



From the ACvA Leadership

Thank you for your ongoing support and engagement with the ACvA.

We are continuing to build our operational team, with our new Executive Director having been on board since early February and recruitment of a Project Support Officer and Project Manager in full swing. The Program Manager position is still open, so if you are interested in applying or know someone who might be, please contact our Executive Director on kerry.doyle@ozheart.org or phone on 0417458979. Click [HERE](#) to view the full Position Description.

We also wanted to acknowledge the extraordinary and worrying times we are in due to COVID-19 and reach out to all of you who are adapting to new ways of working and of keeping in contact with each other. The ACvA is working remotely and also looking at all options to ensure we continue to help the entire CVD research community stay connected and move our work forward. Please email your suggestions for fun and innovative ways to do this to the email address above.

We know many of you are already doing a significant amount of heavy lifting as the COVID-19 situation continues to unfold. The ACvA is a unique position to help nationalise efforts to undertake cohort studies or clinical studies in COVID-19 related areas, through its Flagships and ability to coordinate information. We will be coordinating a Zoom meeting in the next week for interested researchers, with representation from each of the Flagship advisory groups.

Over the last 24 hrs, we have received the following calls for information or potential collaborations:

- Professor Kim Greaves and his team are undertaking a project in Queensland that hopes to provide a descriptive analysis of predictors of outcomes in patients with COVID-19 infection in Australia. This involves linking data from General Practice with hospital data in COVID-19 positive patients. The team are looking for anyone undertaking similar work and are keen to share ideas. Professor Greaves can be contacted at Kim.Greaves@health.qld.gov.au or on 0427389900.
- The HBPRCA Executive are interested in coordinating an analysis of the incidence of hypertension in the COVID-19 patients and the medications that they are prescribed or taking prior to admission & the patients' comorbidities for our Australian patients to see if it differs to the reports from China & Italy. Ideally this work would be undertaken at a national level to address the question of concern for the specific ACEI/ARB medications.

Please contact the Executive team via Dr Anastasia Mihailidou, who can be contacted at anastasia.mihailidou@icloud.com

Please advise of any other projects where we can assist by contacting kerry.doyle@ozheart.org or on 0417458979.

Thanks to,



President: Prof. Gemma Figtree



Executive Director: Kerry Doyle

Celebrating the success of our members

Congratulations to the following groups for major, big vision proposals resulting in funding success:

- George Health and George Medicines receiving \$53m from three investors - \$33m in total from Federation Asset Management and Bupa and \$20m from the Medical Research Commercialisation Fund – led by Professor Bruce Neal. Click [HERE](#) to view.
- The University of Sydney to major work that will assist in transforming post-hospital care for people with heart disease via NHMRC Synergy Grant (\$5m) - led by Professor Julie Redfern. Click [HERE](#) to view.

A Successful Industry Roundtable

The third ACvA Industry Roundtable was held on 19 March 2020, following the inaugural roundtable in 2019. Responding to the escalating COVID-19 situation, we moved quickly from the proposed face to face meeting to a virtual meeting. We were very pleased to secure participation of the majority of our original speakers and to have Kieran Schneemann, Director, Government Affairs, AstraZeneca and Director of Canteen to facilitate the meeting. Over 34 people participated in this virtual event. The core purpose of the roundtable was to continue to build a strong platform of engagement between industry and the research community to tackle Australia's biggest health burden, drive economic

outcomes and agree on the need to establish two working groups to move a shared agenda forward. The proposed working groups would be focused on the following tasks, respectively:

- 1. Accelerating the delivery of evidence-based and value-based care driving equitable health outcomes for all Australians**
- 2. Implementing a new vision for industry/academic partnership, capturing our research and innovation potential for commercials, economic and patient outcomes.**

Next steps

- A report on the roundtable is currently being finalised and will be circulated to attendees, prior to being published on the ACvA website and through our newsletter.
- The Executive Director, ACvA will hold one on one meetings with all industry invitees to collate input on priority workstreams and seek suggestions of key people to involve in the working groups.
- Nominations received at the roundtable for working group membership are being considered, along with recommendations made by attendees. EOIs will be circulated for remaining working group positions.

