

Network Update

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A Reflection on our Achievements

Professor Nikola Bowden, Program Lead, NSW Regional Cancer Research Network

As 2025 draws to a close, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all NSW Regional Cancer Research Network members, collaborators and partners for your commitment, energy and engagement throughout the year. Together, we have continued to grow a network that is reshaping what cancer research looks like in regional NSW, and it is timely to reflect on the progress we have made.



This year, our Network continued to expand its reach and impact, with more than **375 members** now engaged across four Local Health Districts. To date, we have provided **\$2.75 million in research support**, including **\$1.7 million invested directly into regional cancer projects** through competitive funding schemes. These investments enabled **22 new projects**, **8 Clinician Research Fellowships**, and **72 travel grants**, ensuring regional clinicians, researchers and consumers could access key cancer-related events and national forums.

In 2025, the Network represented regional NSW cancer research at a national level. We supported **seven cancer consumer representatives** to attend the 2025 National Cancer Survivorship Conference, enabling them to build new connections and strengthen the voice of regional consumers in research. NSWRCRN members also contributed to the **Cancer Australia Optimal Care Pathway for people living with cancer in rural and remote areas** via membership of the national [Working Party](#), and our [Senior Research Partner Team](#) showcased our innovative research support model at the [Australasian Research Management \(ARMS\) Conference](#).

At the heart of our work is a commitment to driving research that delivers real, measurable improvements for people affected by cancer in regional NSW. Our focus has always been on supporting projects that can be translated into better treatments, improved models of care, and more equitable access for our communities. To this effect I am also proud to highlight several research translation achievements from across our Network:

Medical Oncology

- Uracil/5FU assay progressing toward NATA accreditation
A/Prof Jennifer Schneider, UON – Clinician Research Fellow
- At-home bortezomib administration informing clinical guidelines and approval pathways
Jacqui Jagger, CCLHD – Shovel Ready Translational Research Project

Radiation Oncology

- LEILA patient-positioning technology integrated into clinical practice
Professor Joerg Lehmann, Calvary Mater – Shovel Ready Translational Research Project
- VR-based radiation therapy education program expanded across North Coast Cancer Institute, Tweed Valley and Tamworth, with further scaling planned for 2026
Kath Dower, NNSWLHD – Shovel Ready Translational Research Project

Surgical Oncology

- New perioperative care model implemented at John Hunter Hospital and rolled out across five regional sites
Dr Jennifer Mackney, HNELHD – Shovel Ready Translational Research Project
- Patient decision aid for low-risk thyroid cancer now in multisite trial, with NSW Health considering wider implementation
Dr Chris O'Neill, HNELHD – Shovel Ready Translational Research Project

Psychosocial Support and Palliative Care

- Research informing new prescribing guidelines for levetiracetam
Fern Beschi, Calvary Mater – Clinician Research Fellow
- Routine integration of the Death and Dying Distress Scale (DADDS) into clinical practice
Felicity Bates, Mid North Coast LHD – Clinician Research Fellow
- Patient Reported Measures embedded into routine rural cancer care
Alison Hofman, HNELHD/North West Cancer Centre – Shovel Ready Translational Research Project

None of this progress would be possible without the generous support of the Cancer Institute NSW through the Translational Cancer Research Capacity Building Grant. This support continues to strengthen local research capability and drive collaboration across our regional footprint.

As we turn our attention to 2026, we look forward to advancing this momentum—creating new avenues for research, nurturing the next generation of regional research leaders, and driving translational cancer initiatives that deliver meaningful outcomes for our communities.

Thank you for your ongoing partnership and support as we continue to grow research capability and improve cancer outcomes across northern NSW.

Professor Nikola Bowden

**The NSW Regional Cancer Research Network will be closed from Monday 22 December 2025 and will reopen on Monday 5 January 2026.*

ACHIEVEMENTS

Member Achievements

We love celebrating the achievements of our members. This month, we extend our congratulations to:

- **Kath Dower**

NSWRCRN Shovel Ready Translational Research Project recipient, accepted into the 2026 **UN International Atomic Energy Agency's Lise Meitner Programme for Women in Nuclear**.

