

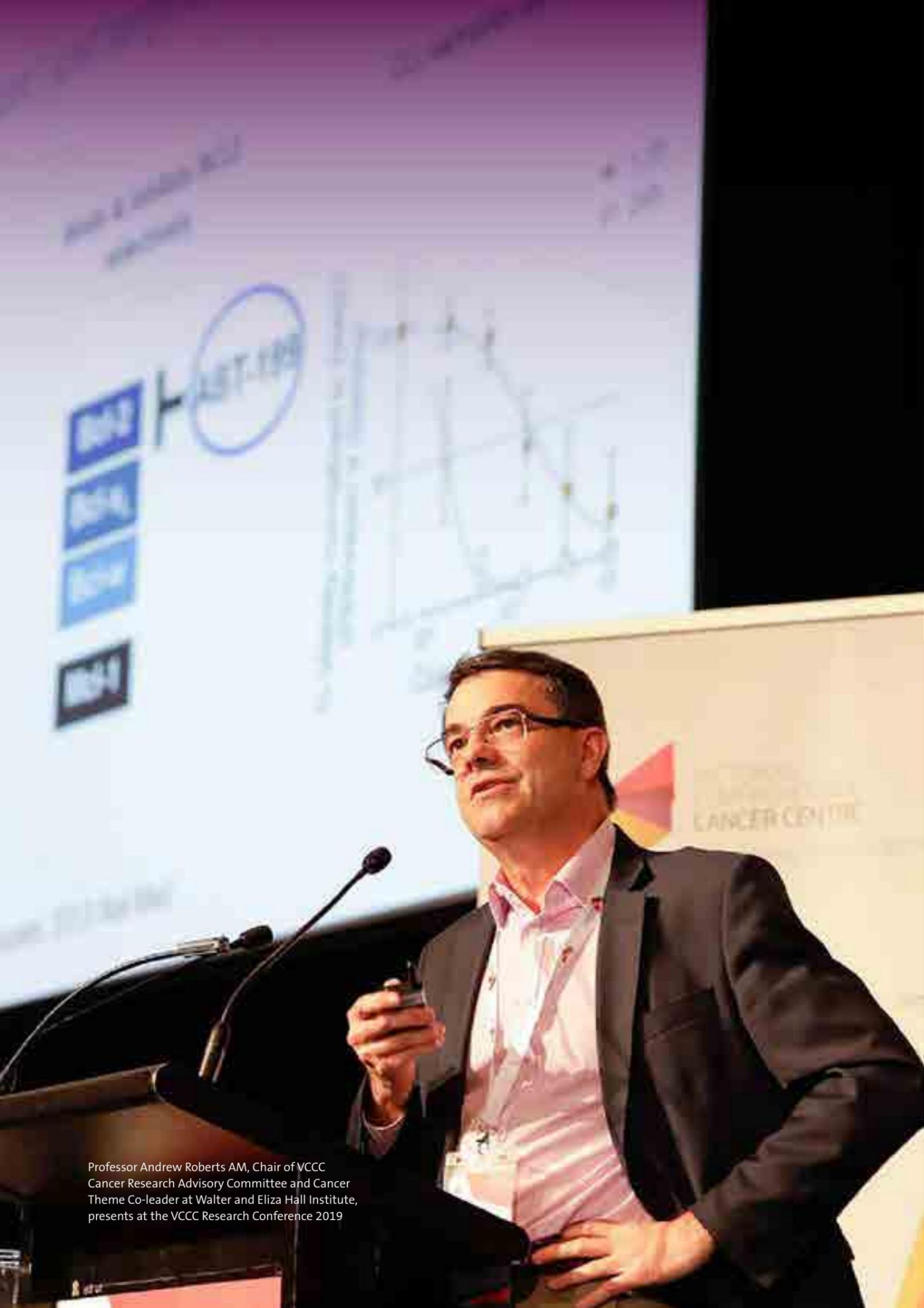


VICTORIAN  
COMPREHENSIVE  
CANCER CENTRE  
Overcoming cancer together

# ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20



Future ready



Professor Andrew Roberts AM, Chair of VCCC Cancer Research Advisory Committee and Cancer Theme Co-leader at Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, presents at the VCCC Research Conference 2019

# ABOUT THE VICTORIAN COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CENTRE



The VCCC team of expert staff facilitate the collective effort of the members

## Overcoming cancer together

The Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre (VCCC) is a multidisciplinary, multi-site alliance of 10 leading research, academic and clinical institutions working together to accelerate and amplify cancer research, knowledge and expertise to benefit the Victorian community.

The VCCC alliance members are Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Melbourne Health (including The Royal Melbourne Hospital), The University of Melbourne, the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research, the Royal Women's Hospital, The Royal Children's Hospital, Western Health, St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne (including St Vincent's Institute), Austin Health (including the Olivia Newton-John Cancer Research Institute and Austin Lifesciences) and Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

## Financial Reports

The financial and auditor's reports for the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre Ltd are published on the website [www.viccompcancerctr.org/annualreports](http://www.viccompcancerctr.org/annualreports)

## Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Owners of the lands upon which the VCCC alliance and our members are situated.

The Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre is supported by the Victorian Government



# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT



## Future ready

The world is constantly changing and this year it changed in ways we could never have anticipated. It began with a palpable sense of optimism with the opening of the Centre for Cancer Immunotherapy based in the VCCC building. Immune-based therapies offer tremendous hope for many cancers, so the unification of research teams from across the alliance to work together in a shared space was cause for celebration. The event, like other achievements during the year, further demonstrated the fundamental premise of the alliance – that we are, most certainly, better together.

## Beyond the alliance

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed extraordinary pressures on the health system, demanding rapid coordination.

