Changing the way we tackle cancer in Victoria
The VCCC aims to implement best practice consumer and community engagement; involving consumers in all we do.
About the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre

Overcoming cancer together

The Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre (VCCC) is a multi-disciplinary, multi-site, powerful alliance of 10 leading research, academic and clinical organisations working together to accelerate research, knowledge and expertise to improve health outcomes for patients with cancer.

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.

The alliance undertakes strategic areas of work to identify and fill key gaps and unmet needs; enhancing areas with the greatest potential to benefit patients. The VCCC distributed leadership model leverages the strengths and critical mass of its members: delivering programs and projects that could not be done by one organisation alone.

Acknowledgement of country

We acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Owners of the lands upon which the VCCC alliance members are situated.
Executive Director’s report

Coming of age

The year’s triumph has been bringing to life the innovative, game-changing programs that make up the VCCC Strategic Research Plan 2017-20.

During the reporting period, we have seen the value of connected, strategic planning, translate to performance across all areas of leadership and collaboration, research, clinical trials and cancer workforce development.

The Board of the VCCC, advisory committees and distributed leadership group have maintained a clear focus on strategic priorities as we sought to implement rapid change in an evolving cultural environment.

Thank you to the hundreds of staff across the alliance who are focused on delivering tangible outcomes. This work has been enhanced by the contribution of our valued consumers and we expect this to gain greater momentum following the launch of our Consumer Engagement Action Plan later this year.

Practical but essential initiatives have generated new efficiencies, with streamlined governance and ethics approaches set to ensure Victoria is attractive to industry for new research initiatives. We have reinforced our reputation as a global leader with the development of cutting-edge education programs and highly collaborative research programs in transformative areas such as genomics and immunotherapy.

Research translation exciting prospect

One of the many standout achievements has been in the area of health data. Complex problem-solving and technical know-how have enabled us to overcome traditional barriers; using existing data and linkages to explore and improve primary care and hospital systems.

Doors are opening in clinical trials. One example of many is the implementation of SiteDocs Portal, an electronic platform designed to streamline regulatory document management to 15 cancer clinical trial sites in Melbourne and regional Victoria. The portal is empowering our clinical trials units so that more patients can have access to a clinical trial.

The VCCC Building Trial Group Capability Program is capitalising on Victoria’s proven track record in palliative care, extending leadership in the field to enable patients to access specialised interventions and therapies that they may not otherwise have access to.

We have contributed to building a robust clinical trials workforce with a successful internship program, business development program and a shared competency framework.

Education on a global scale

This year saw the launch of Australia’s first wholly online degree focused on the latest developments to tackle cancer. The Master of Cancer Sciences will equip the workforce with cutting-edge tools to bring the best of cancer care to Victoria and beyond, as well as taking Victoria’s research to the world.

As we prepare for the next phase of the VCCC’s development, we welcome your feedback and ideas for the future. No doubt this consultation will herald even more challenge and change, and I look forward to our continuing journey of being better together.

Professor Grant McArthur
Executive Director
Chairperson’s report

Shifting the dial

It is an extraordinary experience to see new concepts and ideas develop from the ground up. It is even more impressive when new ideas and meaningful results are inspired by contributions from a wide community of people and organisations from varied locations and areas of expertise.

Collaborative outcomes such as these are only possible when you have shared goals, diverse ideas and a commitment to work together.

Milestones

Over the past year, the VCCC alliance has come together and achieved many significant milestones. Eight thousand people have participated in education and training programs, including 2,000 in the Cancer Survivorship for Primary Care Practitioners course. More than 140 experts have contributed content for the Master of Cancer Sciences program. The first cancer teletrial opened and recruited its first patient. Eleven new, cutting edge investigator-initiated clinical trials have been supported. Cancer registry trials are up and running. The Centre for Cancer Immunotherapy was launched, with researchers from six different institutions working together in one space for the first time. So far, 46,000 health records have been connected between primary care and hospitals to drive new cancer health services research.

These and other achievements are changing the way we tackle cancer in Victoria. Working across organisational boundaries and disciplines, the VCCC alliance members are breaking down traditional barriers to tap into collective capabilities and shift the dial on some of the thorniest problems.

Much has been achieved in a relatively short period of time. We have learned more about our shared potential and the ways that we can make the greatest difference as our alliance matures.

Collective achievements

I would like to thank the Board of the VCCC, the executive team and the broader distributed leadership group for their vision and determination. Our alliance has benefitted from the hundreds of people across the members who have thrown their support into these efforts and contributed on committees, steering groups and in programs to share knowledge, learn and drive these advances. I would particularly like to acknowledge the active contribution of our consumer representatives who have shown us the power and importance of the patient perspective in developing relevant, high impact initiatives.

