

Cancer Trials Management Scheme Competitive Grants

Fostering innovation in cancer to save lives and ensure equitable access to clinical trials for all Victorians.



Clinical trial projects we fund

Project: Accessing cancer clinical trials for people of the West

Aim: To sustainably increase the availability of, and patients' access to clinical trials at Western Health, including

patients of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

Grant recipient: Dr Dishan Herath and the Western Health Oncology Research Unit

Funded by: Cancer Council Victoria and the Department of Health through the Victorian Cancer Agency

Years funded: 2017-2019

The project

To improve patient access to high quality cancer clinical trials by building capacity of Western Health's cancer clinical trials unit, increasing opportunities for CALD patients to participate and providing infrastructure to support increased recruitment to a wide variety of clinical trials. This includes trials focussed on early phase drug development, trials that are investigator initiated or cooperative group funded and trials that involve multiple disciplines (in addition to medical oncology).

The need

Western Health comprises three hospitals based in the regions of western Melbourne where 38% of people speak a language other than English at home, covering more than 100 languages and dialects. Despite having a large and growing population in this catchment, Western Health only recruits 3.8% of eligible cancer patients to clinical trials.

Currently Western Health runs a higher percentage of non-sponsored trials (45%), when compared to larger centres like Peter Mac. This exemplifies the importance of having an effective early phase trials unit, as it provides a platform for greater financial security (and sustainability) which offsets the costs of running lesser funded multidisciplinary/non-commercial clinical trials.

Western Health needed to build capacity of its cancer unit to deliver high quality, Phase I clinical trials to improve outcomes for cancer patients in the western region of Melbourne and improve opportunities to deliver non-commercially funded (i.e. investigator initiated or cooperative group funded) clinical trials and trials in multiple disciplines.

Outcomes

Cancer Council Victoria funding enabled Western Health to put the people and infrastructure in place to run early phase clinical trials, before seeking sponsorship funding to attract and sustain this type of activity.

The funding has directly supported time for a Phase I clinical lead to work on clinical trials, as well as dedicated time for research nurses to work on trials and attend clinics to upskill in early phase trials.

Leveraging a Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre (VCCC) project, Western Health has also recruited an early phase clinical trial coordinator to monitor and share clinical trial activity between three different health services (Austin, Peter Mac and Western).

Cancer Council Victoria funding also supported the growth of Western Health's non-pharmaceutical clinical trial portfolio, enabled collaboration and increased activity across disciplines, and supported the evaluation of strategies to improve trial participation for CALD patients.

“Thanks to the support we received, we have been able to enrol more patients, including CALD patients, onto clinical trials. Cancer Council Victoria's support for our phase I program has given patients access to new drugs early in the development process” – Dr Dishan Herath, Head of Cancer Services, Western Health.

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