 WA Child Research Fund award will accelerate the development of the Moorditj Marp (Strong Skin)– SHARE program, set to be conducted alongside dermatology departments on-site at Perth Children's Hospital and Fiona Stanley Hospital. Modelled on a new Aboriginal health practitioner-led model of care, the program will provide Aboriginal children admitted to general wards an inpatient skin health assessment, dermatology treatment if required and access to education resources. The SHARE program builds on years of community-led healthy skin work across remote and urban WA, strengthening Aboriginal voices in shaping care that is culturally grounded, accessible, and focused on prevention and wellbeing.
- ④ An interactive community engagement project encouraged school kids to become the star of their own show as they explored germs and vaccines through dance, movement and play. Involving the Waalitj Foundation after-school club in Lathlain, the project provided the opportunity to connect with kids in Years 3 to 6 and empower them to consider and articulate what infections and vaccines mean to them in their own unique way. Facilitated by a Noongar Yamitji artist, Kyle Morrison, the one-hour sessions over 10 weeks used a mix of Indigenous culture, drama and dance to help kids learn more about infection control practices and living healthy lifestyles.
- ④ A three-part story book series co-designed by school kids in Broome and Derby was launched in August as part of a special community event. Telling the story of the Missing Piece Surveillance Study, the books share the study results and information about Strep A in a fun and engaging way. The team delivered 400 sets of the books to Broome Library, primary schools, health organisations and daycare centres to be used as a vital community health resource for many years to come.
- ④ Researchers collaborating in the global [Staphylococcus aureus Network Adaptive Platform \(SNAP\) Trial](#) have developed an innovative [Cultural Information Hub](#) to maximise cultural safety for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients participating in research. The new platform supports hospital recruitment for the SNAP Trial giving investigators the opportunity to up-skill and encourage study teams to consider the needs of participants to elevate opportunities for involvement.
- ④ Our researchers have been yarning with Aboriginal families in regional towns such as Kalgoorlie and Geraldton to explore how RSV affects families in these areas. By conducting World Cafés with the local community, the team aims to gain two-way understanding around the introduction of the new national RSV immunisation program and ensure the development of culturally appropriate information resources.
- ④ The [Ngangk Ngabala Ngoonda \(Sun Safety\) of Aboriginal young mob of WA](#) project was launched in 2025 in close collaboration with Aboriginal clinicians, Elders, researchers, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and community members. The project aims to increase awareness of skin cancer risk for Aboriginal youth, help with the development of community-led, culturally- inclusive sun safety resources, and ultimately, reduce the disparity in skin cancer health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Western Australians.
- ④ Aboriginal community members involved in the [Moorditj Marp \(Strong Skin\) Storybook Evaluation Project](#) are helping researchers understand the strengths and effectiveness of co-designed culturally relevant health promotion resources. Through robust evaluation of the community-driven children's storybook Kaal Tackles Eczema, the project team aim to develop a suite of healthy skin storybooks on other common childhood skin conditions, including skin sores, tinea (ringworm), scabies, headlice and sun smart behaviours.



- ④ The Moxi Yarns project has commenced in the East Kimberley region with Medicines Development for Global Health. Moxi Yarns hopes to understand the perspectives of Aboriginal communities on scabies, head lice and future treatment options for these skin diseases. This research through yarning will inform a future clinical trial for a new treatment using antiparasitic medication.
- ④ A new project focusing on a shared understanding of the communication development of Aboriginal children who have received treatment for otitis media has appointed an Aboriginal sub-committee and worked alongside Aboriginal staff to developed appropriate resources.



- ④ Our researchers participated in the Welcome Baby to Country in Armadale, attended the NAIDOC Boorloo Ball in September and supported Cockburn Integrated Health to hold a NAIDOC event in October attended by local community members.
- ④ We shared our knowledge with UWA Audiology students, emphasising the importance of engaging with Aboriginal families.