Most importantly, we are grateful for the generous financial support provided by the Victorian Government, which has helped make possible the worthwhile work led by the VCCC. As we enter the final year of our current funding agreement, we have embarked upon a period of evaluation, reflection and future planning to inform our next stage of work. We know that the investment to date in collaborative research talent, cancer care education, consumer participation and broader clinical engagement is having an impact. We look forward to building on this formative work to magnify the collective effort of this powerful alliance to deliver meaningful benefits for the community in Victoria and beyond.

Professor Linda Kristjanson AO
Chairperson
Alliance members

Overcoming cancer together

Our alliance is a multi-site, multi-disciplinary joint venture partnership between 10 leading medical research, academic and clinical institutions with a shared goal of improving outcomes for Victorian cancer patients.

Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre

Peter Mac is Australia’s only integrated cancer research, treatment and education centre, with multi-disciplinary teams that provide care informed by precision in fundamental, translational and clinical research.

The Royal Melbourne Hospital

The Royal Melbourne Hospital (Melbourne Health) provides high-quality cancer treatment programs, translational research, and surgical and medical expertise, as well as other key support services such as clinical care and emergency medicine.

University of Melbourne

Australia’s first ranked research university and medical school, the university provides academic and research expertise to the alliance.

Murdoch Children’s Research Institute

The MCRI is a leader in understanding the underlying mechanisms and treatment of paediatric cancer and is home to the Children’s Cancer Tissue bank; a world class resource for researchers studying rare solid tumours and leukaemia.

The Royal Women’s Hospital

The Women’s provides specialist cancer services for women with breast and gynaecological cancer and conducts research into the treatment and care of women with cancer, as well as the specific impacts of gender on cancer.
The Walter and Eliza Hall Institute is one of Australia’s leading biomedical research organisations, with a strong national and international reputation for performing highly influential basic and translational research.

The Royal Children’s Hospital

The Children’s Cancer Centre is the only provider of complex children’s cancer care and stem cell transplantation in Victoria and is a leader in the research and treatment of childhood cancer.

Western Health

Western Health is the largest provider of treatment for colorectal cancer and a leader in the treatment of upper gastro-intestinal cancers with programs in breast, lung, genitourinary, gynaecology and haematological cancer. Western Health has on-site radiation therapy and chemotherapy facilities and has a strong palliative care service.

St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne and St Vincent’s Institute

A leader in palliative care practice and complex cancer surgery, St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne also provides oncology and haematology services, on-site radiation therapy and chemotherapy facilities, in addition the hospital houses the Victorian-wide psycho-oncology service. The hospital shares its campus with St Vincent’s Institute, which has fundamental and clinical researchers working on mechanisms of cancer and diseases of cancer survivorship.

Distributed Leadership

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

- Guide programs of work
- Review and approve new processes and systems
- Contribute to education and training initiatives
- Create more effective ways of working in a collaborative landscape.

Alliance members representation on program steering committees

Alliance member program appointments
The VCCC programs have gained traction and built momentum throughout the 2018-19 reporting period. Successes and achievements demonstrate both the short-term benefits and long-term capacity of the comprehensive cancer centre model that underpins the alliance.

Program outcomes highlight the breadth, diversity and significance of the work; the potential for future growth, and impact on the Victorian community.
Clinical trials expansion

New approaches to clinical trials; increases access and builds capability

Increasing clinical trials into more cancer disciplines and providing expanded patient access to trials and clinical research enables faster translation of research to care. The VCCC continues to lead the change in Australia’s clinical trial landscape to improve access, capability and awareness. The alliance has implemented innovative approaches and broadened access to trials and trial methods; developing the trial workforce and expanding disciplines.

[link to leading-clinical-trials]

Broadening and diversifying trial focus

Clinical trials in radiotherapy, palliative care, surgery, dietetics and anaesthesiology are underway with support from the VCCC Investigator-Initiated Trial Capacity Building Program. The breadth and depth of these investigator-initiated trials will improve treatment standards, introduce new fields to clinical trials and increase our knowledge for better patient care.

To date, 11 trials have been supported through the program with a total of 6,500 potential international and national patient enrolments and $7.2 million in leveraged funding.

$7.2M LEVERAGED FUNDING

[link to clinical-trial-access]

Particular emphasis has been placed on palliative care, where trials provide evidence-based outcomes to improve quality-of-life. Through the VCCC Building Trial Group Capability Program, a palliative care clinical trials group has been established across the alliance, capitalising on Victoria’s expertise in the field and developing an area that has great potential for clinical trial investment.