These challenges have brought us closer together, strengthening relationships beyond the VCCC. The establishment of the Victorian COVID-19 Cancer Network in collaboration with Monash Partners Comprehensive Cancer Consortium, has supported clinical staff to help them to provide optimal care in extraordinary circumstances. The participation of Cancer Council Victoria has enabled integrated outreach to patients and rapid access to data, as we work to mitigate delays that may impact on patients' prognoses. This has been a terrific example of what collaboration can achieve.

## Strategic Research Plan 2016-2020 success on many fronts

2020 marks the completion of our current Strategic Research Plan with significant progress in all areas. The collaborative strength of the alliance is enabling leverage of industry funding for important, transformative projects.

In collaboration with the Health and Biomedical Informatics Centre at the University of Melbourne, the first large-scale, comprehensive data linkage of detailed primary care, hospital and registry data for Victorian patients with cancer is now operational.

Through our collective expertise we are continuing to develop smart, innovative clinical trials to translate discoveries and improve patient health outcomes.

This year, 10,000 professionals and consumers connected with VCCC educational programs live and online. The second VCCC Research Conference in September 2019 brought together some of the best minds in cancer to discuss the big ideas in cancer control.

In a few months, the first Master of Cancer Sciences students will graduate. Theirs has been a rich, multidisciplinary learning experience with 180 subject matter experts contributing to the program.

The close relationships we have with consumers will continue to develop. The VCCC Consumer Engagement Forum and toolkit launch in 2019 preceded the introduction of a new consumer remuneration model this year.

## State-wide collaboration and equity

Shortly, pending the Victorian State Government budget, work will roll out on another strategic plan, one which embraces what we have learned, and with greater emphasis on state-wide collaborations and equity. An external review of the VCCC commissioned by the Department of Health and Human Services in 2019 highlighted the progress we have made. Their findings, and our own extensive evaluation, will now help to inform the next exciting phase in our development.

Thank you to the VCCC Board, committees, distributed leadership and staff throughout the alliance for helping to shape a future built on such strong foundations.

**Professor Grant McArthur**  
Executive Director

# CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT



What does it mean to be a future-ready comprehensive cancer centre?

To me it means that a concept has been proven, goals are clear, critical runs are on the board, key relationships are established and momentum has gathered. Future-ready means we have our eye on the prize and the tools we need to win it – including the right mindset.

For the VCCC the target is better outcomes for patients with cancer. As most people reading this will appreciate, there is a lot of complexity hidden in that simple statement. To get there we need to convert the potential of cutting-edge therapies (immunotherapy, genomics and personalised medicine) into active, accessible treatments for more Victorians. We need to get new research out of labs and reports into practice efficiently and effectively. We need more clinical trials and more people participating. We need to pool and share resources, including data. All this requires intelligent leadership and collaborations that really work towards shared goals.

I am delighted that the VCCC alliance has made genuine headway in all these areas over the past few years – and the last 12 months, in particular.

## Exponential effect of education

One of the most fundamental components in a progressive, ambitious undertaking such as the VCCC, is the capacity and capability of the people involved. Underpinning this is education: the means by which we

share knowledge and skills that then unlocks potential, translates concepts to practice, sparks ideas, and makes more possible.

As a comprehensive cancer alliance, education is a key pillar for the VCCC. Since the VCCC's Strategic Research Plan was rolled out in 2017, VCCC education and training activities have reached 28,000 participants across the state and beyond. The result of this is an increasingly skilled, capable and knowledgeable cancer workforce.

As our alliance grows and matures, we can draw on this growing collective wisdom and apply it to the achievement of our goals and vision. We are already seeing the transformative effects that occur when this pool of talented people come together and collaborate to achieve a shared goal.

## Poised for impact

Over the past year, the VCCC has embarked on a major program of strategic future planning, including blue sky thinking sessions, a comprehensive evaluation of our programs with assessment by an independent external review panel, and extensive consultation forums. We now have a clear strategy and are poised to expand the benefits to reach more Victorians.

This is possible thanks to the commitment of contributors from across the VCCC alliance members and the sector. Thank you to my fellow Board Directors and the dedicated and passionate staff team led by Professor Grant McArthur. We also acknowledge the ongoing support of the Department of Health and Human Services and the Victorian Government.

Our VCCC alliance is future ready. We are changing the way we tackle cancer in Victoria. Over the next few years I believe we will make headway on key issues including reducing the disparity of outcomes for patients in regional areas and other vulnerable populations.

Finally, it has been wonderful to see the VCCC working with other leading cancer organisations to coordinate the cancer sector's response to the COVID-19 pandemic across the state. The new Victorian COVID-19 Cancer Network is providing unification, reassurance and sector-specific support during the time of crisis for cancer professionals across the State. This is an excellent demonstration of the true value and potential of collaboration.

We look forward to working with our extended community as we continue our endeavour to overcome cancer together.

**Professor Linda Kristjanson AO**  
Chair, Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre



# CONSUMER CASE STUDY



“MY EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH LES CHANGED HOW I VIEW THE VALUE OF CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT.”

The VCCC has a commitment to capture the voice of consumers, to listen to the unique and crucial points of view that they bring and incorporate these into decisions that shape strategy and program development. In one of many examples, a progressive, multi-site internship program to upskill the clinical trials workforce, is benefiting from close consumer involvement.

### Les Leckie consumer

“I am the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre representative on the VCCC Cancer Community Advisory Committee. I have had a long association with private and public sector organisations and have personal experience of cancer. I think for a lot of us that have enjoyed stimulating careers, being involved in innovative programs developing young talent is hugely gratifying.

“Internships are competitive... for good reason. A month after the inaugural program, 100 per cent were employed in the clinical trial sector.

