

# The Font



ST VINCENT'S  
HOSPITAL  
MELBOURNE



**Sarah  
& Justin's  
wedding:  
a beautiful  
and emotional  
day for one of  
our patients**



## Message from the CEO

The end of 2020 is rapidly approaching. Thank goodness I hear you say! And yes, there are many things we'd like to forget about this strange year, but there are many wonderful things, that I have seen and heard that I will never forget and I want to thank you.

What has stood out to me is the commitment our frontline healthcare workers have shown to go above and beyond in delivering safe and compassionate care to those that need it most.

I have watched with great pride as our teams have risen to the challenge and I would like to sincerely thank you for everything you have done.

Despite being faced with a constant wave of uncertainty, you have continued to push forward with positivity and resilience to spread messages of hope and brightness during some of the darkest hours.

This special edition of The Font is a snapshot of all that we have achieved, a 'souvenir' of sorts to remember what we have been through together in 2020.

We showed we are solutions-focused when caring for patients at our various sites, and beyond our hospital walls.

We have fast-tracked the adoption of innovations such as virtual wards and simulation labs, increased telehealth activity, and other methods of remote working, and have improved outreach to our vulnerable populations.

These new programs and initiatives, new methods of working, and ground-breaking research that have been embraced during 2020 have played a significant part in the delivery of our COVID-19 response.

Nothing stood in our way when it came to offering the best possible healthcare, for everyone.

It is the St Vincent's Mission and values I am so proud of that has brought our patients great comfort and reassurance, especially those who felt lost, troubled and scared.

It is in no small part due to the courage and compassion you shown in overcoming two waves of the pandemic that we are in this position, and for that I sincerely thank you.

You are an inspiration and I feel very privileged to say I work with you.

Angela Nolan  
Chief Executive Officer  
St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne

**This special edition of The Font is a snapshot of all that we have achieved, a 'souvenir' of sorts to remember what we have been through together in 2020.**



St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne is proud to be part of the St Vincent's Health Australia group, which is the second largest health and aged care provider in the country. SVHA's mission is to bring God's love to those in need through the healing ministry of Jesus. We are guided by the values of compassion, justice, integrity, and excellence.



## The Honourable Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO Advocate for St Vincent's Health Australia and the Centre for Palliative Care

Dear friends,

**As we move into the festive season and thoughts turn to joining family and friends, so missed and longed for throughout this year, I am keen to take the opportunity to pay tribute to a very special group of quiet heroes in our community.**

This year, 2020, will be remembered for the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) across our country and throughout the world. The enormity of this pandemic has and will continue to overshadow many significant events in our community, in so many ways, in so many lives.

It is vitally important, however, that during these times of uncertainty and anxiety we acknowledge the extraordinary contributions of dedicated people who work hard, day after day, to keep us safe.

Always our nurses are there; admired, respected and yes, loved for what they do. Let us remember then 2020 was declared by The World Health Organisation (WHO) to be the INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE NURSE AND MIDWIFE.

There can be no better time than now, to celebrate, support and encourage those who have chosen nursing as their life's vocation, who have courageously risked everything on the frontline of the pandemic.

Qualities inherent in nursing, service to others, care for humanity, compassion, intelligence, connectedness, clinical professionalism are those we have always held in the highest esteem.

Whilst such qualities are evident in every area of nursing, I sense they are never more pronounced than in palliative care.

At this time, when nurses are very much in the forefront of my thoughts, I am keen to do anything I can to express my appreciation.

It is a delight to join St Vincent's Centre for Palliative Care in announcing the DAME QUENTIN BRYCE PALLIATIVE CARE NURSING POSTGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP.

**There can be no better time than now, to celebrate, support and encourage those who have chosen nursing as their life's vocation, who have courageously risked everything on the frontline of the pandemic.**

This award will allow a talented young leader in the field to complete their specialist postgraduate clinical studies with a focus on preparing the candidate for future research endeavours in palliative care nursing.

I have long held a particular interest in the importance of palliative care, a field becoming ever more central to medical care as our population ages. Best practice palliative care is critically important to those suffering serious, long term illness as well as to their carers and family members.

I am honoured to be an Advocate for St Vincent's Centre for Palliative Care, based at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, an outstanding national centre for research and training in the field.

I hope you will join me in congratulating nursing staff at St Vincent's for their exceptional contribution this year and for their demonstration of true courage and commitment in the Hospital's proud tradition of compassionate care.

Wishing you and yours a safe and happy Christmas.

With warm regards,  
Quentin Bryce

# Sarah and Justin's wedding



Above: Bride Sarah Foster and her new husband Justin Tham.

**When Sarah Foster woke up one morning in late August, she found the night nursing staff had quietly dressed her hospital room with pretty flowers and hung a handmade banner opposite her bed.**

Two years ago, the former speech pathologist was diagnosed with incurable bowel cancer – news that came as quite a shock, especially as she had no risk factors and led a healthy lifestyle.

But today, the bright-eyed 35-year-old was filled with happiness and hope as she read the words 'Happy Wedding Day' stretched across the wall.

In just a few hours she would be getting married to her fiancé, Justin Tham, thanks to the caring team at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne (SVHM) who came to the couple's aid after their original wedding plans were quashed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We had everything organised for April – the celebrant, the venue. Justin's parents who live in Malaysia had even booked their flights, so it was really disappointing when we had to cancel it," Sarah recalls.

The couple had been dating for only five months before they learned about Sarah's illness, but were determined not to let her prognosis challenge their newfound love.

Sarah started regular treatment at St Vincent's, which included major surgery in August 2018 to remove the primary tumour. She underwent more surgery in March this year to remove part of the cancer from her abdomen.

Dr Rebecca Lenzion, a Colorectal Fellow at SVHM, performed the second operation. As one of Sarah's treating doctors, she got to know her quite well and was deeply saddened to learn the couple had to forego their wedding plans.

"The nurses and I were talking one night and we knew how important

**"We had everything organised for April – the celebrant, the venue. Justin's parents who live in Malaysia had even booked their flights, so it was really disappointing when we had to cancel it"**

getting married was to Sarah and Justin, but with Victoria in Stage 4 lockdown and Sarah's current state of health, we also knew she was running out of time to have a wedding while she was well enough and could enjoy the moment," Dr Lenzion says.

"That's when we came up with the idea of having it here at St Vincent's."

Special permission was sought from the Department of Health and Human Services, Victoria and the Department of Justice



for the wedding to go ahead on compassionate grounds. The ceremony was then structured in accordance with the State Government's restrictions and safety measures.

With less than a week to organise the event a staff working group was set up to spearhead the plans.

Members of the group included Dr Lenzion, 7 West Nursing Unit Manager Debbie Pallett and a dedicated team of nurses from the ward. SVHM Events Manager and Executive Officer of The Good Samaritan Fund, Abbey Luckhurst, was also part of the steering committee.

Coincidentally, Abbey turned out to be the celebrant the couple had booked independently for their original wedding, and was available to marry them at the hospital.