- ④ **Edna Ninyette** is undertaking Marr Mooditj Training, Certificate IV in Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care Practice.
- ④ **Shakayla Walley** will be doing a Doctor of Medicine post graduate course at the University of Wollongong in 2026.
- ④ **Taleah Uge** was chosen as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander STEM Student of the Year at the Premier's Science Awards.

# Global public health: promoting health through research and partnerships

**We are furthering our partnerships with governments, industry and community to identify real-life solutions to emerging threats**



Our involvement in the AMR space has been recognised by an invitation to contribute to the national Antimicrobial Use and Resistance in Australia (AURA), produced by the interim Australian Centre of Disease Control. The AURA request has come off the back of our work developing the Australian Group on Antimicrobial Resistance (AGAR) Kids Report – the world's first-ever, government commissioned surveillance study investigating nation-wide prevalence of AMR in children. Data collected from laboratories throughout the country over the past 12 years were used to identify the patterns of drug-resistant bloodstream infections. It was found that more than one in every 10 children with a bloodstream infection was infected with a multi-drug-resistant organism.

- ④ In collaboration with researchers from the Walyan Centre at The Kids Research Institute Australia, we are building a phage library to ensure that future patients can more readily access phages to combat resistant infections and streamline the pathway to use for children and families.
- ④ Our researchers have demonstrated the various ways Strep A bacteria can survive penicillin treatment and continue to replicate. This has enabled them to identify alternative antibiotics that are useful in these cases, and are working on a way to diagnose infections caused by penicillin-resistant Strep A. A secondary study is helping to explain why Strep throat infections can relapse despite being susceptible to antibiotics in laboratory testing – in combination, this work will pave the way for new diagnostics and improved delivery of alternative treatment options.
- ④ Continued involvement in vaccine safety surveillance through AusVaxSafety, in collaboration with the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Safety allows us to monitor the safety of vaccines available in Australia, a key element to immunisation promotion and infection prevention.
- ④ A decline in community vaccine confidence was identified as a major concern by members of our Vaccines and Infectious Diseases Advisory Group, known as VIDAG. We undertook priority setting work with VIDAG and the Our Children's Health Research Aboriginal Advisors Group, known as OCHRAA, to identify their suggestions for tackling declining community vaccine confidence. In the year ahead, VIDAG and OCHRAA will work on projects that align with their top priorities for building community vaccine confidence, as well as our four flagships.



## Prevent the health harms of COVID-19 and emerging pathogens

- ④ The \$8 million national [PICOBOS study](#) evaluating the impacts of licensed COVID-19 booster vaccines in adolescents and adults has now completed recruitment and has 1,125 participants from Perth, Adelaide and Launceston. Second-year follow-ups are underway and are expected to conclude in October 2026.
- ④ We are a key laboratory partner in the national BOOST-IC adaptive platform trial, led by Monash University, assessing the immunogenicity and safety of different COVID-19 vaccine booster strategies for immunocompromised Australians.
- ④ Our researchers continue to partner with colleagues in Papua New Guinea, East Timor and, most recently, Tanzania, offering advice on research design, laboratory support and capacity building in preparation for future emerging threats.



# Sharing Our Knowledge



## WCVID Biennial Retreat

Over 140 researchers, students, support staff, collaborators and community members came together for our biennial retreat in November. It was a fantastic opportunity to celebrate success, plan for the years ahead and foster professional development in a relaxed environment.

A key highlight was hearing from a panel of Aboriginal elders as they shared their thoughts and experience in the research environment. A fun game brought tables together to make decisions on how to tackle the next pandemic, and an expert graffiti artist captured insights from the day, producing a series of artwork pieces in our key focus areas to reflect on in the future.