[link to palliative-care-growth]

Access from your door

Generally, clinical trials are only accessible from large metropolitan hospitals, meaning patients living in regional and rural locations are required to travel to access trial treatment. The VCCC Teletrial Program uses a hub and spoke model to provide trial treatment beyond the primary hospital. The alliance has worked closely with clinicians, trial and hospital staff and patients to implement rigorous procedures, train staff and connect technologies.

Increasing the number of trials available at regional and rural locations enables patients to access clinical trial therapies closer to home. It has positive impacts on recruitment, retention and data collection, while decreasing trial costs and travel time for patients. The first regional patient was enrolled in a trial using the teletrial model in October 2018.

1 TRIP PER WEEK X 6 MONTHS = 14,496 KM

[link to palliative-care-growth]

Cancer Registries in Action forum reflected on the first year of implementation.
Outstanding cancer workforce

A highly skilled and capable cancer workforce is essential to research excellence and high-quality, patient-centred care.

The VCCC delivers a varied program of events, workshops, masterclasses, symposia, online learning and leadership to support and build our cancer workforce capacity and capability.

New internship program fast-tracks learning to address skills shortage

Expanding Australia’s clinical trial activity calls for a highly trained workforce. Internships provide the opportunity to accelerate theoretical and hands-on learning to address a skills shortage in the clinical trials domain. The VCCC, with the Parkville Cancer Clinical Trials Unit (PCCTU), has created a clinical trial pipeline to train Clinical Trial Assistants and Study Coordinators giving them the ability to immediately step into key roles.

One month after the inaugural program completed in August 2019, 100 per cent of Clinical Trial Assistant interns who participated in the SKILLED Internship program were fully employed in the clinical trial sector in Victoria.

Investing in cancer nursing research capability: a win for patients

Comparative to the size of the workforce, the pursuit of nurse-led research is limited, yet provides significant opportunity for innovation, quality improvements and safety in cancer care.

The VCCC’s development of the Nurse-led Research Hub has raised the visibility and appreciation of the value of nurse-led research, fostered support networks, ensured research knowledge and skills are expanded and is accelerating the development of a nursing research culture.

The development of the Hub is also a win for patients, as nurses learn skills to lead the generation of new knowledge in areas such as minimising line infections for haematology patients, patient preparation for complex therapies and optimising surgical outcomes. This investment in cancer nursing research capability will promote the progression of safe, effective and evidence-based care for all Victorians affected by cancer.

Collaborative education design to address global cancer challenge

People with cancer are living longer, but globally, more people are being diagnosed with cancer. To address this challenge, the VCCC alliance is curating cutting-edge learnings from some of Australia’s leading experts in cancer research and treatment to create a dynamic educational program for the workforce.

Australia’s first Master of Cancer Sciences program achieved the largest intake in 2019 of any new program in the healthcare suite delivered by Melbourne School of Professional and Continuing Education (MSPACE). The educational program which includes professional development and certificate options is an exemplar of collaboration, creating a workforce ready to excel at a world-class level. Up to 30 subject matter experts – alongside a subject development coordinator recruited from the cancer field – contribute to each topic. A huge cast of more than 140 researchers, clinicians and educators from within the alliance and broader networks have already furthered the program’s development and delivery – which will see the first Master of Cancer Sciences graduates at the end of next year.
Research collaboration

Accelerating progress through collective effort

Collectively, the VCCC alliance is Australia’s largest and highest impact cancer research program; members share a common goal and a commitment to work together, delivering cutting-edge cancer research. Collaboration is a hallmark of our programs and the thread that underpins the very nature of the alliance. Yet it is not an outcome in itself. The past year has evidenced the benefits of collaboration in the scale, speed, efficacy and scope of efforts to tackle areas of need and opportunity.

Boosting immunotherapy

Researchers and PhD students from Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, the University of Melbourne, the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, Austin Health/Olivia Newton-John Cancer Research Institute, the Royal Children’s Hospital and the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute are now working side-by-side in the Centre for Cancer Immunotherapy on level 13 of the VCCC building. Officially opened by the Victorian Health Minister in July 2019, this collaborative environment has been structured to encourage and enable multi-partner, multi-site immunotherapy research projects that will fast track promising immunotherapy research into active clinical trials. Under the guidance of the centre’s Director, Professor Joe Trapani, there are already 60 researchers working in this unique space. The Centre for Cancer Immunotherapy is a partnership between the VCCC, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and the University of Melbourne.