- **Jacqui Jagger**

NSWRCRN Shovel Ready Translational Research Project recipient received the **Judith Meppem Lifetime Achievement 13th annual NSW Health Excellence in Nursing and Midwifery Awards** ceremony

If you have an achievement or know of an achievement of another Network member you'd like us to share please email us at nswrcrn@newcastle.edu.au.

NSWRCN Achievements

Recognised for Research Service and Rural Engagement

The NSW Regional Cancer Research Network has been honoured with two awards at the **University of Newcastle's College of Health, Medicine and Wellbeing 2025 Staff Awards**:

- **Research Service Award – Senior Research Partners**

Awarded to Dr Allison Boyes, Dr Erin Fuller and Dr Alexandra Smith for their dedicated efforts strengthening cancer research across regional NSW.

Since forming in mid-2023, the Senior Research Partners team has become a strong source of hands-on support, working directly with clinicians, academics and students to shape research ideas, prepare ethics submissions, refine study plans and secure funding.

In their first year, they supported more than 90 requests and helped win over \$1.3 million in grants, making a measurable difference to research quality and capacity.

- **Highly Commended – Rural Engagement**

Awarded to the Network Team for its strong commitment to ensuring regional communities contribute to and shape cancer research priorities.



From left to right: Professor Alex Zelinsky AO, Dr Allison Boyes, Beck Palmer, Elianne Renaud, Professor Nikola Bowden, Dr Erin Fuller, Dr Sarah Delforce and Professor Lisa Wood. Absent: Dr Alexandra (Alex) Smith.

WHAT'S NEW



New resource: LGBTQ+ Inclusion Toolkit

The [Cancer Institute NSW](#), in partnership with [ACON](#), has launched the LGBTQ+ Inclusion Toolkit – a practical suite of resources to support more inclusive and equitable cancer outcomes across NSW.

The toolkit is designed for health professionals, researchers, and organisations working across cancer prevention and screening, care and research. It provides guidance to help embed LGBTQ+ inclusivity into everyday practice.

What's included:

- Practical guides for inclusive, person-centred care
- Guidance on inclusive data collection to improve representation
- LGBTQ+ inclusion training options
- Posters and resources to support welcoming environments.

Explore the Toolkit and share it with your networks: [LGBTQ+ Inclusion Toolkit | CAN WE](#).

Together, we can help ensure every person in NSW has equitable access to cancer information, care, and research.

GET INVOLVED

Opportunity for Healthcare professionals and hospital-based educators involved in the care of children with cancer to:

SHARE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Researchers from the University of Newcastle, John Hunter Children's Hospital and UNSW are conducting a study to better understand the unmet needs of children with cancer and their parents.

- Healthcare professionals and hospital-based educators involved in the care of children with cancer are invited to take part in a short 30-45 minute interview.
- The interview can be conducted via phone, online, or in person.
- You will receive a \$50 gift voucher as a thank you for your time.



Interested or want more information?



Scan the QR code to register your interest, or go to <https://redcap.link/cavj18hx>



Contact the lead researcher on: 4042 0709 or Jamie.Bryant@newcastle.edu.au



SCAN ME



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA



John Hunter
Children's Hospital

Funded by:



Proudly supported by
Cancer Institute NSW



NSW REGIONAL CANCER
RESEARCH NETWORK

This project has been approved by the University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval No. H-2025-0126

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

• NSW Regional Cancer Research Network Funding Schemes

The Network offers a range of funding opportunities to help regional researchers share their work, build capability and strengthen collaboration across NSW.