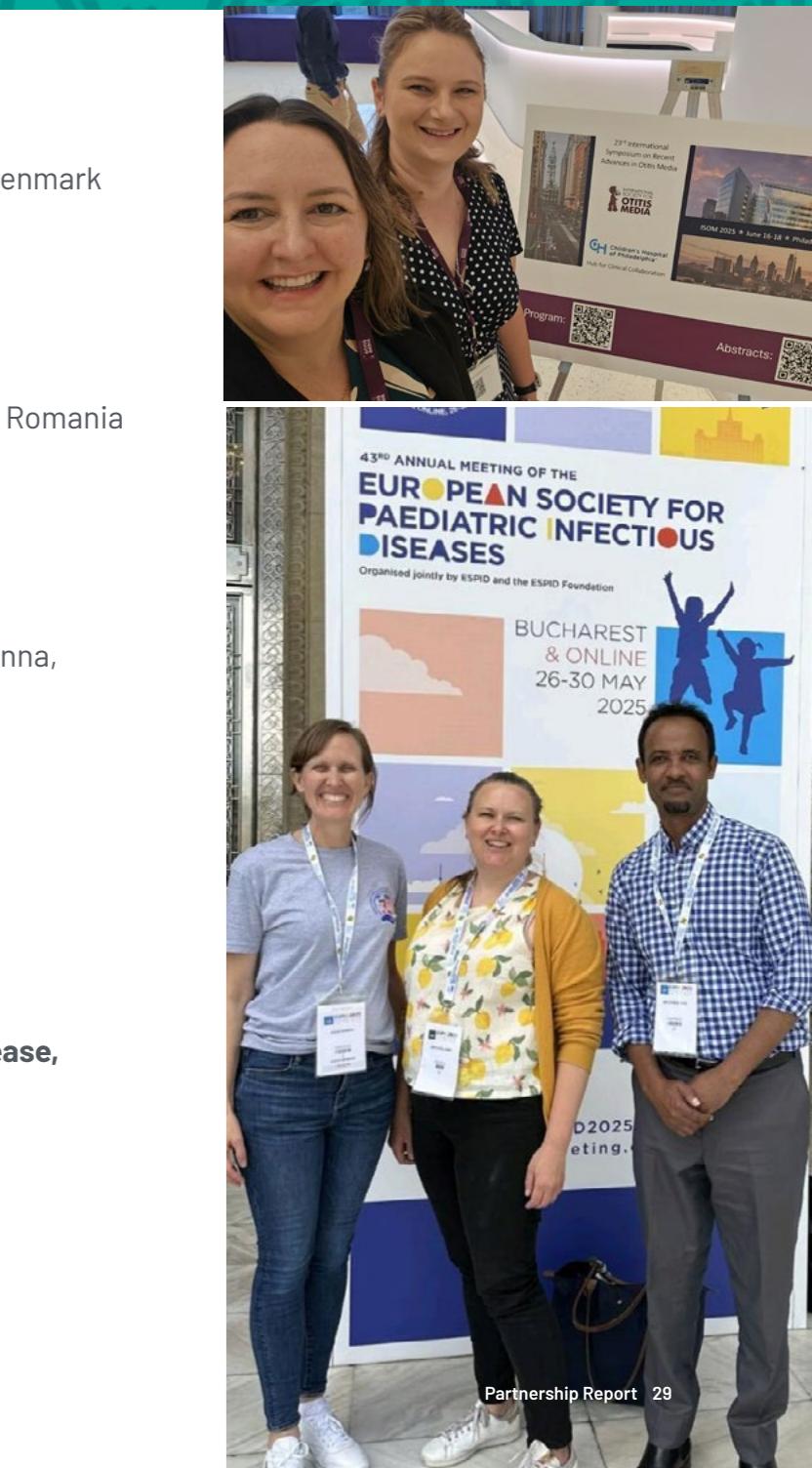
## Wesfarmers Ltd Lunch'n'Learn

Michael Chaney and Fiona Stanley took a walk down memory lane in November, outlining to Wesfarmers Perth Corporate Office and others dialled in, the long history between Wesfarmers and The Kids Research Institute Australia. Current Chair of the Wesfarmers Board, Michael Chaney was a critical support in those early days, helping to assemble funding in order to establish the Institute.

Chris Blyth provided insight of the impact of the past 12 years of funding to the Wesfarmers Centre and provided an opportunity for Wesfarmers staff to ask questions about infectious diseases in the community and the vaccines available.