"It was so amazing watching how everyone chipped in to make this happen," Dr Lenzion says.

Sarah and Justin's wedding was made possible thanks to the generosity of St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne's staff via the Good Samaritan Fund. The Fund enables staff to assist our patients who are most in need. Staff can elect to support the fund by making a fortnightly contribution.

**To find out how to become a Good Samaritan visit: [www.goodsamaritanfund.org.au](http://www.goodsamaritanfund.org.au)**

SVHM's Mission department threw its support behind the staff-initiated plan as well, with a donation to buy flowers for the service. They also provided help navigating the logistics of hosting the ceremony within the hospital.

On the morning of the wedding, many staff volunteered their time to help Sarah get ready. Nurses Alicia Brown and Laura Horgan did her hair and makeup, while another nurse, Catherine McCrohan, loaned the bride her wedding dress for the special day.

"Even though my health was fluctuating, everyone made sure I still felt part of the preparations. They had a whiteboard with a countdown, played wedding music every day in the lead-up and I even got to try on a few dresses," says Sarah, who had been in hospital receiving treatment for two weeks beforehand.

Holding a dainty bouquet of soft-coloured roses Sarah bravely fought back tears as she walked beside her father down one of the hospital corridors that had been transformed into a makeshift wedding aisle, scattered with rose petals and lined with electric candles.

As the black thongs on her feet cheekily peeped out from beneath

**"It was so amazing watching how everyone chipped in to make this happen"**

her wedding dress – a last-minute decision based on comfort – Sarah and her dad shared a knowing smile and laughed. Today was going to be fun and special.

"Both my father and I have had very difficult health challenges over the past few years," Sarah explains. "Dad had a lung transplant in 2019 and we had both wondered if we would ever get the opportunity for him to walk me down the aisle. It was a bit of a miracle moment."

The day was layered with different emotions, including the joy Sarah experienced in being able to see her parents and sister again after almost five months.

Due to her low level of immunity she was advised against catching up with friends and family in the current COVID conditions, and later lockdown measures prohibited any visits.

"It's been so hard because this is a time in my life that I want to be





### “The way the room was set up really blew me away – you could feel the love from the hospital staff”

spending as much quality time with them as possible, so being able to have this moment together was a huge gift for us,” Sarah says.

Justin and Sarah were married on the 11th floor in the hospital’s boardroom, which had been magically transformed into a pop-up chapel draped in fairy lights and offering a breathtaking city backdrop.

“The way the room was set up really blew me away – you could feel the love from the hospital staff,” Justin says. “I just kept telling myself to record this in my mind; this is a good moment.”

In keeping with the Victorian Government’s five-person limit on wedding ceremonies at this time, Sarah’s family could not be present in the room with the couple and her best friend, Claire, who was her Maid of Honour.

But the hospital organised for them to watch the vows being exchanged on a screen in a private room close by and they were also able to share a quiet moment with the newlyweds after the service.

Looking back on the day, Sarah says it made her feel empowered in a time when life was throwing a lot of curve balls her way.

“It felt a bit like a day of reclaiming some normalcy in our lives – we were just able to be Justin and Sarah, a couple in love who just wanted to get married,” she says.

Sarah passed away at home surrounded with love on 10 November 2020 and was farewelled in a private funeral last month. Her sweet smile and kind heart will be greatly missed by her husband, Justin, and her family and friends, as well as those who knew her briefly, but who she inspired deeply with her courage and strength.



### A special shout-out

This fairytale wedding is a testament to the strong values of compassion and care that underpin what St Vincent’s represents.

As word spread about the wedding, staff from various departments jumped on board to help in any way they could. Among them were SVHM’s Engineering Department, Security, Pastoral Care, the Communications team and the hospital’s Cleaning Services.

The IT Department even organised the ceremony to be live-streamed, so Justin’s family in Malaysia were able to watch the young couple get married.

With mandatory face masks forming part of everyday COVID life for Victorians, one of the nurses, Steph McRaie, decided to make a satin mask for the bride to match her dress.

Other nurses organised friends and family to create more special touches including personalised biscuits, as well as an amazing chocolate and raspberry wedding cake donated by nurse Tori Cannon that had gold leaf detailing and was topped with tiny figurines that resembled Sarah and Justin.

Additional flower arrangements were donated by the 7 West pharmacist, 7 West staff and the Cancer Centre.

“It was so collaborative. Everybody just came together to make it happen – it was like it was meant to be,” says SVHM Colorectal Fellow, Dr Rebecca Lenzion.

## On the frontline of our COVID-19 response



The staff from our Fever Clinic have literally been at the frontline of our COVID response since March. The Fever Clinic provides a safe and easy way to screen patients and staff for COVID-19.

Specialist clinic staff, together with members of the Emergency Department and Infection Control consultants, set up the clinic in an isolated part of the hospital to manage patients who were previously attending the Emergency Department to be tested for COVID-19.

A Mobile Fever Clinic was also introduced in July to assist with testing residents in the Carlton, Richmond and Fitzroy housing estates.

Over the past nine months, our Fever Clinic has completed 35,000 tests. Thank you to our remarkable staff for helping to keep our community safe.

The Microbiology lab team has processed thousands of swabs since the clinic opened. To adequately manage service demand, laboratory testing was boosted from 200 to 400 a day, with results provided in 24 hours.

More than 100,000 lab tests have been conducted throughout the pandemic.



The staff from our Fever Clinic have literally been at the frontline of our COVID response since March.

## Nurse Call Advice Line

The St Vincent's Nurse Call Advice Line has been described as a quiet achiever in managing COVID-19. Staffed by a team of 15 nurses, the support service operated 12 hours a day, seven days a week during wave one and wave two, receiving more than 25,000 calls so far.

It was set up to respond to calls from the general public requesting acute clinical advice, mental health referrals, family violence referrals, help with social issues and financial advice. The team has also provided much-needed support for staff wellbeing.

"We started the Advice Line with one cordless phone and a laptop. Within about 15 minutes we taking phone calls," says founder and coordinator Megan McCutcheon.

Among the strategies they have implemented to provide prompt action is a text messaging service that delivers pathology results.



Above: Advice Line Coordinator Megan McCutcheon



## Simulation Ward

In April, a multi-disciplinary group of staff created a simulation ward at our Fitzroy site to allow frontline staff an opportunity to correct procedures and protocols in a COVID environment.

The simulation ward was a terrific example of staff rapidly coming together to design a new multi-disciplinary model of care.

The wards were cleared of patients to train and orientate our staff in the safe care and management of COVID patients, using a multi-disciplinary model of care.

In total, over 95% of staff who work in COVID wards underwent the simulation training.

St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne (SVHM) has played a key leadership role in supporting the Victorian Government through the global pandemic with the launch of St Vincent's Hospital on the Park.