Collaborative results

VCCC Research & Education Lead (R&E Lead) for Genito-urinary cancers, Associate Professor Niall Corcoran of the Royal Melbourne Hospital and University of Melbourne brought together a new combination of investigators from five VCCC member organisations and six cancer research disciplines.

The research proposal, [PRECEPT - PRostatE CancEr Prognosis and Treatment] leveraged VCCC programs, including Regional Oncology, to extend one of the proposed clinical trials to regional Victoria and harnessed the VCCC’s strong relationships with its consumer advisory groups. The proposal received $4 million from the Movember Foundation and Australian Government to examine prostate cancer prognosis and treatment, including ground-breaking new tests to identify which patients are most at risk of progressing to more advanced disease and which patients will likely respond best to different treatments.

Co-design in action

Working with patients and carers, as well as professionals in psycho-oncology, supportive care, cancer education and palliative care, the VCCC Building Connectivity Program has provided support mechanisms to accelerate innovation through working groups and capacity building initiatives.

Researchers, clinicians, psycho-oncologists and a radiologist from the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, University of Melbourne, Royal Children’s Hospital, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute and Western Health will develop initiatives to gain a better understanding of integrating patient-reported outcomes into routine care, generate end-of-treatment roadmaps to assist patient support, and design an accessible, meaningful palliative care education module.

Supporting these initiatives will make substantive impacts on the patient journey with patient contribution. Best practice is accomplished through consolidation and resource sharing amongst VCCC alliance members, our collaboration partners, patients and people affected by cancer.
Effective leadership

An integrated approach to research, education and clinical trials is reliant on effective leadership across the alliance and a culture of collaboration to establish structures and achieve outcomes.

The VCCC alliance is built on the collective expertise and knowledge of its members; delivering outcomes that are greater than the sum of our parts. The distributed leadership model is demonstrated through the VCCC board, advisory committees, steering committees, Leaders in Cancer Strategy and Research & Education Leads, as well as the alliance’s commitment to consultation.

Consultation setting strategic direction

Since the Strategic Research Plan 2017-20 was launched, new and innovative programs have been activated, driving improvements in key areas such as workforce development, regional oncology, cancer genomics, cancer immunotherapy, primary care and cancer survivorship, nurse-led research, consumer engagement and more.

The alliance community is what makes the VCCC unique. As a collective, the members have started to plan future directions through workshops, discussion groups and blue-sky thinking forums that have galvanised the VCCC community. To date 250 people from across the alliance have contributed to imagining, discussing and prioritising the work that will drive future innovation and drive high impact programs to benefit patients.

United leaders to bolster research and education

The VCCC’s flagship collaborative initiative is the Research & Education Lead (R&E Lead) program. Spanning organisations and disciplines, the 12 R&E Leads use their skills, knowledge and networks to identify key opportunities within 10 tumour streams as well as cancer nursing and primary care, to convert important research into routine practice.

Completing this full suite of specialist areas, Dr Belinda Yeo and Professor Bruce Mann were appointed joint VCCC Research & Education Leads, Breast Cancer in January 2019. Dr Yeo is a medical oncologist and clinician-scientist at the Olivia Newton-John Cancer Research Institute. Professor Mann is a surgical oncologist; Director of Breast Cancer Services for Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, the Royal Melbourne Hospital and Royal Women’s Hospital, and Professor of Surgery at the University of Melbourne.

Their complementary skills and experience further enhances a tumour stream that was already a standout model of multi-disciplinary care from prevention and screening to genomics and cutting-edge treatments.

Field leader supporting the next generation

Professor Maarten J IJzerman, Chair of Cancer Health Services Research at the University of Melbourne and Western Health is driving new efforts to connect scientific discovery with health policy. His research group is focusing on change and innovation to improve cancer service delivery, and satisfaction for patients and healthcare professionals. He is also training the next generation of researchers in this priority field.

The VCCC has supported three new fellowship positions, working across disciplines including immunotherapy, registry trials and clinical trials within Professor IJzerman’s research group. The positions have contributed to building analytical capability for data-driven research to be implemented into the VCCC alliance, facilitating data sharing, data sciences and clinical expertise.
Translating research into care

Collectively VCCC members represent the majority of cancer research, clinical trials and patient numbers in Victoria. The alliance has developed innovative systems and processes that overcome barriers and promote sharing and connections across organisations. These initiatives enable research discoveries to be to be rapidly translated into trials that help ensure patients benefit as quickly as possible from the latest research.

Decision-making with real-world data

Combining conventional trial methods with routine registry systems has enabled simple, pragmatic questions to be answered, based on cost-effective, real-world evidence.