**Our work was presented at the following conferences:**

- **Australia and New Zealand Society for Immunology National Conference, Perth**
- **Australian Society for Antimicrobials, Melbourne**
- **CSIRO ON Core, Brisbane**
- **ENGAGE CRE Conference, Melbourne**
- **Ausbiotech, Melbourne**
- **BRIDGE symposium, Melbourne**
- **Australian Society for Microbiology, Adelaide**
- **Asia-Pacific Vaccine and Immunotherapy Congress, Brisbane**
- **The Lancefield International Symposium on Streptococci and Streptococcal Diseases, Brisbane**
- **Australasian Society for Infectious Diseases 2025 Emerging Respiratory Diseases Symposium, Sydney**
- **Australasian Cytometry Society & International Society for Advancement of Cytometry CYTO-Connect Conference, Perth**
- **Australian Society of Infectious Diseases Annual Scientific Meeting, Canberra**
- **Lorne Infection and Immunity Conference, Lorne**
- **Communicable Diseases and Immunisation Conference, Adelaide**
- **Immunisation Coalition Annual Scientific Meeting, Melbourne**
- **WA Ear and Hearing Health Forum, Perth**
- **Audiology Australia Conference, Adelaide**
- **Rural Health West Aboriginal Health Conference, Perth**
- **Australasian Research Management Society Conference, Melbourne**
- **International Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Conference by Lowitja, Adelaide**
- **Australasian Viral Hepatitis Conference, Melbourne**
- **Australian Trials Methodology Conference, Melbourne**
- **Australian Statistical Conference, Perth**
- **Mucosal Immunology and Microbiome Symposium, Noosa**
- **The Bridgetech Symposium 2025 – Brisbane**
- **National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Conference, Sydney**
- **Bayesian Network Modelling Association Conference - Melbourne**
- **Acute Rheumatic Fever Diagnosis Collaborative Network Core Meeting, Singapore**
- **International Society for Otitis Media biennial conference, Philadelphia, USA**
- **Asia Pacific Conference on Point of Care Testing for Infectious Diseases, Bangkok, Thailand**
- **Novo-Nordisk Foundation Initiative for Vaccines and Immunity Meeting, Copenhagen, Denmark**
- **International Pathogenic Neisseria Conference, Florence, Italy**
- **World Vaccine Congress, Amsterdam, The Netherlands**
- **International Meeting on Indigenous Child Health, Winnipeg, Canada**
- **Annual Meeting of the European Society for Paediatric Infectious Diseases, Bucharest, Romania**
- **Perinatal Society of Australia and New Zealand Congress, Christchurch, New Zealand**
- **German Neonatal Society, Lubeck, Germany**
- **World Congress of Paediatric Dermatology, Argentina**
- **Congress of the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases, Vienna, Austria**
- **Paediatric Infectious Diseases virtual attendance from Perth – Bengaluru, India**
- **World Society for Paediatric Infectious Diseases, Bangkok, Thailand**
- **International Network of Research Management Societies Congress, Madrid, Spain**
- **Impact Lab, Toronto, Canada**
- **Strep A Vaccine Global Consortium, Geneva, Switzerland**
- **Infection and Immunity in Children International Congress of Paediatric Infectious Disease, Oxford, United Kingdom**
- **World Congress of Paediatric Cardiology and Cardiac Surgery, Hong Kong, China**
- **Pacific Islands Health Research Symposium, Suva, Fiji**
- **Annual Meeting of RSV – Wuhan, China**





# Grants and Funding

**The Wesfarmers Centre is committed to supporting high quality research by providing support for researchers, enabling them to develop new ideas and grow those ideas into fundable competitive grants.**