## St Vincent's Hospital on the Park leads new charge in Victoria's collective fight against COVID-19



In August St Vincent's welcomed patients at its newest hospital to help manage the escalating demand on Victoria's healthcare system caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Victorian Government called on St Vincent's earlier this year to recommission the former Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, in East Melbourne, as part of a concerted effort to render extra medical support during the State's growing health crisis.

As a result, the 84-bed St Vincent's Hospital on the Park (SVHOP) was developed to offer surge response by providing care for some of St Vincent's lower-acuity patients.

Palliative care patients were the first to be admitted at the new facility, followed by rehabilitation and geriatric evaluative medicine patients.

The strategic move freed up more beds to treat COVID-positive patients at the St Vincent's main Fitzroy site, putting the public hospital in an even stronger position to offer on-going care for those who need hospital and critical-response attention.

Plans for the \$30-million hospital were formulated during the early stages of the pandemic, with building works starting in April.

More than 700 people were involved in developing the history-making new site and 40,000 hours were spent transforming it into a functioning hospital.

CEO Angela Nolan said she is extremely proud of the work done by the St Vincent's Project and Construction team to realise this vision in such a tight time-frame.

"Usually a project of this magnitude would take more than nine months to complete, but we were able to commission the building in less than five months," she says.

"It is a great outcome, and reflects the ongoing commitment of St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne to providing excellent, compassionate care to Victoria's most vulnerable."

**"Usually a project of this magnitude would take more than nine months to complete, but we were able to commission the building in less than five months"**

# Donations for our frontline workers

St Vincent's was inundated with donations from companies to acknowledge the tireless efforts of our staff, lift spirits and encourage a focus on self-care and wellbeing throughout the COVID-19 healthcare crisis.

The Nourish & Flourish program was created and led by St Vincent's Mission to help distribute these items to staff at all St Vincent's sites over this time.

**More than 25 companies gave generously, with items ranging from food and beauty products, to flowers, candles, throw rugs and notebooks.**

"We loaded up trolleys and would go to different departments to drop things off," says Daisy Sargeant, who was redeployed as a staff wellbeing project officer during the pandemic.

"The donation of 500 bunches of snapdragons were really special. As staff members finished their shift, we handed them a bunch of flowers. Some staff cried because they were so touched."

More than 25 companies gave generously, with items ranging from food and beauty products, to flowers, candles, throw rugs and notebooks.

Two organisations, Frontline Meals and Feed the Frontline Australia, fundraised to provide 550 hot meals purchased from local cafes. These were brought to some of St Vincent's hardest-hit wards and behind-the-scenes operations teams by the staff wellbeing team.

"It's gestures like this from the community that made them feel appreciated and improved morale," Daisy says.



# Hotels for Heroes



Above: Dr Adrienne Lui and Leondra Petrongolo

**Providing emergency accommodation for our frontline workers quickly became a priority as the COVID-19 pandemic escalated.**

The Hotels for Heroes program was introduced by the Victorian Government to support at-risk workers, including healthcare staff, who had tested positive for the virus and needed to self-isolate, or worked in close contact with COVID-positive members of the community.

Leondra Petrongolo, a social worker and Accommodation Liaison Officer at St Vincent's, said more than 100 of the hospital's healthcare workers have used the service since it was launched in early April.

"Having this program available to our staff was a blessing; it was a lifesaver for a lot of people," she adds.

Eligible staff were provided with a free hotel room and three meals a day during their quarantine period.

Leondra says this helped ease some of the stress frontline workers were experiencing around the safety of their family and loved ones due to the nature of their work.

"It provided them with a refuge – a safe place when they couldn't be at home," she explains.

Adrienne Lui was working as a general medical intern at St Vincent's when the second wave of the virus hit. During this time, one of her patients tested positive

to COVID-19 and Adrienne was asked to self-isolate for 14 days.

"I live with my parents and sister, so I became quite worried of potentially transmitting the virus to my family and endangering them," she explains.

St Vincent's were quick to seek emergency accommodation for her through the Hospitals for Heroes program, which Adrienne recalls was a massive relief.

"I was looked after really well and the place where I stayed had everything I needed," she says.

Although it was very difficult being away from her family, Adrienne felt comforted knowing they were safe and thankful she could still stay in touch.

"We would FaceTime each other and even did some virtual dinners," Adrienne adds.

The program also provides accommodation for frontline workers on compassionate grounds.

Leondra says this option offers a "home away from home" for eligible staff who might feel vulnerable going back to their families after working a shift in a COVID-19 exposed area.

Some of them have used this service for several months.

"I think the compassion shown through this program and the service to others works parallel with the values of St Vincent's in so many ways," Leondra says.



## Going out on a Lim

Pharmacist Dan Lim (pictured above) went above and beyond in the early days of the pandemic. When stocks of hand sanitiser were running low, Dan contacted a local gin distillery and together with this producer, made St Vincent's own hand sanitiser to keep everyone in the hospital safe. Thank you Dan!



"My 7-year-old granddaughter, who is being home-schooled at the moment, made this poster as part of a project about germs. She gave it to me because I work in a hospital – junior logic I guess. I brought the poster to work and it has been put on display in the nurses' station. At this time when so many of our emails and noticeboards contain serious information about COVID-19, this poster has brought a little light relief. There have been many smiles and comments about it on the ward."—Margaret Myers, Senior Nurse

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen some rapid and rigid changes to the way we live – statewide lockdowns, temperature testing to enter supermarkets, schools and hospitals, a new norm of physical distancing and now, the mandatory wearing of masks in public.

As the escalating health crisis casts a shadow of concern over the community, medical teams around the world are working tirelessly to manage the deadly virus and find a cure.

## Groundbreaking clinical trial tackles crippling effects of breathing with COVID

A global clinical trial led by St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne is using Heparin (a blood-thinning medication) to help improve breathing in critical-care COVID-19 patients and get them off ventilators sooner.

Dr Barry Dixon, an Intensivist at SVHM's Intensive Care Unit, is in charge of the global trial which will study how Heparin can address the damaging effects the coronavirus has on a person's lungs by focusing on one of the virus's lesser-known symptoms – blood clots.

Rather than injecting Heparin to prevent blood clots in the body – primarily in the lungs and legs – this trial administers it as an inhaled gas to treat COVID-19 patients on ventilators.

"We did a study before COVID-19 in patients with lung injury and pneumonia – similar to COVID-19

patients – and that study found that giving people inhaled Heparin accelerated their recovery," Dr Dixon says.

"We were able to show they had less lung injury, we were able to show they were less likely to get a condition called Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS), and we were able to show that survivors were able to get home sooner."

### A study found that giving people inhaled Heparin accelerated their recovery.

Blood clots can damage the lining of the lungs and cause fluid to leak into them as well. Both these issues will restrict the ability to breathe, which is one of the

primary concerns in critical-care COVID-19 patients.

"The thing about Heparin is it also binds with COVID-19 and so we think it inactivates COVID-19 as well," Dr Dixon says.

The St Vincent's-led COVID-19 Heparin Clinical Trial hopes to provide another form of active treatment in the medical arsenal being developed to head-off the debilitating effects of this condition.

