

MOMENTUM

Progress through research | JULY 2026 UPDATE



Therapeutic hypothermia treatment: “an overnight success after 20 years of preclinical research”

“A mighty kauri has fallen.” - Professor Larry Chamley, Chair of AMRF Medical Committee

REMEMBERING ALISTAIR GUNN

A legacy of caring

Professor Alistair Gunn’s work transformed how researchers and clinicians protect the newborn brain.



HIS RESEARCH LED to the development of therapeutic hypothermia, a simple and safe treatment that cools the brain after oxygen deprivation at birth.

Today, it’s used worldwide to protect newborn babies from brain injury. His work helped save countless lives and enabled millions of children to grow and thrive without disability.

For us at AMRF, this legacy is deeply personal. Alistair often acknowledged our early support, which enabled his team to develop the first cooling machines, and carry out the critical studies behind this breakthrough.

These studies showed how and when cooling could protect the newborn brain and laid the foundation for the international clinical trials that followed, and for a treatment now used across the globe.

He once described therapeutic hypothermia as “**an overnight success, after 20 years of preclinical research.**”

This reflects the reality of medical advances, and also his persistence, scientific rigour, and commitment to improving outcomes for babies and their families.

Behind his extraordinary impact was not only scientific brilliance, but a wonderful human presence.

Alistair is remembered by colleagues worldwide as kind, generous, quietly determined and endlessly curious. He was a mentor who gave his time freely, a collaborator who lifted others, and a researcher whose warmth was felt in every interaction.

Tributes from the global research and clinical community speak to a life defined not only by achievement, but by character.

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Auckland Medical Research Foundation

Funding progress | since 1955

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Welcome Tracy Peirce, Finance Manager



Understanding how melanoma spreads could help stop it in its tracks

Jayden Gibson's path into cancer research is shaped by both curiosity and loss. As a young scientist at the University of Auckland, he has spent years learning how the immune system recognises and responds to melanoma. But his motivation runs deeper.

AFTER LOSING HIS GRANDMOTHER

to cancer, he committed himself to understanding how the disease spreads, driven by a belief that better knowledge can lead to better outcomes.

Now, Jayden is turning his attention to one of melanoma's most devastating steps: how cancer cells move from the bloodstream into the brain. Using a cutting-edge model that mimics real blood flow, he is observing this process in real time, capturing how melanoma cells attach, move, and ultimately cross the body's protective barriers.

What drives him is not just the science, but the possibility of stopping this journey before it begins. And for Jayden, every experiment brings him one step closer to honouring his grandmother's memory by helping shape a future where cancer is no longer a life-limiting journey.

By identifying the molecular signals that allow these cells to spread, Jayden hopes to uncover new therapeutic targets that could halt metastasis and change the course of the disease for patients and their families.

Jayden is the most recent recipient of funding from the **JI Sutherland Fund** for his PhD research into how melanoma spreads to the brain.

For the last 12 years, this fund has helped progress vital research into skin cancers. Established in memory of John Sutherland – a chemical engineer whose life was tragically cut short by melanoma – the fund has made a significant impact.

To date, through donating to our Foundation, the JI Sutherland Fund has supported a doctoral scholarship for Dr Jennifer Eom, to investigate different support cell types in lymph nodes affected by melanoma. Her findings were published in the American Association for Cancer Research and helped lead to her current role as a research fellow in tumour immunology.

It has also funded two projects for Dr Cherie Blenkiron, one exploring whether people with Merkel cell carcinoma benefit from immunotherapy, and one looking at blood-based biomarkers to help identify which patients are likely to respond to immunotherapy for metastatic melanoma.



Jayden Gibson

Understanding how
melanoma spreads to
the brain could help
us stop it, before
it becomes a life-
limiting diagnosis.

This research is only progressed by people like you. When you join with us on our mission, you're supporting real-life impact and helping to strengthen health outcomes for us all.

REMEMBERING ALISTAIR GUNN

Continued

Supported by AMRF, Professor Gunn's research gave clinicians a life-saving tool, transforming care for newborn babies and ensuring generations of children can grow, thrive, and reach their full potential.