### The right person for the job

“Having been a patient myself, I’m motivated to maintain a connectivity to patient perspectives which I have managed to achieve through an association with Cancer Connect at Cancer Council Victoria. Applying this helps to identify the best candidates.

“I was provided information and took time to understand the experience and aspirations of prospective interns. It was terrific to work with the manager of PCCTU, Marian Lieschke. Applying for an internship can be a stressful and emotional experience and it was great to work alongside a leader in the field to build trust and give candidates the best opportunity to display their talents.”

Marion agrees, “We conducted over 30 interviews over several days. Les not only attended every interview but was prepared. He took the role seriously and the other panelists appreciated this. He has remained involved in the journeys of the interns, providing a constancy during our first year of this program that has been amazing.

### Consumers on the team

“My experience working with Les changed how I view the value of consumer engagement. I have since had consumer involvement in other projects. I believe that where the skills that the consumer brings matches the role being asked of them, there can be fabulous outcomes.”



[viccompccancerctr.org/  
consumer-case-studies](https://viccompccancerctr.org/consumer-case-studies)

## CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT



### Consumer engagement is everyone’s business

A fundamental goal for the VCCC is to ensure that consumer engagement is integral to all its programs; creates opportunities for collaboration across the alliance, and reinforces our ethos to keep patient experiences at the forefront of our thinking. Considered a key element of the VCCC’s Strategic Research Plan, great strides have been made in this area. The new VCCC consumer engagement manager role is a vital link in assisting the organisation’s Cancer Consumer Advisory Committee to implement the VCCC Consumer Engagement Action Plan which came to life this year.

### Consumer Engagement Toolkit

The VCCC Consumer Engagement Toolkit was launched December 2019, providing advice and strategies for effective integration of consumer perspectives into progressive cancer research. The online toolkit is a collection of resources and case studies for consumers and those who work with them in health and medical research organisations. It assists people in understanding and implementing consumer engagement processes and practice within their own settings. Since the online resource was launched, there have been 6,000 pageviews and 523 sample documents downloaded from the VCCC website.

The toolkit was introduced at the first VCCC Consumer Engagement Forum attended by consumers, administrators and executives, academics and researchers and health professionals. There was a strong turnout from alliance members as well as representation from Cancer Australia, Department of Health and Human Services, Melbourne Academic Centre for Health, Safer Care Victoria and Cancer Council Victoria. Evaluation of the forum concluded:

- > 96% positively endorsed the interactive event
- > 75% reported an increased understanding of the VCCC and its purpose
- > 96% said they would look at the new online toolkit and
- > 91% would advocate for improved consumer engagement.



[viccompccancerctr.org/  
consumer-engagement](https://viccompccancerctr.org/consumer-engagement)

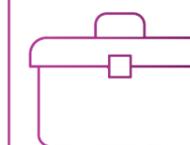
### Consumers as partners in research

Consumers have the expertise of a lived experience, a unique perspective not often represented or considered in research teams. Increasingly patient insights are incorporated into managing clinical care however consumer and researcher relationships are less developed. To assist researchers to involve consumers at the earliest stages of research, the VCCC presented a series of six researcher workshops at the Royal Children’s Hospital, Olivia Newton-John Cancer Research Institute and University of Melbourne, facilitated by Anne McKenzie AM.

Ms McKenzie is a nationally regarded leader in consumer engagement who also lent her expertise to developing the course content of the Cancer Research subject in the Master of Cancer Sciences postgraduate degree collaboratively developed by the VCCC and University of Melbourne.

### Consumer remuneration

In recognition of the significant impact consumers have had on VCCC projects and programs, recompense in acknowledgement of consumer contribution and expertise was introduced this year. Remuneration is now offered to all consumers involved with VCCC programs and activities reflective of the level of participation aligning with the VCCC Consumer Engagement Model. VCCC Cancer Consumer Advisory Committee member Keith Donohoe says, “I find introducing honorariums focuses the requestor into efficient and respectful use of the resource, and positively changes some volunteers’ accountability for their contribution.”



**6000**  
CONSUMER TOOLKIT  
WEBSITE PAGE VIEWS



**6**  
RELATIONSHIP  
BUILDING  
WORKSHOPS

# REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT



## Delivering cancer care close to home

The VCCC is focused on improving outcomes for patients with cancer no matter where they live in metropolitan, regional or rural Victoria.

### Developing the regional workforce

The VCCC Teletrial Program provides a framework for clinical trial sites to partner across multiple organisations, including regional sites, increasing trial treatment opportunities for patients closer to home.

The framework, supported by a library of new resources, is currently being used by four trials across seven Victorian sites. These resources have been developed to have broad relevance and application across the Victorian setting. Successful implementation has increased the range of trial participants, in addition to advancing telehealth-based shared care models. Alfred Health has applied the framework to continue trial participation for a patient from Hobart, unable to travel to Victoria due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Clinical trial site efficiencies have improved with the application of a digital portal to 17 regional and metropolitan clinical trial units, for management of regulatory administration. The portal provides opportunities for remote trial monitoring, diversifying trial participant population and the capability to grow the regional trial load.

Further capacity building for regional clinical trial sites has been enabled through placement of clinical trial assistant and study coordinator interns. The dedicated roles support implementation of quality improvement projects to enhance regulatory and reporting procedures required for trial compliance.

### Connected to expanded networks

The VCCC has signed Memorandums of Understanding with Bendigo Health and Albury Wodonga Health to establish VCCC Affiliated Partners, in an important extension of the alliance network.

The partnerships will enable the VCCC to further extend clinical trial programs into Victorian regional cancer centres, growing access to trials, building connections between regional and metropolitan health workforces, leading to better cancer outcomes for regional patients with cancer.