Since the trial's launch in April 2020, 10 patients have been enrolled.

Dr Dixon says eventually there will be about 206 patients involved in the trial. Patients from hospitals including Galway, Barcelona and Liverpool have also come on board and other sites for the trial are currently being explored.

Below: Dr Barry Dixon



## Clinical trial looks to protect high-risk healthcare workers against COVID-19



Above: A/Prof Mandana Nikpour and SVHM nephrologist Dr Sharon Ford, who put her hand up for the trial.

St Vincent's is playing a pivotal role in an Australian-led clinical trial to determine whether hydroxychloroquine can protect healthcare workers from contracting COVID-19 while caring for COVID-positive patients.

COVID Shield is a collaborative project led by the Walter and Eliza Institute of Medical Research in partnership with IQVIA and healthcare providers across the country.

A/Prof Mandana Nikpour, one of COVID SHIELD's lead principal researchers and a consultant rheumatologist at St Vincent's, says during the pandemic hundreds of thousands of healthcare workers have been infected worldwide, demonstrating the value, need and urgency of this clinical trial that focuses on prevention rather than cure.

When the trial started in June, more than 10 per cent of COVID-19 cases in Australia were linked to healthcare workers. In the second wave of infections in Victoria, more than 1000 healthcare workers were infected.

### COVID Shield is a collaborative project led by the Walter and Eliza Institute of Medical Research in partnership with IQVIA and healthcare providers across the country.

"For every healthcare worker who is infected, quite a few then have to be tested, or go into self-isolation for two weeks. This has had an impact on the physical and mental health of healthcare workers, as well as an impact on the workforce we have available to undertake frontline duties," A/Prof Nikpour says.

Hydroxychloroquine is commonly used in the treatment of lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. Having used the drug to successfully treat patients with both these conditions, A/Prof Nikpour says initial findings indicate hydroxychloroquine could potentially help in the fight against COVID.

"In the test-tube, hydroxychloroquine reduces the replication of SARS

Coronavirus 2, which is the COVID-19 virus, by about 90 percent," she explains.

"When you are very sick or ventilated in hospital you have a lot of inflammatory molecules causing collateral damage to organs, and it is not possible at that point to intervene with a drug like hydroxychloroquine. However, hydroxychloroquine could potentially reduce the risk of COVID-19, if taken prior to exposure to the virus, that is, as 'pre-exposure prophylaxis' or 'PrEP'."

During the trial, participants will regularly report, via an electronic data-capture platform, any COVID-19 symptoms they may be experiencing and whether they have been tested for the virus or been diagnosed with it.

"They also get smartphone alerts daily to remind them to take their medication and monitor their progress, including any side effects. The eDiary also checks whether they have had contact with anyone who has tested COVID-positive," A/Prof Nikpour says.

A/Prof Nikpour says they will be looking to recruit about 650 participants locally, with 40 participants recruited from St Vincent's to date.

"The prospect of contracting COVID-19 is always front of mind. My biggest fear is unknowingly passing the virus on to a patient or loved one. Most of the patients I usually see are immunosuppressed and at a heightened risk of contracting COVID-19; they were incredibly scared. I felt this was one thing I could do to help out." —Dr Sharon Ford, SVHM nephrologist

# COVID-19



## March

- Pandemic Plan is activated
- Commencement of Fever Clinic
- Advice Line implemented
- Visitor Restrictions implemented

## April

- Outpatient clinics switches to telehealth
- Planning for St Vincent's on the Park begins
- Staff accommodation and meal service begins
- Isolation & Recovery facilities become operational
- Simulation ward established
- Practical PPE training begins

## July

- Blitz testing of hot spots
- Confirmed case in ICU
- Stage 2 Operating Model reinstated
- St Vincent's Hospital on the Park commissioned
- Mobile testing of Fitzroy and Carlton housing towers
- Elective Surgery to 65%
- 8E COVID Ward commissioned
- Level 2 PPE in non-COVID settings
- Cardiac transferred to St Vincent's Private Hospital Melbourne (SVPHM)
- Visitor ban implemented
- Courtyard marquees
- Stage Four lockdown begins

## June

- Virtual Visitor Program launched

## May

- Elective surgery re-start
- Testing blitz
- Recovery planning
- Mobile Fever Clinic starts



## October

- Easing of restrictions begins
- Plastics, Endocrinology and Urology to return from SVPHM
- Limited visiting hours resume
- Elective Surgery to 75%
- Lessons Learnt consultation process completed



## November

- Wave 3 Preparedness activities undertaken
- Return to COVID Normal rules

## September

- Haematology and Oncology to SVPHM
- Bolte COVID Ward commissioned
- Staff and visitor attestation begins
- 8E, 8W, 9E, 9W COVID wards decommissioned

## August

- Level 3 PPE in all clinical settings
- 8W and 9E COVID Wards commissioned
- Plastics, Endocrinology and Urology to SVPHM
- "ANZAC" Recruitment campaign launched
- Expansion of inpatient telehealth



## Managing the wellbeing of healthcare workers during COVID-19



The COVID pandemic saw healthcare workers thrust into uncharted territory. As a result, the peaks and troughs of their COVID-fuelled work environments added unforeseen layers of complexity for managing wellbeing including increased levels of anxiety and trauma.

A new set of wellbeing initiatives developed by St Vincent's are helping staff manage the unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 health crisis.

SVHM's Wellbeing Action Plan – COVID-19 was developed when the virus first hit Australia in March. It was later modified to accommodate the pandemic's evolving stages.

"It is a living action plan, as, even though the situation in Australia is one of 'controlled' pandemic, sporadic outbursts, like the one we are currently experiencing, are expected to continue and a state of readiness is necessary," says Monita Mascitti-Meuter, Wellbeing Program Coordinator.

When the virus first hit Victoria, St Vincent's staff were prepared for an overflow of patients. But the wave was smaller than anticipated and the emergency department was quieter than usual.

"The build-up to face a looming disaster, which did not eventuate, left many staff feeling lost, frustrated, disillusioned, reflecting, fatigued and burnt out," says Jacqui Bloink, Workplace Wellbeing Program Manager.

**When the virus first hit Victoria, St Vincent's staff were prepared for an overflow of patients. But the wave was smaller than anticipated and the emergency department was quieter than usual.**

Staff then had to manage feelings of knowing they would need to be perpetually prepared for a surge, Jacqui adds.

When the second wave hit in July and August, a heightened level of pressure was felt.

"Some of our staff likened the effects of riding these waves as living with permanent stress fractures," Jacqui says.

Through the targeted wellbeing plan, St Vincent's has been able to identify these 'stress fractures' and manage them quickly, effectively and with care and support.

Some of the program strategies that have been particularly successful include regular communication, such as daily huddles, to help staff feel empowered to go about their work and practise with the most up-to-date knowledge. Role modelling of different wellbeing approaches has included a buddy system and end-of-shift debriefing, or 'Mental Doffing', which helps to mitigate feeling overwhelmed.

