

Network Update

Strengthening Cancer Palliative Care in Regional NSW: Driving innovation through collaborative pharmacy research

Cancer drives a large share of palliative care hospitalisations in New South Wales, making palliative care a vital part of cancer treatment. In 2022–23, two in five palliative care hospitalisations nationally involved patients with a principal diagnosis of cancer (AIHW, 2024). As the population ages and more people survive cancer, the need to deliver high-quality, person-centred palliative care across has never been more urgent.

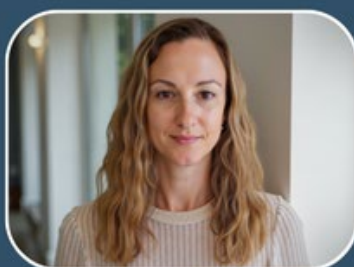
Pharmacists play a key role in multidisciplinary palliative care teams, using their medication expertise to manage symptoms, minimise side effects, and improve patients' quality of life. In regional and rural NSW, palliative care pharmacists also play broader roles in service development, clinical education and research, addressing local challenges in delivering care closer to home.

The NSW Regional Cancer Research Network (NSWRCRN) is driving innovation in this area by uniting clinician-researchers with pharmacy backgrounds to develop ways to improve medication safety, access, and outcomes for regional people with cancer receiving palliative care. Among them are Associate Professor Jennifer Schneider (University of Newcastle), Felicity Bates (Mid North Coast Local Health District), and Fern Beschi (Calvary Mater Newcastle) - all recipients of NSWRCRN Clinician Fellowships.

Each of these researchers is tackling a unique, practice-driven challenge identified through frontline work with patients and clinicians. Associate Professor Jennifer Schneider is developing a practical, home-based method of therapeutic drug monitoring (TDM) for chemotherapy using dried blood spot sampling aimed at reducing the frequency of hospital visits for cancer patients in non-metropolitan areas. Felicity Bates is leading the use of the Death and Dying Distress Scale (DADDS) to identify and address existential distress in palliative care patients and examine its links with medication use. Fern Beschi is conducting foundational stability and compatibility testing for subcutaneous drug infusions to support safe medication management and pain control for people with brain cancers receiving care at home.



A/Prof Jennifer Schneider



Felicity Bates



Fern Beschi

Together, these projects represent a shift towards safer, more responsive, and more locally tailored models of palliative cancer care. The NSW Regional Cancer Research Network (NSWRCRN) has made this work possible by funding clinicians to dedicate time to research and collaboration. Time that would otherwise be difficult to secure within busy clinical roles. This support has allowed them to come together, share expertise, and pursue innovative, practice-driven solutions. Their combined efforts have the potential to drive local change and centre palliative care around patients' needs and the realities of delivering care in regional and rural settings.

As NSW works to improve cancer outcomes, this group's work demonstrates that meaningful innovation can start within our regional areas. By building research capacity in palliative care pharmacy, they're improving the experiences of end-of-life care for people with cancer in regional areas and equipping the health system to respond to local needs with compassion, evidence, and real impact.

FUNDING OUTCOMES

Announcing Our 2025 Regional Research Fellowship Recipients

The NSW Regional Cancer Research Network is pleased to announce the recipients of our latest Regional Research Fellowship grants. This scheme supports clinicians and researchers, including basic scientists, working across the Central Coast, Hunter New England, Mid-North Coast and Northern NSW Local Health Districts to conduct high-impact translational cancer research within their own institutions.

Congratulations to the two outstanding recipients selected in this round:

Dr Jamie Bryant

Senior Research Academic, University of Newcastle

Project: *Co-designing and validating unmet needs assessment tools for children with cancer and their parents in regional NSW*

Each year, around 350 children are diagnosed with cancer in NSW. In 2023 alone, 51 of these cases were managed at John Hunter Children's Hospital, which services a large regional population. Despite this, there are no validated tools to assess the unmet needs of these young patients and their families.

Dr Bryant's project will address this gap by:

- Co-designing two self-report tools for children (aged 8–14) with cancer and their parents
- Implementing a cross-sectional survey to validate these tools and assess the prevalence of unmet needs in regional NSW

This work will help embed patient-centred, needs-based care into paediatric oncology and establish a foundation for future national research.

Dr Michelle Brown

Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Newcastle

Project: *Utilising DNA methylation as blood-based biomarkers to develop a diagnostic test for ovarian cancer*

Ovarian cancer is often diagnosed at a late stage, drastically reducing survival rates. However, when detected early, outcomes improve dramatically, with cure rates of up to 90 percent. Currently, there is no reliable early detection test.

Dr Brown's project will explore the use of DNA methylation biomarkers, which are chemical changes in DNA detectable in the bloodstream, as a minimally invasive way to identify early-stage ovarian cancer. The research aims to:

- Develop a sensitive and specific blood test to detect these markers in ovarian cancer patients

- Advance the development of a clinically useful early detection tool that could transform outcomes for women diagnosed with ovarian cancer

These projects reflect the core mission of the Regional Research Fellowship scheme: to build research capability across regional NSW and foster innovation that translates into real-world cancer care improvements.