The VCCC Registry Trial Program has successfully piloted a novel design that uses data collected during regular care to produce baseline measures and evaluation of multiple treatment strategies. The method enables large numbers of patients to participate and is providing insights into how clinicians can best make evidence-led treatment decisions for individual patients.

The first patient recruited to a cancer registry trial occurred in October 2018, subsequently three trials have been opened across multiple clinical trial sites.

Big data = big gains

The VCCC’s collaboration with BioGrid and the University of Melbourne is on the cusp of delivering game-changing, accessible data including primary care clinical data linked to hospital records. Once gold-standard cancer diagnosis and death data from the Victorian Cancer Registry is also linked, the new VCCC Cancer Health Data Hub will enable researchers to mine cancer ‘big data’ for insights into the care patients receive from general practitioners before and after cancer treatment and uncover factors that affect patient outcomes.

The Hub is yet to be officially launched, however researchers from the University of Melbourne Centre for Cancer Research have already begun to investigate care pathways for the approximately 13 per cent of all 16,000 Melbourne Health cancer patients who have a linked primary care record. The number of cancer health services research projects accessing data through the Hub is expected to rapidly expand over the coming year.

Genomic advances

A new protocol based on clinical criteria for selecting, enrolling and testing patients using either a Comprehensive Cancer Gene Panel or Whole Genome Sequencing has been developed, with the first patients enrolled in May 2019.

The innovative protocol was collectively developed by oncologists from across the alliance to allow new flexible clinical decision-making (rather than fixed eligibility criteria as would be usual for a specific research study or clinical trial) to provide access for the patients most likely to benefit to the latest in genomic testing. This includes the Illumina next-generation whole genome sequencing platform led by Professor Sean Grimmond at the University of Melbourne Centre for Cancer Research. To date, 18 people have been enrolled for sequencing through the program.

The program will also evaluate the impact of tumour genomic sequencing results on clinical treatment decisions. Ultimately the outcomes from this program will inform the processes and systems that will be required to fully integrate cancer genomics into routine clinical care in Victoria.
Member engagement

VCCC alliance members work strategically and collaboratively together. The collective resources, expertise and patient numbers represent a critical mass contributing to and participating in strategic programs. The alliance facilitates research-led solutions, integrates consumer perspectives and delivers evidence-based outcomes; changing the way we tackle cancer in Victoria.

Member key

- Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre
- The Royal Melbourne Hospital
- University of Melbourne
- The Royal Women’s Hospital
- Walter and Eliza Hall Institute
- The Royal Children’s Hospital
- Western Health
- St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne and St Vincent’s Institute
- Austin Health and Olivia Newton-John Cancer Research Institute
- Murdoch Children’s Research Institute
Overcoming cancer together

Metrics for clinical trial participation

Development of clinical trials workforce capacity and capability

Investigator-initiated trial capacity building

Building capacity through efficiency

Increasing awareness of clinical trials

Registry trials

New approaches to clinical trials

Increasing adolescent and young adult clinical trial access

Teletrials

Metrics for clinical trial participation

Stream key

- Research development
- Corporate/leadership
- Education/training
- Clinical trials development

Master of Cancer Sciences
2018-19 moments

1. Victorian Health Minister Jenny Mikakos officially opens the Centre for Cancer Immunotherapy
2. Monday Lunch Live
3. Member representatives at strategy consultation
4. VCCC Oral and Oropharyngeal Cancers: role of dental and medical practitioners forum
5. Picchi Award for Excellence in Cancer Research 2019
6. Master of Cancer Sciences content filming
7. Cancer Survivorship for Primary Care Practitioners online learning
8. Alliance member leaders participate in strategy consultation
9. VCCC Executive Director, Professor Grant McArthur, Victorian Health Minister Jenny Mikakos, and VCCC Associate Director, Associate Professor Anna Boltong
10. Skin & Cancer Foundation Clinical Trials Coordinator award 2019
12. Clinical Trial Assistant interns graduate
13. Launch of the Master of Cancer Sciences
2018-19 moments

1. Gabriella Martello and Jude Jayasuriya, Cancer Trials Australia are streamlining document management
2. Leanne Pasanen is working towards standardising practice in palliative care
3. Nurse-led Research Partnership Post graduates
4. World Cancer Day 2019
5. Cancer Registries in Action panelists
6. Finance for Non-finance clinical trial unit professional development
7. Research & Education Leads discussion summit
For in-depth insights into the VCCC’s activities, achievements and impacts, including the 2018-19 Financial Report: viccompcancercotr.org/annual-report