Alistair is remembered as a brilliant colleague and an outstanding researcher, humble and supportive, and someone whose work profoundly improved the life chances of so many. Others recall his encouragement of early-career researchers, his thoughtful questions, and the genuine care he showed to those around him.

His legacy continues in the clinicians who carry forward his work, the researchers he inspired, and the families whose lives have been changed because of his dedication.

We extend our heartfelt condolences to Alistair's family, friends, and colleagues. His legacy lives on in the children he helped save and in the generations of researchers advancing the field he helped shape.



Working at the intersection of neonatal medicine and physiology, paediatricians Dr Shirley Tonkin and Professor Alistair Gunn asked a simple but urgent question:



How can we better protect babies in their most vulnerable moments?

TOGETHER, they worked to reduce the everyday risks facing infants, supported often by AMRF throughout their careers. Dr Tonkin's life's work continues to save babies from Sudden Unexplained Death in Infancy and has helped guide safer co-sleeping practices for new parents.

Their research into breathing issues for infants in car seats showed that a baby's airway could become constricted when their head slumped forward. With collaborators, and with support from AMRF, they developed a simple foam insert to keep a baby's head upright and airway open, significantly reducing breathing problems.

These advances share a common goal: protecting the newborn brain and ensuring babies can breathe.

Behind these breakthroughs are decades of careful, collaborative work and a commitment to improving outcomes for babies and their families, translating research into practical, life-saving care.

Supported by AMRF donors, their work has saved lives around the world. Their legacy lives on in every baby given the chance not just to survive, but to live a full and healthy life.

Bequests: another kind of legacy

Dr Shirley Tonkin left a bequest to support medical research into infant mortality, especially sudden infant deaths. Since her gift in 2017, our Curtis-Tonkin Paediatric Fund has supported these researchers working in fields including obstetrics, gynaecology, physiology and bioengineering—all to ensure babies have the best possible start to life.