To learn more about the projects we support, visit the [Supported Projects page](#).

TRAINING/SEMINAR AND EVENTS

Upcoming Events:

Looking Forward to the NSW Cancer Summit 2025

We're excited to be joining colleagues and collaborators from across the state at the inaugural **NSW Cancer Summit 2025**, taking place on **13–14 August at ICC Sydney**. This landmark event will bring together researchers, clinicians, consumers, and policy leaders to help shape the future of cancer prevention, treatment and care in NSW.

From cutting-edge laboratory research and innovative diagnostics to prevention strategies, treatment breakthroughs and holistic support models, the Summit will showcase the depth and breadth of cancer research and care across our state.

The **NSW Cancer Summit 2025 is now sold out**. For your chance to still be part of it. [Join the waitlist here](#).

- **Program now available:** [View the full program](#)
- **Featured speakers:** [Meet the speakers](#)

We look forward to connecting with many of you in person and celebrating the collective impact of cancer research and care across regional and metropolitan NSW.



Cancer Institute NSW



Franklin Women Event – Building A Thriving Career in Newcastle and Beyond

Franklin Women is hosting a special panel event exploring how location can shape a career in health and medical research. This session will feature a panel of women who have built successful and impactful

careers while based in Newcastle, a city situated at the intersection of metropolitan and regional research and healthcare.

The panel will share insights across roles, disciplines and career stages, reflecting on the challenges, opportunities and networks that have shaped their careers and impact. Attendees can expect inspiring stories, practical tips and the chance to make new career connections.

When: Wednesday 20 August 2025, 5.30–8.00pm AEST (livestream 6.15–7.30pm)

Where: The University Gallery, Callaghan, and livestreamed

Tickets:

- In-person (member) \$35
- In-person (non-member) \$65
- Livestream (member) \$30
- Livestream (non-member) \$15

Registration is essential via the [Franklin Women website](#).

We're back, *Newy!*

**Building a thriving career
in Newcastle and beyond!**

20 AUG, 5:30PM – 8PM | NEWCASTLE + LIVESTREAM

 Jessica Bennett The University of Newcastle and Hunter New England Local Health District	 Cate Dingelstad Hunter New England and Central Coast Primary Health Network	 Prof Kirsty Pringle The University of Newcastle and Hunter Medical Research Institute	 Dr Shanthi Ramanathan Hunter Medical Research Institute
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Let's come together in Newcastle to hear women from diverse career paths across the health and medical research ecosystem share the opportunities, challenges and connections shaping their careers within the region.

Tickets via [FranklinWomen.com.au](#)



2025 Cancer & Immunology Ideas Forum - Abstract Deadline Extended

On behalf of Sydney Cancer Partners, Maridulu Budyari Gumal (SPHERE) Cancer CAG, NSW Regional Cancer Research Network, The University of Sydney Cancer Research Network, UNSW Cancer and Triple I Themes and Macquarie University we invite you to register to attend the 2025 Cancer & Immunology Ideas forum.

We welcome abstracts from Honors Students, PhD candidates and Early Career Researchers. The deadline has been extended to August 15.

When: Friday 19 September 2025, 9.30am–4.30pm

Where: Teachers Federation Conference Centre, Surry Hills

[REGISTER AND SUBMIT AN ABSTRACT](#)

NSW CANCER AND IMMUNOLOGY IDEAS FORUM

FRIDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 2025

9:30AM - 4:30PM

NSW TEACHERS FEDERATION CONFERENCE CENTRE, SURRY HILLS



NSW REGIONAL CANCER
RESEARCH NETWORK



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY



Sydney
Cancer Partners



Maridulu
Budiyari
Gumar



Cancer
Clinical Academic Group



MACQUARIE
University
SYDNEY AUSTRALIA

Training:

Pathways to Publication in Oncology

A recent **Lancet Webinar** exploring the pathways to publication for oncology research is now available to view **on-demand**. Access is free with registration.

Are you considering submitting your oncology research to *The Lancet* or one of its specialty, *Regional Health*, or *Discovery Science* journals? This webinar is designed to help you navigate the publication process and choose the most appropriate journal for your work.

The Lancet's expert editorial team provides practical advice and insight into:

- The range of publication options available for oncology content
- How the article transfer service works to find the best fit for your manuscript
- Tips on optimising your manuscript for submission success

Whether you're an early-career researcher or a seasoned author, this session offers valuable guidance and support for your publishing journey.

Watch the webinar on demand: [Access the recording here](#).

CONNECT WITH US:



We acknowledge the many Traditional Custodians of Country throughout regional, rural and remote NSW and honour their Elders, families and descendants, past and present. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs, and deep and continuing relationship with the land and waterways. We acknowledge that they are the proud survivors of more than two hundred years of dispossession.

The NSW Regional Cancer Research Network is funded by the [Cancer Institute NSW](#) through a Translational Cancer Research Capacity Building Grant and established through [NSW Regional Health Partners](#).