 [viccompncancerctr.org/  
regional-victorians](https://viccompncancerctr.org/regional-victorians)

## CLINICAL TRIALS

### Enhancing clinical trial capability and capacity

Increasing clinical trial disciplines, efficiencies and providing resources, offers the Victorian cancer sector opportunities to expand patient access, diversify workforce skills and implement new approaches. The VCCC continues to lead advancements in Victoria's clinical trial landscape.

### Addressing the number one unmet need

Investigator-initiated trials (IIT) are established and managed by non-pharmaceutical researchers, such as clinicians and researchers working in a healthcare setting. IITs benefit patients by asking important clinical questions that pharmaceutical or biotech industries are less likely to invest in.

The VCCC IIT Capacity Building Program has facilitated support mechanisms for several trials, from fully-funded concepts to idea generation and protocol development. The trials supported through the program received knowledge and coaching from experienced investigators in addition to trial management, site management and biostatistical support. A toolkit of downloadable resources and process maps has been developed to guide early-to-mid career investigators, as well as clinical trial staff, through the trial process.

 [viccompncancerctr.org/  
iit](https://viccompncancerctr.org/iit)

### Building clinical trial capability

Palliative care incorporates good symptom management with a team approach to patient and carer communication. Clinical trials in palliative care are essential for establishing and creating new standards, backed by robust evidence.

The VCCC Building Trial Group Capability Program focuses palliative care leadership and activity in the cancer sector to increase workforce skills, and access to advanced palliative care approaches. The program has enabled a growth in palliative care trials, increasing workforce resources, networks, connections, knowledge and shared learnings, as well as patient outcomes.

 [viccompncancerctr.org/  
palliative-care](https://viccompncancerctr.org/palliative-care)



### Overcoming barriers to clinical trial access

Cancer biology is not constrained by the social definition of adulthood, 18 years and over. Adolescents (15-17 years) can develop adult-type cancers, and young adults (18-25 years) can develop paediatric-type cancers. For these patients, there is often a disconnect between place of care, tumour-specific oncology expertise, and access to state-of-the-art treatments via clinical trials.

The VCCC Increasing Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Access to Clinical Trials Program successfully requested that the Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) adopt the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) guideline to include adolescent patients in adult oncology clinical trials. In addition, an AYA clinical trial ethics and governance guideline and a standard operating procedure for young adult access to a paediatric clinical trial, have been developed and can be freely accessed online for implementation in healthcare settings.

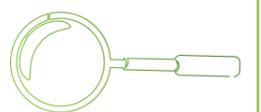
 [viccompncancerctr.org/  
aya](https://viccompncancerctr.org/aya)

### Improving clinical trial data

Clinician awareness of clinical trial availability is key to patient recruitment. Provision of real-time trial information with reliable, accurate and up-to-date data is required to ensure recruitment is active. In collaboration with Cancer Council Victoria, the VCCC Increasing Awareness of Clinical Trials Program is developing efficient, practical enhancement options aimed at improving the Victorian Cancer Trials Link platform.

8

EARLY-CAREER RESEARCHERS GAINED INVESTIGATOR-INITIATED TRIAL EXPERIENCE



6

PALLIATIVE CARE UNITS CONDUCTING CLINICAL TRIALS



# MASTER OF CANCER SCIENCES



It used to be that surgery, radiation and chemotherapy were the limit of options in cancer care. But things have changed, especially in the last decade. Multidisciplinary teams are introducing novel ideas and new therapies, better suited to individual circumstances. When students emerge this year as graduates from Australia's first wholly online cancer-specific program, they will be among a new era of cancer specialists ready to tackle cancer on all fronts.

The Master of Cancer Sciences is the flagship postgraduate course in the VCCC's educational suite, jointly presented with the University of Melbourne. As the incidence of cancer continues to rise globally, skilled practitioners in the oncology workforce are in increasing demand.

### Real-time learning

The innovative nature of the program brings together internationally recognised oncology expertise with online learning techniques. Students learn from clinicians and researchers almost in real-time – as new research and clinical approaches develop.

Over 180 experts have contributed to the program which incorporates curricula and resources that reflect the dynamic nature of the field. Teaching and learning approaches include fully animated lecture suites, gamification, virtual reality, and patient simulations.

### Relevant for broad range of disciplines

Junior study coordinator in clinical trials at Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Farha Inam says, "I've developed my professional communication skills, both oral and written, and my knowledge of the foundations of cancer and general understanding of cancer within society has also deepened."

Speech therapist Alanna Bowen also endorses the multidisciplinary approach saying, "I have been a clinician for 10 years and wanted to further my knowledge and understanding of cancer beyond that of my own profession. The subjects exploring survivorship are of particular interest to me and I hope to obtain the skills required to contribute to translational research in a meaningful way."

 [viccompcancerctr.org/  
master-cancer-sciences](https://viccompcancerctr.org/master-cancer-sciences)

"I WANTED TO FURTHER MY  
KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING  
OF CANCER BEYOND THAT OF MY  
OWN PROFESSION."



## EDUCATION

### Future-ready cancer workforce

Some of the world's best cancer specialists work within VCCC institutions. The alliance harnesses this expertise in innovative ways to help translate leading-edge knowledge into contemporary learning. This year, more than 10,000 people took the opportunity to connect with the VCCC to discover more, learn more and do more – applying new understanding to improve outcomes for people with cancer.

### Multiple learning events

The Monday Lunch Live lecture series provides weekly access to the latest knowledge across the spectrum of cancer disciplines.