Prof Larry Chamley



Dr Brodie Elliot



Prof Charles Unsworth



Dr Guido Wassink



Dr Simerdeep Dhillon

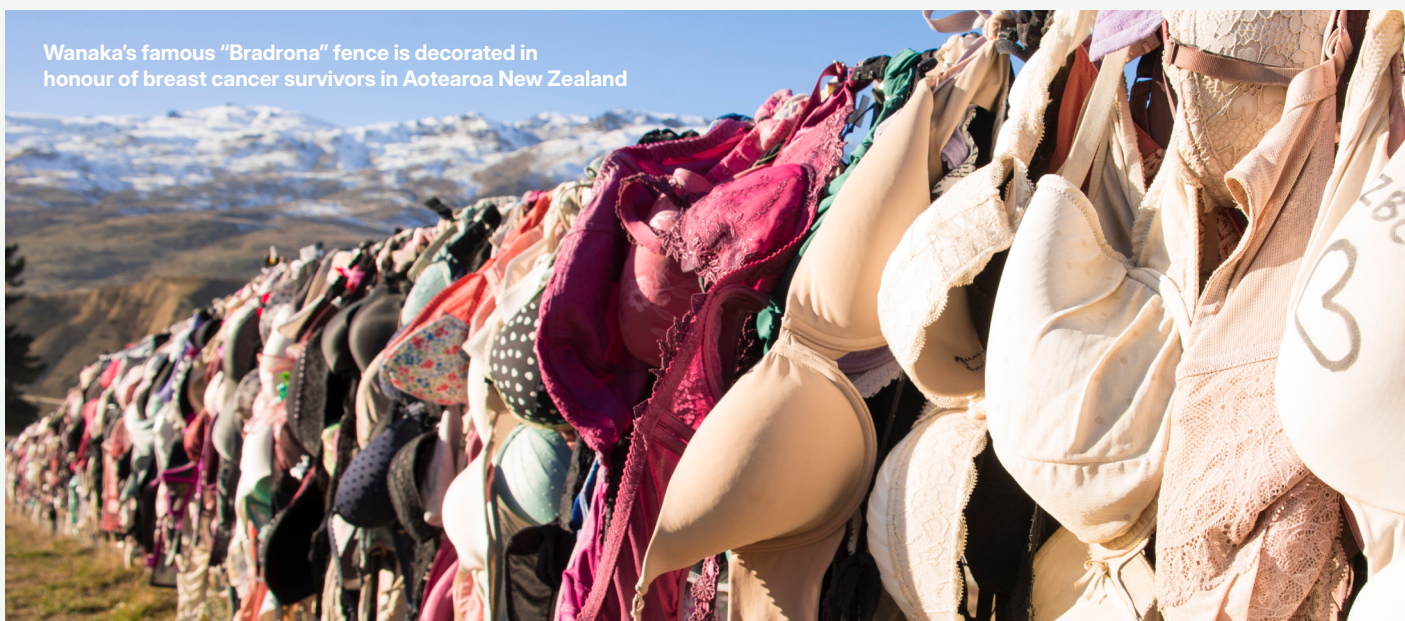


Dr Robyn May

From global science to local impact: advancing breast cancer research here

After a decade working in leading research institutes overseas, Dr Emma Nolan made the deliberate decision to come home. Her goal is clear: to bring international expertise back to Aotearoa New Zealand and apply it to improving outcomes for people affected by breast cancer.

Wanaka's famous "Bradrona" fence is decorated in honour of breast cancer survivors in Aotearoa New Zealand



WITH SUPPORT FROM AMRF DONORS, Emma established her own research programme in Auckland, building something entirely new: a living bank of tumour organoids. These mini tumours grown in the lab can reflect how breast cancer behaves in real patients.

Emma's research focuses on a critical and poorly understood challenge: why people with obesity often experience more aggressive cancer and respond less well to treatment. By studying how cancer cells interact with surrounding fat cells with her tumour organoid technology, she is working to uncover the biological signals that drive tumour growth.

Through development of breast cancer organoids, Emma is opening new pathways for treatment, ensuring that her global expertise is translated into real

impact for patients and whānau here at home. This organoid technique is not only central to her work, but is now being shared across the research community, helping accelerate discoveries in other types of cancer.

This work, funded through Emma's Douglas Goodfellow Repatriation Fellowship, has now had the collaborative effect we hope for with all our funding.

Dr Hossein Jahedi, working in Emma's lab, is creating a bank of lung cancer tumour organoids from Māori and Pacific patients. His work to reduce this population's increased risk of death from lung cancer is a directly transferable outcome from supporting Emma to return to Aotearoa New Zealand and shows the value of her international expertise.



Dr Emma Nolan

Progress like this happens because of people like you. Together, we back the researchers improving health for our communities.

Bringing knowledge home means every discovery can directly benefit patients, shaping new treatments and improving outcomes for people here in Aotearoa.



Richard Taylor



Katie Noble



Dr Anna King

Celebrating service and welcoming new leadership

After years of dedicated leadership, our Board enters a new chapter marking the conclusion of one president's remarkable contribution and welcoming the leadership of two experienced trustees to guide our next chapter.

AFTER MORE THAN two decades of service, including six years as Board President, Richard Taylor retires with an enduring legacy of considered leadership, strong governance, and dedication to medical research. Joining our Board in 2004 and becoming President in 2018, Richard played a central role in shaping our Foundation through both growth and challenge.

His leadership was tested during the COVID-19 pandemic, when research programmes across the country were disrupted. Under Richard's guidance, we responded quickly, establishing emergency and relief funding to ensure researchers could continue their work, despite unprecedented uncertainty. This decisive action protected vital progress and reinforced our Foundation's commitment to those working to improve health outcomes.

Over his tenure, Richard also helped steward us through a significant milestone—surpassing \$100 million in research funding

since our establishment—reflecting a long-standing commitment to backing world-class researchers and advancing health for communities across Aotearoa New Zealand.