Thanks to,



Mr Kieran Schneemann



Prof. Kerry-Anne Rye

Members' input – first grant round of the MRFF CVD Mission

The leadership of the ACvA would like to thank our members for responding to our survey in relation to enhancing subsequent rounds of the MRFF/Mission funding. We will continue to work with the Commonwealth to enhance grant processes and importantly, to achieve alignment with the Roadmap that has now been endorsed by Minister Hunt.

A brief summary of members input to the survey is outlined below.

- Achieving the big vision of the Mission would be enhanced by more specific referencing of the Road Map in the design of the grant schemes and the assessment criteria- including encouraging whole-of-pipeline solutions across all Flagships.
- Longer time frames are required for high quality applications to allow meaningful and high-quality collaborations at scale to be developed and formalised, including funding and in-kind support.
- The call for applications should be broad. While the initial focussed call was welcomed, a broader scope, possibly with cross-cutting themes, would be more inclusive, encourage greater collaborations and whole of pipeline approaches, across disease states or systems. For example, it would allow areas such as vascular biology to be included and co-morbidities to be addressed.
- Consider an iterative approach for grants applications, with a grant review panel that includes international experts. Models used in the US may be useful for further exploration (including a consistent panel team with diverse expertise).
- Examine other peer-review processes that allow outlier reviews to be addressed and applications to be ranked relative to one another. The ABC process used by the National Heart Foundation was an example put forward for consideration.
- Include criteria that encourages and enables networks of clinical and discovery research to be developed within themes.
- Consider mechanisms/criteria to address the “leaky pipeline”/loss of skilled researchers, giving additional weight to applications that include EMCR and/or researchers returning from family/care-giving responsibilities, with a view to developing a sustainable workforce over the next decades.
- Strengthen consumer engagement across all aspects of the process, from priority setting to review.

ACvA Emerging Leaders’ Committee – new initiatives

To help us support the next generation of cardiovascular researchers, and to harness further energy and innovative ideas for the Alliance, we established the ACvA Emerging Leaders Committee. The main aim of the Emerging Leaders Committee (ELC) is to provide a conduit between the ACvA board, the cardiovascular community and the community in general, to promote awareness about cardiovascular disease research and the need for sustainable and impactful funding. The committee membership is set out below:

- Dr Francine Marques, chair, Heart Foundation Future Leader Fellow at Monash University
- Dr Katrina Colafella, NHMRC CJ Martin Fellow at Monash University
- Dr Joanne Tan, senior postdoctoral fellow at SAHMRI
- Dr Anna Calkin, Heart Foundation Future Leader Fellow at the Baker Institute
- Dr Jason Wu, Senior Research Fellow at the George Institute

- Dr Helena Viola, Heart Foundation Future Leader Fellow at the University of Western Australia
- Dr Rachel Climie, Prestige and Marie Curie Research Fellow at the Paris Centre de Research Cardiovascular
- Dr Steve Wise, Leader of the Applied Materials Group at the Heart Research Institute
- Niamh Chapman, social media liaison, PhD student at the Menzies Institute.
- Dr Emma Thomas, Research Fellow at the University of Queensland
- A/Prof Sally Inglis, NSW Cardiovascular Research Network Life Science Fellow at UTS.

The ELC has been working on a range of initiatives and is pleased to launch its first activity for 2020. On behalf of all ACvA members, I would like to acknowledge the vision and work of the ELC and of Dr Helena Viola as the program manager for the new initiative detailed below.

Launching the ACvA Mentor-Mentees Program.

- This unique program offers the opportunity for cross-sector mentoring, providing mentees with knowledge and constructive feedback in view of supporting and guiding career development.
- If you are a member of the ACvA and would you like to be matched with a mentor, please click [HERE](#).
- If you are a member of the ACvA and would like to act as a mentor, please click [HERE](#).

We look forward to providing the opportunity for meaningful mentor-mentee relationships, and hope this program assists you in making meaningful connections and continuing your career development during these uncertain times.