Hotel provision for staff requiring self-isolation; donations to teams in need of extra support; a buddy system for clinical and non-clinical staff; as well as access to mindfulness exercises, well-curated resources and targeted online training were other strategies adopted.

This COVID-specific plan also saw increased STAR (Support Team Action Response) Peer Support offered to provide wellbeing text messages and phone calls to all COVID-positive staff and those in self-isolation, along with weekly Nurse Unit Manager support forums.

"Despite the many challenges and adversities the staff maintain a remarkable sense of collegiality and resilience as they work through the emotional consequences of the pandemic," Jacqui says.

"They continually express how incredibly well-supported they feel by the organisation to face whatever the shift presents and to collectively lift the extra weight with great skill and capacity."



## Love Your St Vincent's

Please give today

[loveyourstvincents.org.au](http://loveyourstvincents.org.au)

T 03 9231 3365

Text LoveStvts to 0400 807 807 to donate



## Love Your St Vincent's Grateful Patient Giving Campaign

The St Vincent's Foundation team works tirelessly to support our brilliant medical teams by raising funds and awareness.

Time and again, patients and families get in touch with staff at the St Vincent's Foundation to let us know how deeply moved they have been to receive outstanding and compassionate care, for which our health services are renowned for. The Foundation is therefore delighted to launch the Love Your St Vincent's Grateful Patient Giving Campaign.

The campaign will highlight the importance of giving and philanthropy across our hospital campuses in Victoria. It will raise the profile of St Vincent's as an organisation, committed to encouraging individuals and corporations to think of us, when they are making giving decisions.

The Love Your St Vincent's – Giving Campaign will provide fresh inspiration and new opportunities for all members of the community. It enables our patients and their families to celebrate our nurses, doctors, staff and volunteers who work across St Vincent's Health Services. We will share the many ways in which people give back to our hospitals and how these gifts make an untold difference to the care we are able to provide.

Those keen to support or to share a story are encouraged to visit [www.loveyourstvincents.org.au](http://www.loveyourstvincents.org.au)

## Emergency Appeal addressed urgent need

Our St Vincent's Foundation Team has been awarded first place in a major Australian and New Zealand peer reviewed fundraising competition.

The award was received as acknowledgement of the highly successful, St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne Emergency Appeal.

Launched just seven days after the COVID-19 global pandemic

announcement, the community responded immediately to the urgent request for support. This surge of generosity resulted in the Appeal raising almost \$2 million for much needed hospital equipment, enabling the hospital to prepare for what was to come.

We are truly grateful for the generous support we received from the community. On behalf of our frontline staff, we thank you.



## 50,000 warm clothes donated this winter

Committed students from Caulfield Grammar School took time out from their school holidays to assist with packing over 50,000 items of warm clothing kindly donated to the St Vincent's Foundation for distribution to people in need. These gifts were generously provided by large and small local and national businesses, with a major contribution from the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The packs of warm clothing

and toiletries were distributed to St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne's most vulnerable patients.

St Vincent's Foundation CEO Lyn Amy said, "We are extremely grateful to the organisations who donated goods in support of our highly disadvantaged, chronically ill and isolated patients. Once again, the family of St Vincent's displayed its enormous and beautiful its."

# Telehealth lets patients be seen from the comfort of their own home

## 2020 has seen a huge increase in telehealth use across St Vincent's.

As two periods of lockdown forced Victorians to adapt to new ways of working and keeping in touch with friends and family, patients and clinicians alike have welcomed the ability to access specialist care from the comfort of their own home.

According to Organisational Telehealth Coordinator Karen Munton, St Vincent's has already seen a record number of patients via telehealth in 2020-21, surpassing what was a record year in 2019-20.

"Specialist Clinics have conducted over 16,000 telehealth appointments this year, an average of 500 appointments a day, ensuring our patients continue to receive vital care during these challenging times," says Karen.

With 11 per cent of St Vincent's patients living in rural and regional Victoria, adoption of telehealth had already been growing. But COVID has further accelerated that growth.

'There are many patients who have difficulty travelling, so they might need specialised equipment to get here or the conditions they're travelling in might be tricky considering their health issues,' says Karen. 'Telehealth eradicates travel time, provides patients with greater flexibility for appointments, and provides them with easier access to specialist care.'

**Telehealth eradicates travel time and provides patients with greater flexibility**

## Visitor videos in ICU

The visitor restrictions during the pandemic have made it very hard for friends and family of patients in the Intensive Care Unit. Telehealth has been vital in keeping patients connected with their families during this time.

Nursing staff in the ICU have organised telehealth video calls so families can see and interact with their loved ones. Telehealth allows families to get a fuller sense of their relative's condition and ICU journey.

Patients who have breathing tubes find it difficult to talk on the phone and tire easily, so the benefit of being able to see a familiar face helps make the patient feel safe.

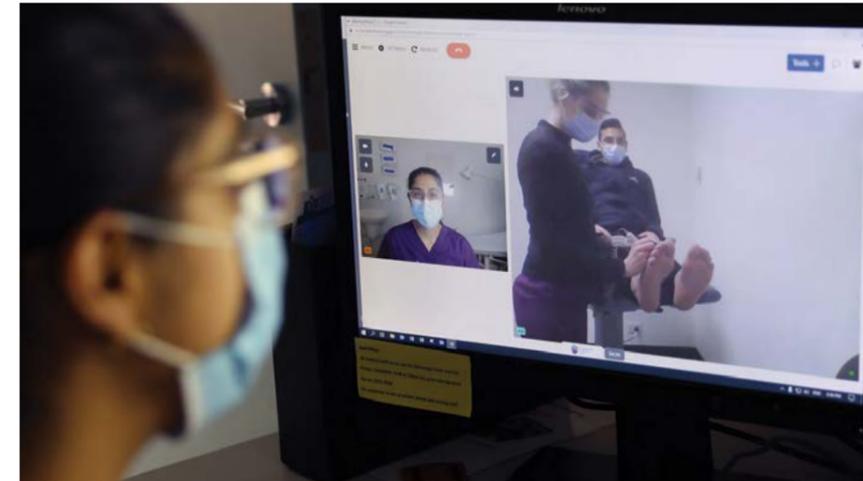
"If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a real time video when your loved one is in physical crisis and unable to have visitors, is priceless," says Nellie Nixon, ANUM in the Department of Critical Care Medicine.



Joan, 92, has shown age is no barrier when it comes to using technology to access health services remotely.

As part of our telehealth services, a rehabilitation physician, an allied health assistant, and a psychologist, all met with Joan online.

Joan is the oldest person to access our telehealth services and found it so convenient she is never going back, and neither are we!



## High Risk Foot Clinic

A telehealth service offered by the High Risk Foot team is making it easier for regional residents to access the care they need closer to home.

The service complements St Vincent's focus to expand healthcare beyond the hospital walls by allowing people to attend an interdisciplinary assessment off-site.