As Richard steps down the leadership baton passes to Katie Noble, who assumes the role of Board President, with Dr Anna King continuing as Vice-President. Both bring extensive experience and a shared commitment to our mission.

Katie offers a depth of governance and leadership experience across the health, disability, and non-profit sectors. As Managing Director of Allied Medical, she leads a national organisation providing assistive technology and rehabilitation equipment, alongside holding numerous governance roles supporting community and health outcomes. Her leadership style is grounded in building relationships, strategic thinking, and a long-standing passion for improving lives across New Zealand.

Anna brings a complementary perspective shaped by clinical practice, research, and education.

With a PhD in nursing and more than a decade as an academic at the University of Auckland, she has led research projects, supervised emerging researchers, and contributed to improving care for older people. Her experience spans both front-line healthcare and system-level thinking, further strengthening the Board's connection to the real-world impact of research.

Together, Katie and Anna represent both continuity and evolution, by building on a solid foundation while guiding us into our next phase. With their leadership, our Foundation remains focused on supporting the researchers whose work will shape the future of health in Aotearoa New Zealand.

We thank Richard for his extraordinary service and look ahead with confidence to this new chapter.

Introducing Tracy, our new Finance Manager



Tracy Peirce

WE'RE DELIGHTED TO WELCOME

our new Finance Manager Tracy Peirce, joining at a time when every decision we make helps shape the future of life-changing research.

"What drew me here was not just the role, but the opportunity to contribute to something meaningful: supporting researchers whose work improves and saves lives," she says.

As an experienced accountant who has worked across a wide range of industries, combined with a law degree, Tracy brings both rigour and perspective to how we care for and grow the

resources entrusted to AMRF.

Just as importantly, she is excited about working alongside the team and committed to making financial information clear and accessible, upholding the reputation of strong financial stewardship that we have become known for over our 70 years.

This collaborative approach is how we operate and continues to amplify the impact of every dollar invested in researchers. We are excited for what lies ahead and grateful to have Tracy contributing to the medical research that matters most.

FUNDING PROGRESS

Futures Fellowship Fund moves closer to launch

The Futures Fellowship Fund was established as an in-perpetuity fund to support researchers in the often challenging, mid-career phase of their research journey.

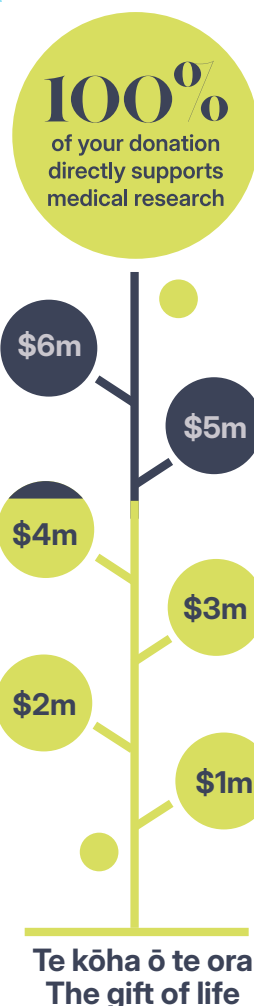
THANKS TO THE EXTRAORDINARY generosity of our donor community, an impressive \$4.8million has been raised and we are now within sight of reaching our \$6million goal!

This milestone reflects the dedication of our donors to sustaining research excellence and we extend our forever thanks to our donors for their support in bringing this vision to life. But we still have the final stretch ahead and we'd love your support to get us there, please.

On behalf of our mid-career researchers, we invite you to join us in our mission to secure the remaining \$1.2million.

If you would like to be part of launching this transformative fund, you can make a secure donation via our website at www.medicalresearch.org.nz and reference 'Futures Fellow' or contact Sue Brewster, Executive Director on 027 569 7777 or sue.brewster@medicalresearch.org.nz.

Thank you to all those who have been part of this journey and those to come. Your support turns possibility into progress and will allow our mid-career innovators to continue on their own journey in medical discovery and breakthroughs.



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