## Seed-funding

### Round 1:

- **Thick or Thin** - What drives heart valve remodelling and dysfunction in rheumatic heart disease? Vanessa Tenaglia, Tim Barnett, Wennie Lee, Ying Wang, Abha Chopra, John McPharlin
- **Not Just Numbers, But Voices Too** - A narrative inquiry on the experiences of Aboriginal families with the Blow, Breathe, Cough intervention - Jaimee Rich, Natasha Morrison, Lydia Timms, Robyn Choi, Chris Brennan-Jones, Val Swift
- **SHARE Initiative pilot study** - Aboriginal Health Practitioner capacity building in Moorditj Marp - Bernadette Ricciardo, Asha Bowen, Noel Nannup, Dale Tilbrook, Fiona Wood, Stephanie Weston, Jeff Cannon, Matt Cooper, Melanie Robinson, Rachel Burgess
- **Let's Yarn About Sepsis** - understanding Aboriginal children and their family's sepsis journey to improve outcomes - Anita Campbell, Gillian Woods, Lisa Pigliafiori, Melanie Robinson, Tania Harris, Jenna Greaves, Ingrid Amgarth-Duff, Asha Bowen, Natalie Middleton, Chris Blyth

## Round 2:

- **Putting families first** - a new tool to measure what matters in kids' chest infections - Daniel Oakes, Melinda France, Perry Cunningham, Rochelle Hicks, Helen Cooke, Richard Norman, Yue Wu, Charlie McLeod, Meredith Borland, Tom Snelling, Chris Blyth
- **Culturally secure knowledge translation methods to share Moxi Yarns Research findings with Aboriginal communities of the East Kimberley** - Tracy McRae, Rachel Burgess, Asia Bowen, Hannah Thomas, Ingrid Amgarth-Duff, Julie Toy
- **Building partnerships, protocols and proof-of-concept data to progress a novel probiotic strategy for GA and RHD prevention** - Janessa Pickering, August Mikucki, Emma Haynes, Alice Mitchell, Asha Bowen, Courtney King

## Training Support

- **Stephanie Enkel** - International Meeting of Indigenous Child Health 2025, Canada
- **Anita Williams and Beaynew Taye** - Annual Meeting of the European Society for Paediatric Infectious Diseases, Romania



➤ **Hannah Thomas, Fatoumata Camara, Jua Iwasaki, Tim Barnett** - The Lancefield International Symposium on Streptococci and Streptococcal Diseases, Brisbane

➤ **Emily McLeish** - Platform for Advanced Technologies in Omics and Biomedical Imaging training, Denmark and Sweden

➤ **Elke Seppanen** - The BRIDGE Program

➤ **Sarah Brazier** - WILD for STEM Leadership Circles Program

➤ **Soraya Leedham** - BridgeTech Program

➤ **Danial Oakes** - Bayesian Network Modelling Association Conference - Melbourne

➤ **Ainslie Poore** - Australasian Research Management Society Conference, Melbourne

### Aboriginal Capacity Building

➤ **Shakayla Walley** - Australian Society of Infectious Diseases Annual Scientific Meeting, Canberra

➤ **Lisa Pigliafiori** - Lowitja Institute's International Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Conference and SNAP Trial Team Retreat

### Deborah Lehmann Research Award

➤ The latest recipient of the **Deborah Lehmann Research Award** winner is Papua New Guinean researcher **Dr Lincoln Timinao**. Based at the PNG Institute of Medical Research, Dr Timinao's research focuses on asymptomatic malaria infections, which are currently going unnoticed in households yet play a major role in transmission within families and communities.