A panel discussion in March addressing the impending COVID-19 pandemic attracted 900 viewers and was the catalyst for the establishment of the Victorian COVID-19 Cancer Network (VCCN). Since then the online lecture format has been extended to focus on specialised content to address the demands and challenges facing the workforce as a result of COVID-19 with the *Cancer and COVID-19 in Victoria* series.

Woven into the VCCC cancer education (theory and understanding) and training (the skills to practice) programming are opportunities at all levels incorporating clinical and research training, professional development and leadership.

 [viccompcancerctr.org/  
learn](https://viccompcancerctr.org/learn)

eLearning takes Victorian expertise to the world. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) provide a globally accessible platform that is helping to transform learning on a large scale. Enrolments for the Cancer Survivorship for Primary Care Practitioners MOOC, developed by the VCCC and the University of Melbourne, have now surpassed 3,800 students.

The MOOC attracts participants from metropolitan, regional and rural settings Australia-wide. It has been embraced by international students with participants joining in from 83 countries, demonstrating the value of contemporary digital cancer education to overseas markets.

### Clinical trials skills development and workforce training

The VCCC SKILLED Program is successfully introducing employment-ready candidates into the Victorian clinical trials workforce. From Ballarat Health Services and Barwon Health, to St Vincent's Hospital and Royal Children's Hospital, interns have gained positions in regional and metropolitan clinical trial units and healthcare services.

Industry support for the future success of the program has been assured with VCCC coordinating MTPConnect's Researcher Exchange and Development within Industry (REDI initiative) into the future. This will enable the VCCC to extend delivery of the internships and increase available places, clinical sites and partners.

 [viccompcancerctr.org/  
REDI-launch](https://viccompcancerctr.org/REDI-launch)

**10,000+**  
LEARNING PARTICIPANTS



**3,800**  
MOOC ENROLMENTS  
FROM 83 COUNTRIES



# RESEARCH CONFERENCE



## Examining Cancer From Every Angle VCCC Research Conference 2019

The second VCCC Research Conference *The Next Wave* proved to be a unifying and inspiring event for the Victorian cancer workforce in 2019.

Cutting edge cancer science merged seamlessly with consumer perspectives and patient stories to produce a holistic, multidisciplinary event. The broad-ranging program showcased the world-class research and cutting-edge clinical developments of VCCC members enhanced by international perspectives from global experts.

### Cutting edge

On 16-17 September 2019, 420 delegates attended the event at the Sofitel Melbourne, enjoying a program that tackled some of the trending topics in cancer from revolutionary new therapies and teletrials, to future health trends, cancer nursing and survivorship. There was a focus on fundamental science and its clinical application, as well as population health, government perspectives and policy.

The stellar line up of over 50 international and local speakers included:

- > Olivia Newton-John OBE AC, founding champion of the Olivia Newton-John Cancer Wellness and Research Centre
- > World-renowned cancer expert, Professor Doug Hanahan author of *The Hallmarks of Cancer*, the most cited cancer research paper of the last decade
- > American physician scientist Professor Helen Heslop
- > The Medical Futurist, Dr Bertalan Mesko.

The event concluded with a public forum hosted by multi-award winning ABC science journalist, Natasha Mitchell and featured experts and consumers discussing the future of cancer care and cancer research in Victoria.

The event was convened by Associate Professor Kate Burbury, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and The Royal Melbourne Hospital and Professor John Mariadason, Olivia Newton-John Cancer Research Institute, supported by an expert committee.

 [viccompcancerctr.org/  
research-conference](https://viccompcancerctr.org/research-conference)

**“THIS WAS A FANTASTIC CONFERENCE. I WAS ENGAGED, EXCITED AND INSPIRED.” – CONFERENCE DELEGATE**

# RESEARCH COLLABORATION



## Connectivity is central to effective integration

As an alliance organisation, our ability to bring about better connectivity is key to the effective integration of research, education and clinical translation. Multiple initiatives have created connections across organisational boundaries, encouraged system-level collaboration and fostered a culture of parity, openness and cooperation.

### Creating connections between scientists and clinicians

This year, the VCCC Scientists in the Clinic program was successfully piloted in partnership with the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. The key goal of the preceptorship is to build connections between researchers and clinicians to facilitate opportunities for translational research. Scientists who took part in the program have gained experience in a clinical setting, interacting with experts in cancer treatment. Importantly, they were also able to meet with patients undergoing treatment, community and family members, to gain an understanding of some of the challenges faced, and the impacts that research can have on individuals.

To assist other organisations to duplicate the program in their own settings, a freely available online toolkit has been created, offering multiple resources via the VCCC website.

### Overcoming barriers to nurse-led research

The VCCC Nurse-led Research Hub is a thriving community of practice, research incubator and online network designed to develop nurse education and training in research. Nurses from Victoria, interstate and overseas are actively involved in the initiative which is a progressive example of a multi-faceted approach to empowering nurses to become emerging clinical researchers. It provides tailored support for nurses to connect, consolidate and utilise their new knowledge to begin to build quality nurse-led research as a feature of comprehensive, evidence-informed cancer care.

 [viccompcancerctr.org/  
scientists-in-clinic](https://viccompcancerctr.org/scientists-in-clinic)

Graduates of the VCCC Nurse-led Research Hub Partnership Post program; where nurses are released from their regular workplace to take part in a research study intensive - say the program has demystified research and opens the door for more nurses to consider research as a pathway to improve patient care, and to enhance their career capability.

 [viccompcancerctr.org/  
nurse-led-research](https://viccompcancerctr.org/nurse-led-research)

### Molecular Tumour Board progresses precision medicine

Now entering its eighth year, the VCCC Molecular Tumour Board provides a multidisciplinary style forum to share opinion on the clinical implications of molecular pathology test results of tumours. Held monthly and open to all, the forum offers clinicians the opportunity to gain cutting edge advice on complex cases and provides an exceptional education opportunity for anyone interested in precision oncology.