"We have a huge cohort of regional patients that will benefit from this – some of them travel hundreds of kilometres to get here," says Kate Waller, a senior podiatrist with the High Risk Foot Service which operates as an outpatient clinic once a week from SVHM.

The service provides vascular, endocrinology, rehabilitation, podiatry, orthotics and nursing care to referred patients.

The main goal of the clinic is to lower hospital admissions and reduce lower-limb amputations.

According to Diabetic Foot Australia, 50,000 Australians were living with diabetic foot disease on any given day in 2017 and 12,500 were living with a diabetes-related amputation.

The High Risk Foot Service has been regularly providing telehealth

consultations since April to assess and manage people suffering from conditions such as diabetes-related foot ulcers and peripheral arterial disease.

So far 41 telehealth consultations have been successfully conducted with patients, largely from Albury/Wodonga and Swan Hill. This service is also being used to assist patients in residential aged care and clients using SVHM's Hospital in the Home program.

Kate says the telehealth option not only saves patients travel time, but also extra costs that might be incurred in taking time off work, parking, petrol and overnight stays.

"It has also improved the patient experience because they are able to access a lot of their care through people they have a rapport with locally," she adds.

As a large component of the care required is procedural-based, Kate says telehealth doesn't eliminate face-to-face contact at the hospital but offers an adjunctive service.

The telehealth consults involve various members from the St Vincent's High Risk Foot team conducting an appointment remotely with a patient and their local clinician.

"Because the clinician will be with the patient at the other end, they are able to do some of the procedural assessments, such as feeling for pulses, conducting Doppler assessments, cleaning and dressing the wounds," Kate says.

They can even organise for things like x-rays to be done closer to home.

"Offering this service has also allowed us to build stronger relationships with service providers in these local communities and share our skill set with them," Kate adds.

Norman McLeod is among those who have recently used the telehealth High Risk Foot Service. The Albury resident was referred after developing a cyst on his left heel, which was causing him great pain.

Norman recently had stents put into his left leg at St Vincent's, so he was already familiar with the high-level care they offered.

**"I'd never done a telehealth appointment before. It saved me having to go all the way to Melbourne again, where I would have had to stay the night because I live so far away."**

"I'd never done a telehealth appointment before, though, and found it was great," Norman says. "It saved me having to go all the way to Melbourne again, where I would have had to stay the night because I live so far away."

Melbourne's recent COVID restrictions added an extra layer of complexity for regional patients like Norman, who were required to self-isolate on returning home after treatment in the city.

"I didn't have to do that this time with my telehealth appointment. It just made things so much simpler and has given me a lot of peace of mind."

# Our aged care response



Above: Dr Richard Kane (front right) with members of the Residential In-Reach team.

## One of the hardest hit areas as COVID-19 swept across Victoria was the residential aged care sector.

Hundreds of vulnerable older people were affected at a number of not-for-profit and private aged care facilities that bore the brunt of major outbreaks, largely in the second wave.

During this time, the four public residential aged care facilities operated by St Vincent's remained COVID-free.

Dean Jones, General Manager of Subacute Home and Community Services at St Vincent's and the General Manager overseeing COVID Response for St Vincent's aged-care areas, attributed this to the team's preparedness.

"We were really strong in terms of the way we set ourselves up throughout the second wave to protect both our residents and our staff," Dean says.

As soon St Vincent's learned other aged care facilities weren't in as good a position, they were quick to lend a helping hand.

Working as part of a broader support hub with The Austin and Northern Hospitals, St Vincent's deployed special COVID Response teams to provide support to over 35 aged care facilities.

"We expanded our Residential In-Reach team, and were able to take the procedures and practices we had in place at St Vincent's and impart that knowledge to the private facilities that needed our help," Dean explains.

St Vincent's provided three main forms of response during the crises.

"We rapidly mobilised a multi-faceted approach to meet the escalating demands," says Dr Richard Kane, SVHM's Director of Geriatric Medicine.

St Vincent's accepted some of the more unstable residents from impacted private residential aged care facilities, while the St Vincent's Private Hospital accommodated residents who were COVID-positive and needed to leave their facility, but were not as acutely unwell as others.

## The staff had concerns for the mental wellbeing of residents as well, who were isolated in their rooms for long periods – some for over two months.

A significant third element involved St Vincent's specially-boosted Residential In-Reach Service that helped with the on-the-ground assessment and care of COVID-positive residents at the facilities to determine what treatment was necessary, how this aligned with the residents' goals of care and whether hospitalisation was appropriate.

Over this period, St Vincent's focus was offering this clinical care, but support to the facilities was also provided with advice around infection control and daily operations, such as rostering and the logistics of helping organise resident transfers when required.



In some cases, St Vincent's provided essential nursing workforce support, especially when staff at the facilities became infected or furloughed.

"Above all else, we wanted to make sure the residents, most of whom were incredibly vulnerable through physical frailty and cognitive impairment, got the care they needed, wherever they were," Dr Kane explains.

"It was not always acute, hospital-based care that was required, sometimes really good palliative care was what residents and their families were seeking. We just wanted to make sure every person was treated with comfort and dignity, which comes back to the compassionate care St V's is known for."

According to Dr Kane, staff entering some of the more severely affected private residential aged care facilities during this time reported how sombre the atmosphere had become.

"One staff member described it as eerie and said, when they arrived there were sheets up at the entrance,

residents were confined to their rooms and the place was silent, when usually it was known to be filled with music and conversation," he explains. "It felt almost like a war zone."

The staff had concerns for the mental wellbeing of residents as well, who were isolated in their rooms for long periods – some for over two months. Supporting the facility staff to maintain good levels of communication with them was important, including looking at meaningful ways to keep residents remotely connected with their families.

"Our staff came out of this feeling emotionally drained and exhausted, but I think the spirit of togetherness helped them through this challenging time," Dr Kane says.

"Universally, they felt they had been able to make a big difference, which was incredibly rewarding."



**"We were really strong in terms of the way we set ourselves up throughout the second wave to protect both our residents and our staff"**

# Our medical response

Taking a few big virtual steps forward enabled St Vincent's General Medical team to tackle COVID-19 response collaboratively in a time where they were often physically forced to work apart.

Among the innovative moves introduced that helped staff stay connected and able to fulfil patient healthcare needs more collectively were virtual ward rounds, virtual handovers and even a virtual visitor program.

Dr Stephanie Bond, a Senior Medical Registrar at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne described these virtual applications as "a game-changer".

"It has demonstrated our agility to push past the barriers COVID presented, so we could continue providing the necessary care to our patients in a safe and effective way," Stephanie says.

On COVID-affected wards, iPads were introduced for ward rounds. This allowed the senior doctor to conduct patient assessments inside the patient's room, while junior medical staff could watch on iPad screens outside at a safe distance.

Stephanie said this meant the junior staff members could still be part of the round and allowed them to gain a clearer understanding of the current health status of patients, so they could identify any deterioration more readily during their shifts.