### 2025 HDR Scholarship Recipients

➤ **Keerthi Anpalagan** - Healthy Skin & ARF Prevention

➤ **Michael Dymock** - Infectious Diseases Implementation Research

➤ **Bonnie Hyatt** - Strep A Pathogenesis & Diagnostics

Dr Lincoln Timinao

## External Funding Grants Received in 2025

Project Title	Funding Awarded	Funding Body	Funding Scheme	Investigator Name
Leading for Impact: Strengthening leadership for child health program implementation in low-resource settings	\$45,020.00	Raine Medical Research Foundation	Raine Research Collaboration Awards	Dr Stephanie Einkel
Uncovering Protective Targets for Next-Generation Mucosal Vaccines Against Strep A	\$230,138.98	Raine Medical Research Foundation	RainePriming Grants	Dr Maria Emilia Dueñas Fadiel
Moorditj Marp (strong skin) - SHARE: developing an Aboriginal Health Practitioner-led Skin Health Assessment & Research Evaluation initiative for Aboriginal children and young people admitted to Perth Children's Hospital	\$965,522.40	Raine Medical Research Foundation	NHMRC Partnership Projects	Prof Aisha Bowen
Breathing easier: Capturing the impact of respiratory virus infections and assessing the cost-savings of respiratory virus interventions	\$100,000.00	National Health and Medical Research Council	WA Near-Miss Awards: Emerging Leaders (WANMA Investigator Grants Emerging Leaders)	Dr Linda Sama
Developing clinical risk prediction scores for early detection and treatment of hepatocellular carcinoma in Australia	\$100,000.00	Department of Health WA	WA Near-Miss Awards - Ideas Grants	Dr Baynew Taye
The Aboriginal Leadership and Training Platform for the Wesfarmers Centre of Vaccines and Infectious Diseases	\$130,000.00	Stan Perron Charitable Foundation	Perron People and Platforms	Dr Chris Byth

External Funding Grants Received in 2025 continued...

Project Title	Funding Awarded	Funding Body	Funding Scheme	Investigator Name
Epidemiological Services	\$40,000.00	Australian Society for Antimicrobials	Australian Society for Antimicrobials	Ms Anita Williams
RISE: Modelling RSV Immunisation Strategies for Evidence-Based Policy	\$1,499,072.60	National Health and Medical Research Council	NHMRC Partnership Projects	Prof Hannah Moore
RISE: Modelling RSV Immunisation Strategies for Evidence-based Policy	\$1,000,000.00	Department of Health WA	Major Research and Innovation Application Support	Prof Hannah Moore
Development of microbiome-based interventions for improved healing in burn wounds	\$111,651.38	Department of Health WA	DOH WA FHRIF Innovation Fellowships	Dr Huda Ghori
Advancing immunoassays for clinical proof-of-concept for a novel nasal spray vaccine	\$127,357.60	Department of Health WA	DOH WA FHRIF Innovation Fellowships	Dr Elke Seppanen
INFLUENCE: INcreasing InFLUENza Vaccine Use in Australian Children by Better Understanding Barriers, Broader Benefits, and Effectiveness of funded Influenza Vaccination Programs	\$100,000.00	Department of Health WA	WA Near-Miss Awards - Ideas Grants	Dr Huong Le
New Formulation of Benzathine Penicillin for Tx of Syphilis	\$784,337.81	Gates Foundation	Gates Foundation	Prof Laurens Manning
Clinical development of a nasal therapy to prevent otitis media and other respiratory infections	\$9,477,955.00	Stan Perron Charitable Foundation	Perron Programs and Partnerships	A/Prof Lea-Ann Kirkham

Project Title	Funding Awarded	Funding Body	Funding Scheme	Investigator Name
Delivering the tools for eliminating rheumatic heart disease	\$2,000,000.00	National Health and Medical Research Council	NHMRC Investigator Grant	Prof Jonathan Carapetis
Data driven approaches to RSV and Strep A immunisation implementation and evaluation	\$100,000.00	Department of Health WA	WA Near-Miss Awards - Ideas Grants	Prof Hannah Moore
Innovative clinical trials to generate evidence to strengthen Australian immunisation policy	\$100,000.00	Department of Health WA	WA Near-Miss Awards - Ideas Grants	Dr Charlie McLeod
Less pain, longer protection: implementing a novel approach to delivering rheumatic heart disease prophylaxis in Aboriginal communities	\$100,000.00	Department of Health WA	WA Near-Miss Awards - Ideas Grants	Dr Jane Oliver
Investigating the reduced NTHi immune response in children with otitis media	\$273,925.00	The Garnett Passe and Rodney Williams Memorial Foundation	The Garnett Passe and Rodney Williams Junior Fellowship	Dr Sharon Clark
ADAPTIVAX - an adaptive platform for vaccine trials in Western Australia to generate evidence to optimise immunisation practice and policy	\$777,147.00	Stan Perron Charitable Foundation	Perron People and Platforms	Dr Charlie McLeod
Blitz-OM: A single-dose anti-biofilm gel to effectively treat recurrent and chronic otitis media	\$1,397,116.10	National Health and Medical Research Council	NHMRC Ideas Grant	Dr Ruth Thornton
Ngangk Ngabala Ngoonda (Sun Safety) of Aboriginal young mob of WA	\$139,786.00	Cancer Council WA	Cancer Council WA Project Grant	Prof Asha Bowen