 [viccompcancerctr.org/  
molecular-tumour-board](https://viccompcancerctr.org/molecular-tumour-board)

*“This platform allows connection and communication between researchers, pathologists and clinicians with shared interests in precision oncology approaches across the VCCC. It allows us to highlight the progress we have made using bench-to-bedside translational research approaches.” – Dr Stephen Luen, convener, VCCC Molecular Tumour Board*

**140**  
NURSES  
CONNECTED VIA  
ONLINE COMMUNITY



**7**  
YEARS MOLECULAR  
TUMOUR BOARD





## Addressing clinical challenges during COVID-19

Healthcare services around the world have faced many clinical challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The global health crisis has necessitated rapid innovation and a coordinated response. Patients with cancer, and the health professionals who care for them, are particularly impacted.

### Victorian COVID-19 Cancer Network crisis response

Early in March 2020, the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre (VCCC) and Monash Partners Comprehensive Cancer Consortium (MPCCC) established the Victorian COVID-19 Cancer Network (VCCN) to lead the cancer sector's crisis response and recovery plan. The network is provided with vital data by the Victorian Cancer Registry and Cancer Council Victoria is also an active contributor, providing a vital interface with the Victorian community.

The VCCN quickly grew to over 700 members from a wide range of disciplines from general practice, medical oncology, haematology, radiation oncology, paediatric and geriatric oncology and pharmacy through to consumers, patients and government representatives.

As the pandemic continues, the cancer sector is experiencing large scale disruption to the treatment of patients, reduced healthcare sector capacity and concerns about the ongoing impacts of delayed cancer diagnoses.

The network has delivered clinical guidance across the cancer sector, ranging from specific tumour streams to telehealth, ethics and cancer care for Indigenous peoples. In addition, the VCCN has supported educational programming, public health advocacy campaigns, surveys to identify the needs of the sector, peer support and connectivity.

### Catalyst for fast, collaborative change

The VCCC's COVID-19 response has demonstrated the alliance's capacity to act as a catalyst for fast, inclusive change and its effectiveness as a vehicle for enabling health sector resilience to unexpected challenges.

The VCCN approach and collaborative outputs have provided much needed unification during the time of crisis. As a result, care and treatment provided to patients across the state has been more consistent and importantly, health care professionals have been better supported to deliver optimal care.

 [viccomcancerctr.org/vccn](https://viccomcancerctr.org/vccn)

## LEADERSHIP

### Leadership in a changing world

This year, leaders from across the member organisations have been active in many arenas. They programmed the second major VCCC Research Conference in September; were recipients of Medical Research Futures Fund (MRFF) and National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) funding; led VCCC committees; were consumer advocates and experts on working groups; participated in the VCCC distributed leadership group, and, with colleagues all over Victoria, came together in the face of challenges of COVID-19. There is no doubt that the strength and future of this alliance is the deep pool of talent that it brings together.

### Research and Education Lead program

The Research and Education (R&E) Lead program is maturing into an effective means for fostering multi-site, multidisciplinary, high impact, collaborative research. With 13 Leads working across 10 tumour streams and two cross cutting cancer themes (primary care integration and nursing), the framework is producing comprehensive approaches to translatable cancer research.

Some of the highlights include:

#### Addressing gaps in endometrial cancer

In November 2019, Professor Linda Mileshekin, R&E Lead for Gynae-oncology, convened a workshop *Endometrial Cancer, a Vision for 2020* at which key research opportunities were identified and discussed by the multidisciplinary group. To address the gap of limited treatments for women with metastatic or recurrent endometrial cancer, a Medical Research Futures Fund (MRFF) application was submitted by the Lead in collaboration with Australia New Zealand Gynaecological Oncology Group (ANZGOG), a multidisciplinary team from Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and the NHMRC Clinical Trial Centre, citing the significance of the VCCC endometrial cancer workshop. This application was ultimately successful with \$1.6m committed to new ANZGOG trials.

### Breast Cancer 2020: the cutting edge

The Breast Cancer R&E Lead program hosted its first major conference and public forum in February 2020 to profile what is new, challenging and controversial in the neoadjuvant management of patients with breast cancer. The forum addressed dilemmas in breast cancer treatment including surgical considerations, tumour heterogeneity, therapy sequencing, radiotherapy, reconstruction and supportive care and featured internationally renowned expert, Dr Eric Winer, director of the Breast Oncology Centre at Dana Farber Cancer Institute.

### Improving treatments for pancreatic cancer

Professor Peter Gibbs, R&E Lead for Gastrointestinal Cancers, convened the third in a series of pancreatic cancer symposia aimed at using clinical registry data to analyse and improve clinical management of pancreatic cancer. With the poorest outcomes of all cancers, the need to use the collective experience of clinicians caring for pancreatic cancer patients, and integrate it with published research evidence and real world clinical data, to reach consensus on optimal patient care is essential to achieve the best possible outcome for patients. As a result, focused effort on the development of a research project investigating a role for PET imaging and novel PET tracers is underway.

 [viccomcancerctr.org/leads](https://viccomcancerctr.org/leads)

### Distributed Leadership

Together, the VCCC alliance members represent a critical mass of expertise and resources. Under the VCCC distributed leadership model, strategic leadership is drawn from across the alliance members to:

- > Contribute to strategic planning and prioritisation
- > Guide programs of work
- > Review and inform new processes and systems
- > Contribute to education and training initiatives
- > Galvanise collaboration across disciplines and institutions

 [viccomcancerctr.org/distributed-leadership](https://viccomcancerctr.org/distributed-leadership)



## Outcomes-focused health services research

Health services research, whereby healthcare practice, services, costs and experiences are used to understand community requirements and outcomes, is critical to improving patient outcomes. However accessing crucial health data has proven to be difficult, as systems are siloed, governance creates barriers, or technology is out-of-date.