Thanks to,



Dr. Francine Marques



Dr. Helena Viola

HBPRCA – Early Career Research Committee

COVID-19 resources and Zoom catch-ups

The COVID-19 pandemic is posing new challenges to all of us. Please click [HERE](#) for a series of resources put together by the High Blood Pressure Research Council of Australia

(HBPRCA) Early Career Researcher Committee. We hope that these resources can provide some guidance throughout this uncertain period.

The HBPRCA ECR committee have also organised 30-minute Zoom conversations each Tuesday and Thursday. Please feel free to dial in have a chat with colleagues over a virtual cup of coffee or tea, keep each other informed and share any other updates with each other. If you would like to join the Zoom conversations please click the links within the [COVID-19 resources document](#) and enter the password: HBPRCAchat.



HBPRCA Coffee Catchup

Upcoming ACvA activities

Planning for the first meeting of the ACvA Scientific Advisory Committee.

We will bring our Flagship Directors together in April to hold the first formal meeting of this group. High on the agenda is ACvA's priorities for cross cutting themes to address gaps in our knowledge and accelerate impact for those at risk, living with or recovering for cardiovascular disease. This will place our membership in a unique and positive position as funding opportunities, public, private, national and international, are announced, and cement the sector's reputation as strategic and forward thinking. We look forward to engaging you in, and reporting to you on, this important work.

National Awards for Cardiovascular Research

We have commenced work with the National Heart Foundation of Australia on a partnered approach to developing national awards for outstanding cardiovascular research. After the initial scoping is completed we will establish a working group to take this project forward. The awards will be developed and delivered in a virtual environment, although we hope that as the COVID-19 situation resolves, we can move to a major awards evening and celebrate excellence and success together.

Emerging Leaders Committee activities in progress

- **Workforce survey:** the committee surveyed 548 Australian cardiovascular researchers to identify the main issues they are facing as well as identify solutions. This was developed into a paper, which is currently under peer-review and a report is being prepared for the public and politicians. The most striking finding was that in the absence of secure funding in the next few years, 91% of cardiovascular researchers (especially women) said they would leave the sector. The survey data was selected as a finalist for the oral presentation award by the International Society of Hypertension in November 2019.
- **Cardiovascular Champions:** this is one of our most exciting initiatives, where we will select the top emerging cardiovascular researchers (in a merit-based process) to receive intense science communication training to enable them to promote better understanding about cardiovascular disease and research by the Australian public, politicians and policymakers. In the COVID-19 environment we are exploring innovative ways to take this forward, so watch this space!
- **Public promotion of cardiovascular research:** the committee is designing new online campaigns to promote awareness and educate Australians about cardiovascular disease and research. This will be launched later this year.

Working with ACvA partners

- **Bioplatfroms Australia:** Bioplatfroms Australia was established through the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy to strategically coordinate and position Australia's biomolecular research infrastructure capability in support of Australia's research priorities. Bioplatfroms Australia currently manages a national network of 'omics research infrastructure providers and the bioinformatics capacity needed to support these activities. Collectively Bioplatfroms Australia provides the capability to support all aspects of product development, production, QC and market performance. Bioplatfroms Australia has partnered with the [Australian Cardiovascular Alliance \(ACvA\)](#) that was established in 2015 by leading scientists and key scientific institutions and associations from across Australia. In addition to supporting the operations of the ACvA, Bioplatfroms Australia will also make grant funding available to be administered through the ACvA. Funds will be used to generate additional data, and will be particularly relevant to Big Data, Precision Medicine and Drug Discovery and translation flagships. We look forward to launching this initiative in the near future and thank Bioplatfroms Australia for their support and partnership.
- **The National Heart Foundation of Australia:** The NHFA is a funding supporter of the ACvA but is also working collaboratively with us on a range of initiatives such as the development of a national awards scheme. As indicated in our last newsletter the NHFA is developing its strategic research priorities for 2021 and is keen to secure the input of the ACvA members. We will continue to engage through our Flagships/Scientific Advisory Board to coordinate input to this process.