 **TOTAL FUNDING Nov 24 - Oct 25**

**\$19,599,029**

# Awards and Recognition



Sonia McAllster



Asha Bowen

## BrightSpark Fellowships

► **Sonia McAlister** has been awarded a fellowship to advance work underway for the PRIME Study (Protective Vaccine Responses in Infants after Maternal Immunisation), which investigates how repeat maternal pertussis vaccination influences infant vaccine-induced immunity. Sonia will spend the first six months of 2026 training in Systems Serology at the European Plotkin Institute for Vaccinology, where she will gain experience in an advanced functional antibody testing platform and strengthen our strategic partnerships with global leaders in vaccinology.

► **Emily McLeish's Brightspark Fellowship** will support her research on neonatal brain injury detection and neurodevelopmental outcome prediction using an AI-guided approach. A Wesfarmers Centre training grant this year allowed Emily to travel to Denmark and Sweden to gain hands-on experience of advanced proteomics techniques at the Platform for Advanced Technologies in Omics and Biomedical Imaging, which will support her ongoing research into the causes and consequences of sepsis in preterm infants.

► **August Mikucki's fellowship** will support research looking into novel probiotic candidates for the prevention of Group A Streptococcus (GAS). August's project will focus on using 'healthy' bacteria found in remote-living children to inhibit the growth of GAS, with the goal of developing probiotic treatments. This work has the potential to reduce infections, prevent rheumatic heart disease (RHD), and improve the health of at-risk communities, particularly Aboriginal children, who suffer the highest rates of GAS-related diseases.

## Premier's Science Awards:

- **Asha Bowen** – Winner, Mid-Career Scientist of the Year
- **Taleah Ugle** – Winner, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander STEM Student of the Year
- **Glenn Pearson** – Finalist, Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Scientist of the Year
- **Stephanie Enkel** – Finalist, Student Scientist of the Year
- **Micheal Dymock** – Finalist, Student Scientist of the Year

## 2025 UWA Research Awards:

- Winner – The School Mid-Career Research Award – **Asha Bowen**
- Winner – The School Early Career Research Award – **Anita Campbell**
- Commendation – The School Early-Career Research Award – **Hannah Thomas**

## WA Health Awards

**Researchers from the Healthy Skin & ARF Prevention team** were **finalists in the St John of God Health Care Excellence in Aboriginal Health category**, in partnership with the WA Country Health Service Kimberley, Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services and Nirrumbuk Environmental Health Services.

**The CAHS Sepsis Program, led by Chris Blyth**, were **finalists in the Altera Digital Health Excellence in Safety and Quality category**.



Glenn Pearson

► **Elke Seppanen and Sharon Clark** were selected to participate in The BRIDGE Program; a prestigious national training program to facilitate commercialisation of pharmaceuticals.

- **Lea-Ann Kirkham** was recognised as a Fellow of the Australian Society of Microbiology
- **The Blitz-OM team** completed the CSIRO OM Project and were named as recipients of the Facilitator Prize.
- **Greta Bernabei and Tanisha Cayley** were awarded the Allega Scafidas Development Award.

► **Janet Hansen** was named Elder of the Ball at Perth's NAIDOC Ball.



Blitz-OM team