### A goldmine of information and data

Connection and comparison of health data is a potential goldmine for health services research, enabling primary health care and hospital records, as well as registries, to be used for analysis and investigation. Effective linkages between health data sources will provide researchers with the opportunity to explore and consult, potentially providing answers or direction for key clinical questions.

The new VCCC Data-Driven Research Hub is making these connections, opening networks and unearthing the gold.

The Data Hub combines a data-sharing platform that uses University of Melbourne developed GRHANITE™ software to unlock primary care data with data-sharing systems and infrastructure provided by BioGrid enabling a dedicated secure research environment.

In addition, an expert Data Hub team provides project design advice to researchers ensuring the capabilities of the linked data are considered and key features such as overarching ethics processes, are used for all data sources.

### Sophisticated analytical tools and techniques

Through the University of Melbourne Cancer Health Services Research and the Cancer in Primary Care Research groups, the Data Hub also enables access and utility of the data. These groups work with clinicians and researchers to use analytical tools and techniques with the Data Hub, mitigating over-interpretation and helping to accurately focus and investigate important research questions.

The Data Hub is a research project incubator, providing approaches to collating data, advice on analytic methods and delivering outcomes-focused results for improving health services into the future.



# RESEARCH

## Accelerating research outcomes to clinical practice

### Integrating genomic testing in clinical practice

The principle of precision oncology is to 'give the right drug to the right patient at the right time'. The key to this is genomic molecular profiling of tumours to identify targetable alterations. Greater use of new technologies is enabling application of this cutting-edge diagnostic tool to benefit more patients.

The VCCC Precision Oncology Program builds on expertise and infrastructure at the University of Melbourne Centre for Cancer Research and Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre to increase use of genome sequencing technologies, expand patient access and develop tools for treatment decision-making.

Ethics and governance approval for genomic sequencing was approved in early 2019 and within 12 months 121 patients with 11 tumour types accessed truly comprehensive genomic testing. Of these, clinicians were able to glean clinically useful information for 62 per cent of patients and targetable alterations for 44 per cent.

In addition, three Research Tissue Coordinators are working across VCCC clinical member sites to facilitate tissue retrieval and distribution for multisite translational research projects, including those related to precision oncology, immunotherapy and targeted therapies. To date, the tissue coordinators have supported 19 collaborative research projects.

### Improving consistent risk assessment and screening practices

Coordinated precision prevention and tailored screening models provide consistency of risk assessment and cancer screening practices.

A VCCC program has prioritised three projects to bridge translational gaps connecting alliance members to develop communication and prototype tools to:

- > Optimise the implementation of the new national guidelines for the use of aspirin for the chemoprevention of colorectal cancer
- > Understand how breast cancer screening resources can be optimised to achieve greatest efficiency, effectiveness and equity for Victorian women in breast cancer prevention
- > Develop an applied risk model to assess the genomic risk of multiple cancers.

## Short circuiting Victoria's deadliest cancer

In late 2019, Cancer Australia opened an enquiry into a National Targeted Lung Cancer Screening Program to determine the best way to implement a national lung cancer screening program. The R&E Lead for Lung Cancer, supported by the R&E Lead for Primary Care brought together experts from multiple disciplines and organisations, including consumers, to coordinate a consensus response, culminating in a detailed plan.

The issues set out in the submission have become the blueprint by which Cancer Australia is assessing applications from organisations tendering for the contract to provide tailored lung cancer screening Australia-wide. The outcome of the tender process is expected in October 2020.

As a result of the VCCC's coordination, Victoria is positioned to implement a tailored lung cancer screening program that will have direct benefits through earlier detection of lung cancer.



TARGETABLE ALTERATIONS FOUND IN

# 44%

OF SEQUENCED TUMOURS

# 3

RESEARCH TISSUE COORDINATORS



## KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

### Online resources and toolkits

VCCC collaborations have generated a range of new tools and resources. These knowledge products promote sharing and dissemination of information and increase capability across the sector.

#### Adolescent and Young Adults

Low clinical trial participation for adolescent and young adults (AYA) is attributed to barriers such as lack of understanding, access to children's hospitals, age eligibility and levels of collaboration between paediatric and adult oncology researchers. The AYA toolkit addresses these barriers, providing an ethics and governance guideline, standard operating procedure (SOP) and form, as well as a link to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) guidance for inclusion.

 [viccompcancerctr.org/aya](https://viccompcancerctr.org/aya)

#### Consumer engagement

The role of consumer representatives within the Australian healthcare system has evolved significantly over past decades. Meaningful partnerships now functionally benefit the community and those involved in advancing cancer research, education and clinical care. The VCCC's consumer engagement toolkit shares what the VCCC has learned and provides tips and tools to help others improve practices in developing consumer-led research with patients and carers.

 [viccompcancerctr.org/consumer-engagement](https://viccompcancerctr.org/consumer-engagement)



### Investigator-initiated trials

Investigator-initiated trials (IITs) are established and managed by non-pharmaceutical researchers, such as clinicians and researchers working in a health institution. This VCCC toolkit was developed to help researchers to unlock pathways to take key research to the next stage. The resources set out the clinical trial life cycle, from idea to implementation, and provide access to advisory guidance, links, downloadable resources and process graphics.