Flagship Update

1. **Policy and Implementation Flagship** – Garry Jennings
 - The P&I Flagship will be diverse and inclusive and operate as a community of interest.
 - The Heart Foundation has offered to provide a level of administrative support for the operation of the Flagship and make meeting space/technology available, as required.
2. **Clinical Trials Flagship** – Chris Reid and Vincent Thijs
 - First meeting held.
 - Paper on outputs/outcomes being developed.
 - Paper to be circulated to Flagship members, prior to being provided more broadly.
3. **Big Data Flagship** – Emily Banks and Louisa Jorm
 - Brainstorming session held.
 - As the next step, identify 5 big CVD questions that could be answered if we were able to access existing big data (e.g. NIHSI, MADIP). Broad areas already identified relate to:
 - Concordance with best practice care – prevention, acute care, post-acute care/secondary prevention, AF management
 - Outcomes/surveillance following procedures, devices, medication useIncidence
 - A discussion paper is being drafted for publication and advocacy purposes.
4. **Precision Medicine** – Alicia Jenkins and Peter Meikle.
 - The Flagship met in December 2019 and recommended the following priorities for further work:
 - Audit of national capabilities
 - Cohorts biobanks
 - Clinical partners
 - Commercial partners
 - Establishment of a database.
 - Establishment of linkages and collaboration.
 - Establishment of research collaborations.
5. **Bioengineering** – James Hudson and Peter Barlis
 - The Flagship has met on two occasions and is refining its workplans, with the following priorities under discussion:
 - Promotion of CV bioengineering/creating a one stop-shop for CV bioengineering.
 - Strategies to move discoveries through the pipeline.
 - Creating opportunities for early career researchers to engage internationally and nationally.
 - Developing an ACvA-wide workshop focused on creating impact from research.

6. Drug Discovery and translation

- A brainstorming session has been held, with the following ideas put forward for further consideration and development:
 - Mentoring programs and career development for early and mid-career researchers.
 - Development of searchable databases (capabilities, technologies, research platforms).
 - Leadership in good experimental design.
 - Developing a cultural framework for the CVD sector.

Upcoming funding opportunities

National Heart Foundation of Australia – research grants

- Future Leader Fellows – open until 1 May 2020
- Postdoctoral Fellows – open until 15 May 2020
- Vanguard Grants – open until 24 April 2020
- Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Awards – open until 3 April 2020.

Information can be found at <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/research>

The Big Data Challenge

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is inviting novel Solutions for the NHLBI Big Data Analysis Challenge: Creating New Paradigms for Heart Failure Research. The goal of the challenge is to foster innovation in computational analysis and machine learning approaches utilizing large-scale NHLBI-funded datasets to identify new paradigms in heart failure research. The challenge aims to address the need for new open source disease models that can define sub-categorizations of adult heart failure to serve as a springboard for new research hypotheses and tool development in areas of heart failure research from basic to clinical settings.

NHLBI will award up to a total of \$250,000. Up to five (5) winners will be selected, with each winning up to \$50,000. The competition period ends at NOON EDT on August 28, 2020.

For more information on this challenge please visit:

<https://protect-au.mimecast.com/s/ushFCyojxQT6xKBEIze69G?domain=nhlbi.nih.gov>

Participants are strongly encouraged to use NHLBI-funded datasets in the development of their Solutions. To view available BioLINCC data collections and initiate a request for data, please visit:

<https://protect-au.mimecast.com/s/3UZaCzvkyVC85EjvfXpZwb?domain=biolincc.nhlbi.nih.gov>

For a description of BioLINCC request requirements, please refer to section 3.0 of the BioLINCC Handbook (<https://protect-au.mimecast.com/s/RTuGCANpgjCrkBDMf9K0tY?domain=biolincc.nhlbi.nih.gov>) and FAQ (<https://protect-au.mimecast.com/s/NnUgCBNqjlCPY0L3ujPmX9?domain=biolincc.nhlbi.nih.gov>).

NSW Office of Health and Medical Research grants

The NSW Office for Health and Medical Research currently has a Translational research Grants Scheme (TRGS) round open. The grants are not specifically dedicated to cardiovascular research but our NSW cardiovascular researchers have been successful in these grants in the past and we would encourage NSW researchers to apply. Expressions of Interest close in July 2020: <https://www.medicalresearch.nsw.gov.au/translational-research-grants-scheme/>