"It helped promote engagement within the team and kept everyone involved, even when they couldn't physically all be in the room together," Stephanie says. "It also increased our efficiency as there wasn't the need to keep donning and doffing personal protective equipment, which definitely slows things down a lot, but is very necessary."

As contact transmission was a key concern on the COVID and suspected-COVID wards, an electronic medical record system was temporarily implemented to reduce potential transmission of the virus through paper charts.

"This process proved quite useful when we'd need to discuss things with doctors in other departments," Stephanie explains. "They could just refer to the patient's medical records online without having to go into the COVID area to see the patient."

Virtual handovers provided an opportunity for different speciality units to also become involved at earlier stages and get immediate insight on all new COVID and suspected COVID patients.

**"It helped promote engagement within the team and kept everyone involved, even when they couldn't physically all be in the room together"**

"We have a main handover in the morning, which is done through a video conference and we found so many different people would attend – the respiratory physicians would tune in, ICU would tune in, infectious disease physicians and even palliative care," Stephanie explains.

"We suddenly had this multi-disciplinary team working together at the one time, and watching

all the different speciality units came together in this way was just so incredibly amazing and so collaborative."

Stephanie has found these virtual tools highlighted how the General Medical team has had to really think outside the box and brainstorm some flexible solutions to keep moving through this complex time when treating patients.

"It has really re-imagined the way we work."



Above: Dr Stephanie Bond



## Supporting the homeless to recover and isolate

For 126 years, St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne has supported the poorest and most vulnerable in the community, including homeless people.

St Vincent's is proud to have played a lead role in establishing four pop-up facilities to support our state's most vulnerable as part of the Victorian Government's COVID-19 response.

Located in inner Melbourne, the facilities will support Victorians experiencing or at risk of homelessness to self-isolate, quarantine and recover from COVID-19.

In addition to developing the model of care, St Vincent's leads clinical services in all four facilities and coordinates intake and referral processes, and the delivery of a Mobile Fever Clinic.

The facilities accommodate people who have undergone testing and are awaiting results, or those who have returned a positive result. This includes people who are required to self-isolate and do not have suitable housing to do so, as well as those who are discharged from hospital and require accommodation to recover from COVID-19.

Homelessness services staff will provide 24-hour support to people in the facilities, alongside St Vincent's nursing staff who will assess and provide care for people as they recover.

If clients require a higher level of care, they will be referred to mainstream health services, including Ambulance Victoria or their closest Emergency Department.

The program is operated by Anglicare Victoria, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Launch Housing, Sacred Heart Mission and VincentCare Victoria, with Bolton Clark Homeless Persons Program providing additional nursing support at remote sites. It was made possible by \$8.8 million of funding from the Victoria government.

## Mask donations for homeless



People experiencing homelessness have been hit particularly hard by the COVID pandemic. For this vulnerable group, masks to protect themselves and others can be hard to access.

Following appeals from our staff, Gorman and BONDS were been incredibly generous in donating thousands of masks for needy clients.

"When the announcement was made that people would need to wear masks when outside, our first thought was 'what on

earth does that mean for our clients?'," says Paisley Suggett, a primary health nurse working at the Salvation Army's Bourke St hub. "Our clients don't have the money or necessarily the ability to access resources such as reusable masks."

"So we sent off a few emails to several different companies, and we had a really amazing response. The masks have been provided to our clients here at the Salvation Army and have also been distributed across St Vincent's to people in need."

## Answering the call: Our ANZAC recruitment campaign

Nurses from across Australia and New Zealand were quick to answer the call for help from St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne in the fight against COVID-19.

Victoria was particularly hard hit by the crippling effects of the pandemic.

Our frontline healthcare workers were pushed to the limit during the second wave of the virus, when at one point the state's active cases exceeded 700-plus.

Not only did St Vincent's experience increased demand as a result of the huge spike in COVID-positive and suspected COVID cases, staff also had to manage and support the regular intake of patients.

**“The dedication and commitment demonstrated by these nurses was exceptional”**

In an unconventional move, the hospital advertised an opportunity online and through their social channels, calling for nurses from across the country and New Zealand who could join the



St Vincent's team for a few months to provide essential support during this time of great need.

The campaign, which commenced at the start of August, has seen 15 nurses join our frontline staff.

Each new nurse had their flights, accommodation and salary covered by St Vincent's for the duration of their contract, and in appreciation of their contribution, each was gifted a \$2000 travel voucher to explore Victoria once restrictions lifted.

Vanessa Tetaz, General Manager People Services, People & Corporate Support at St Vincent's Hospital

Melbourne described the response as overwhelming and inspiring.

“The dedication and commitment demonstrated by these nurses was exceptional, and they each applied our values of compassion, integrity, justice and excellence in their daily work,” Vanessa says.

“Their unwavering support allowed St Vincent's to continue to uphold the outstanding level of care for our patients during this difficult time, and we are extremely grateful.”



### Symptom and Urgent Review Clinic

In its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, our Cancer Centre acted quickly to establish a nurse-led Symptom and Urgent Review Clinic, thanks to a grant from the Department of Health & Human Services.

Staff at the clinic assess cancer patients who are having adverse reaction to their treatment over the phone or via telehealth, thereby helping them avoiding coming to

the Emergency Department.

“It's particularly important during this COVID context, because it means that people can avoid coming to the hospital, where their exposure risk would be increased,” says Cancer Centre nurse, Jessica Robertson, pictured left.

“We hope that the SURC clinic will be an ongoing service to provide benefit for our patients into the future.”

### Community Mental Health food service

Staff at St Vincent's Community Mental Health Services have been providing some of our vulnerable mental health clients impacted by COVID-19 restrictions with essential items such as food packages.

“Thanks to a grant from SVHA's Inclusive Health and Innovation Fund, we started this program in June and we are averaging around \$900 a week worth of supplies at one of the mental health clinics alone,” says Peer Support Worker George Skoufis.

**“We have had some clients literally in tears from being happy that we are thinking of them in this difficult time.”**

“Besides food supplies, we also have vouchers for our clients so that they can purchase mobile phones to maintain contact with others during isolation.

“Normally the interaction between case managers and clients is about medication and treatment and this program has changed that.

“We have had some clients literally in tears from being happy that we are thinking of them in this difficult time.”



## HealthMonitor trial stepped up the fight against COVID-19

During 2020, St Vincent's trialled a phone-based support service for people who tested positive to coronavirus, to provide a safe way to manage and monitor their health and wellbeing whilst self-isolating.

It also hoped to reduce preventable demand on hospitals and minimise further risk of community transmission.

Designed by St Vincent's Health Independence Program Complex Care Services, the HealthMonitor program was originally trialled to manage older patients at high risk of returning to hospital after discharge.

With the onset of COVID-19, the HealthMonitor trial was redirected to manage COVID positive patients isolating at home by offering virtual access to a multi-disciplinary team who regularly assessed their needs and progress during the illness.