 [viccompcancerctr.org/iit](https://viccompcancerctr.org/iit)

#### Scientists in the Clinic

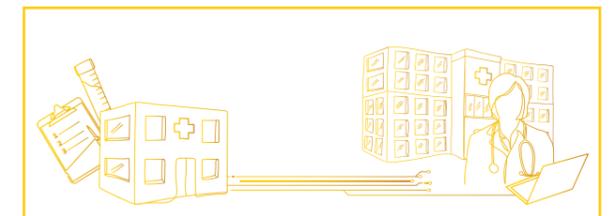
Providing scientists with the opportunity to shadow clinicians as they attend outpatient clinics, multidisciplinary meetings and ward rounds, gives them clinical insights and perspectives that enhance the context of their research. This new toolkit aims to provide organisations with the key considerations and resources to develop their own preceptorship program within specific contexts.

 [viccompcancerctr.org/science-clinic](https://viccompcancerctr.org/science-clinic)

#### Teletrials

A teletrial allows a primary clinical trial site to enrol, consent and treat patients on clinical trials in partnership with multiple satellite sites. Resources, guidance and a framework are available for Victorian clinical research sites to deliver a trial through the teletrial approach, meeting regulatory and legal requirements, including Good Clinical Practice (GCP).

 [viccompcancerctr.org/teletrials](https://viccompcancerctr.org/teletrials)

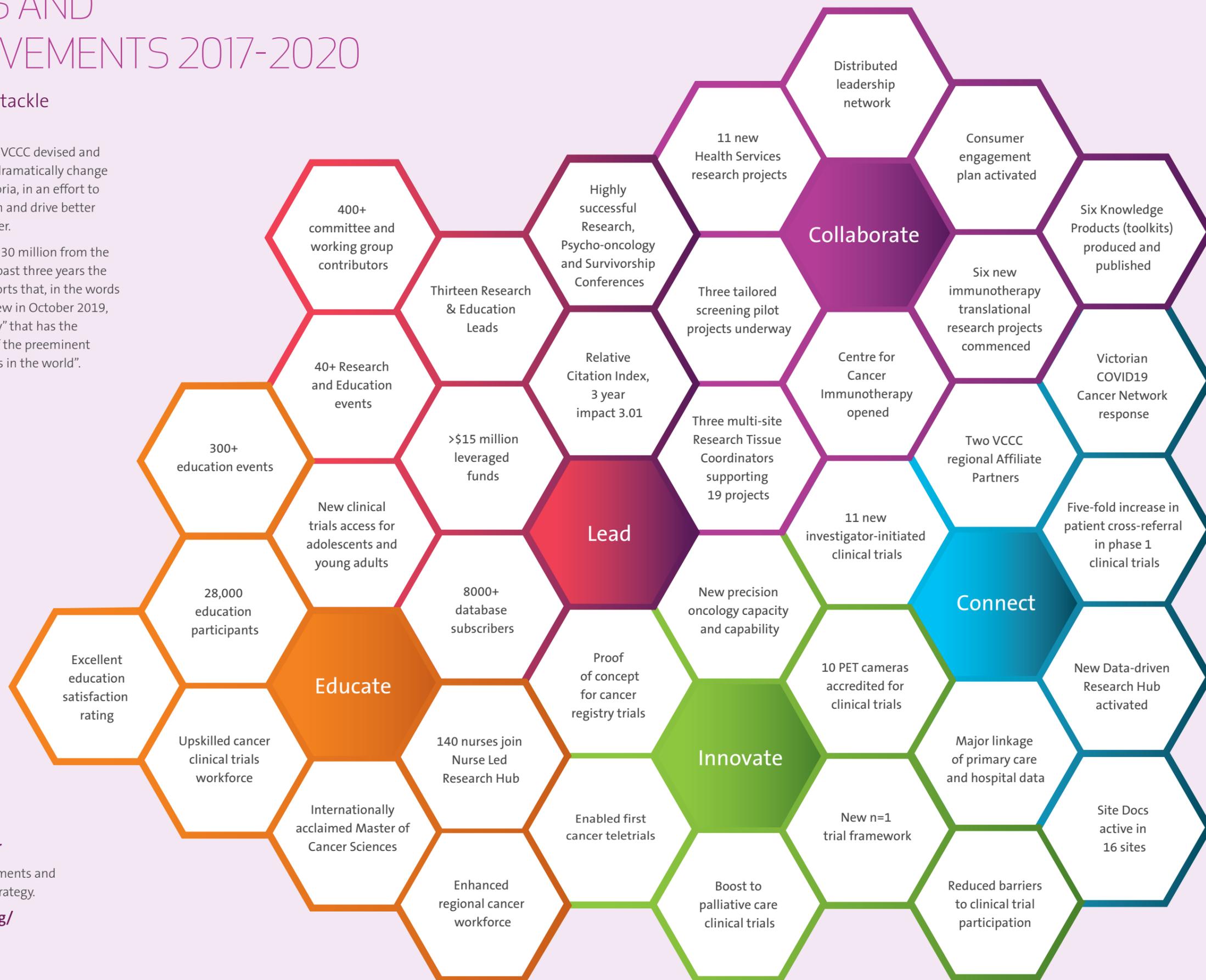


# PROGRESS AND KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2017-2020

## Changing the way we tackle cancer in Victoria

In 2017, the ten members of the VCCC devised and agreed to a plan that sought to dramatically change the way we tackle cancer in Victoria, in an effort to accelerate translation of research and drive better outcomes for patients with cancer.

Supported by an investment of \$30 million from the Victorian Government, over the past three years the alliance has led collaborative efforts that, in the words of an independent External Review in October 2019, represents “exceptional headway” that has the VCCC on track to become “one of the preeminent population based cancer systems in the world”.



### #overcomingcancertogether

Learn more about these achievements and the next iteration of the VCCC Strategy.





Supported by



Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre members



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