- **Regional Open Access Publication Scheme:** Supports members to publish open-access, peer-reviewed cancer research by covering Article Processing Charges (APCs).
- **Conference Travel Grant Scheme for Regional Researchers:** Provides financial support for members presenting accepted cancer research at domestic (up to \$1,500) or international (up to \$6,000) conferences.
- **Professional Support Package:** Offers funded research assistance from our Senior Research Partners to help develop project ideas, refine methods, strengthen grant applications or progress translational activities.

Full details and eligibility criteria are available on our [website](#).

• New Scholarship for PhD students

The Phare Trust PhD in Regional and Disadvantaged Community Health Scholarship

University of Newcastle

This new donor-funded scholarship supports a PhD candidate undertaking research that delivers practical, meaningful impact for regional and disadvantaged communities. The scholarship aims to strengthen research that improves health outcomes where it is needed most.

What's included:

- **Stipend:** \$50,000 per annum (up to 3.5 years)
- **Relocation allowance:** Up to \$1,500
- **Focus:** Research addressing health outcomes in regional and disadvantaged communities

Further details and application information can be found on the University of Newcastle website:

[The Phare Trust PhD in Regional and Disadvantaged Community Health Scholarship / PhD Scholarships / PhD scholarships and opportunities / Research / Study / The University of Newcastle, Australia](#)

Applications close 31 January 2026.

• 2026 Supporting People with Cancer

The **Supporting People with Cancer (SPWC)** grant program funds projects that reduce the impact of cancer and provide better support for people affected by cancer. The program contributes to Cancer Australia's mission to minimise the burden of cancer, address disparities and improve outcomes through national leadership in cancer control.

Aligned with the strategic objectives of the **Australian Cancer Plan**, SPWC places strong emphasis on achieving equity in cancer outcomes for **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**. Funding is designed to complement, not duplicate, existing government programs.

Grant details:

- **Project length:** 1-3 years
- **Funding available:** \$50,000 to \$120,000

More information is available through [GrantConnect](#).

Applications must be submitted through Can-Grant, Cancer Australia's online grants portal. Information on how to access Can-Grant is available on the [Cancer Australia website](#).

Applications close 5:00 pm, 30 January 2026.

• Networking for Cancer Equity Grant Program

The Australian Government, through Cancer Australia, is offering grants to strengthen and connect cancer care networks across Australia, improving access to high-quality cancer care for people in outer-metropolitan, regional, rural and remote communities.

The program funds **pilot initiatives** that trial innovative, collaborative and sustainable models of care, with a strong focus on addressing disparities for **priority populations**, including rural and remote communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Funded activities will contribute to the activation of the **Australian Comprehensive Cancer Network**, supporting better coordination and access to care closer to home.

Grant details:

- **Funding available:** \$1 million total (4–10 grants, capped at \$250,000 each)
- **Delivery period:** 27 April 2026 – 30 June 2027

More information is available through [GrantConnect](#).

Applications close 5:00 pm, 6 February 2026.

TRAINING/SEMINARS AND EVENTS

Exercise in Regional and Rural Cancer Care – Webinar Recording Now Available

The latest National Regional Cancer Forum, hosted by the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre (VCCC Alliance) on 27 November 2025, explored how exercise can be integrated into cancer care pathways to improve outcomes for people living in regional and rural communities. The Forum highlighted innovative models being implemented across Australia to overcome barriers to exercise access, including telehealth approaches, community-led programs and local capacity-building initiatives.

Clinical research shows that exercise is a safe and effective intervention across the cancer trajectory, yet access remains limited outside metropolitan centres. This session examined successful rural exercise models, strategies for addressing service gaps and the role of exercise from diagnosis through to survivorship.

We are proud that **Dr Jennifer Mackney**, NSWRCRN member and Clinical Specialist Physiotherapist at John Hunter Hospital, presented at this Forum. Dr Mackney shared insights from her expanding prehabilitation program, **C-SPRITES**, which is now being scaled across community settings following her recent \$800,000 Cancer Institute NSW's Accelerated Research Implementation Grant.

The webinar recording is available to [view](#), and attendees are invited to provide feedback.

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](#).