The phone based program provided clinical monitoring of symptoms, reinforced isolation procedures,, coordinated short-term welfare needs and helped to rapidly escalate hospital care when an individual's health was deteriorating.

Infectious Diseases Clinical Nurse Consultant and team member Adrian Hubble said the trial, which operated seven days a week during the height of the pandemic, made people feel reassured and comforted during these uncertain times.

“They really valued the regular contact we provided,” said Adrian.

The HealthMonitor COVID team was comprised of nursing staff, physiotherapists and occupational therapists, who coordinated care and provided rapid on-demand outreach support to vulnerable clients.

The program partnered closely with the Hospital in the Home (HITH) program to provide escalation pathways where symptoms were deteriorating or where there were concurrent medical issues requiring urgent review.

“We had one young client who had symptoms consistent with shingles in her eye. Our HITH registrar provided a telehealth assessment and prescribed medications which our care coordinators dropped off to her,” says Adrian

“By facilitating interventions like this for people in isolation we mitigated the need for people to come into hospital emergency departments or GP practices while they were COVID+.”

**During 2020, more than 550 people with COVID-19 were successfully managed by HealthMonitor.**

Kris, who was the program's first client, initially learnt she was COVID positive while travelling on a cruise ship to Antarctica.

When she returned home after the two-week travel quarantine period, she had a sore throat again and decided to have it checked at the St Vincent's Fever Clinic, where she tested positive a second time for the virus.

“I started feeling quite anxious about it all,” says Kris.

She says the Health Monitor program provided her with much-needed support, reassurance and answers to her questions during a very stressful period.

“It's meant so much to have someone there to help and hold my hand through that time,” says Kris.

With the successful conclusion of the trial, the project team are now actively seeking funding for a formal pilot, with a view to it becoming an ongoing St Vincent's service for older people leaving hospital.

# 2020 BC...‘Before COVID’

## St Vincent’s Staff Showing Support for the LGBTIQ+ Community

In a show of solidarity with the LGBTIQ+ community, staff from St Vincent’s proudly participated for the first time in the annual Midsumma Pride March on Sunday 2 February.

St Vincent’s participation in this march was an important step in demonstrating the Hospital’s commitment to being inclusive, affirmative and responsive to the needs of LGBTIQ+ consumers and staff.

St Vincent’s believes that acknowledging, welcoming, protecting and respecting a person’s individuality and diversity is central to patient-centred care, trust in our services, employee engagement and workforce wellbeing.

LGBTIQ+ Steering Committee member Jan Kilicaslan said St Vincent’s participation in the march was an important step in demonstrating the hospital’s commitment to being inclusive, affirmative and responsive to the needs of LGBTIQ+ consumers and staff.

‘LGBTIQ+ individuals still face more barriers when accessing health and wellbeing services, and are at higher risk of poor mental health and suicide than their non-LGBTIQ+ peers,’ says Jan. ‘LGBTIQ+ employees also face high levels of workplace bullying, harassment and discrimination.’

St Vincent’s has developed Gender and Sexual Diversity Responsiveness Guidelines, in partnership with LGBTIQ+ communities, to ensure that everyone feels safe, welcome and free to express themselves.

St Vincent’s Mental Health is tackling even more LGBTIQ+ issues through the establishment of the Steering Committee in 2016, which contributes to St Vincent’s best-practice strategy in working towards safe, responsive and inclusive



service delivery for LGBTIQ+ people in our community.

‘The aim of the steering committee is to drive quality improvement projects that affirm the dignity and value of each person, to live their lives free from discrimination, and to have access to services that address specific health and wellbeing needs,’ says Jan.

St Vincent’s Mental Health has also established the Allies Network to create a network of support across the service for people who identify as LGBTIQ+ and promote understanding and awareness of LGBTIQ+ issues affecting staff and consumers.

‘Allies are not experts about matters of sexuality and gender identity,’ Jan says. ‘They are people who strongly support making St Vincent’s an environment where all staff, consumers and their carers can safely work and receive care free of harassment or discrimination.’

**St Vincent’s believes that acknowledging, welcoming, protecting and respecting a person’s individuality and diversity is central to patient-centred care, trust in our services, employee engagement and workforce wellbeing.**

### What does LGBTIQ + refer to?

People who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning (LGBTIQI)

## Closing the gap by supporting Indigenous staff



Above: Dr Sam Burrell, Dr Yasmin Manahan and Dr Beau Wilson, who in 2020 became St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne’s first Indigenous medical interns.

St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne is now the largest employer of indigenous staff across the Victorian metropolitan health service after exceeding a target the hospital set last year to increase numbers by 33 per cent.

By June, St Vincent’s had recruited 80 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, which is just under 2 per cent of its workforce.

Chris Delamont, Indigenous Recruitment Coordinator at St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne, says a focus on retention and ongoing support has played a big part in attracting greater numbers of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders to work here.

‘The message out there is that St Vincent’s is genuine about closing the gap in education, training, employment and, ultimately, the health outcomes of our Aboriginal community,’ Chris says.

He feels St Vincent’s has clearly taken steps towards developing a deeper understanding for what it means to be an Aboriginal person.

‘Things like introducing a cultural leave policy, providing them with greater training opportunities to develop professionally and involving them in round-table discussions are really resonating with our indigenous staff,’ Chris explains.

## Beating breast cancer with Artificial Intelligence!

A groundbreaking study led by Dr Helen Frazer, Clinical Director at St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne’s BreastScreen, has received \$2.26m to improve and transform breast screening for thousands of Australian women.

The project has the potential to not only tailor the program to meet each woman’s individual needs, but also enhance the experience for women.

A woman who has a mammogram today would expect to get an all-clear result in about two weeks’ time. With Artificial Intelligence (AI), this result could be delivered instantly.

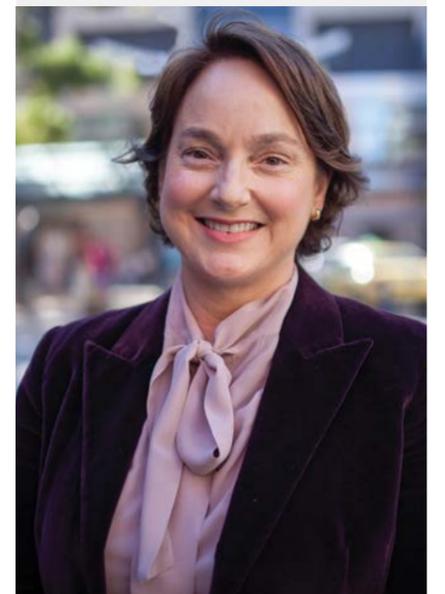
A joint initiative between St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne and St Vincent’s Institute of Medical Research, and also supported by BreastScreen Victoria, the project is funded by the Commonwealth Government’s Medical Research Future Fund.

**“The message out there is that St Vincent’s is genuine about closing the gap in education, training, employment and, ultimately, the health outcomes of our Aboriginal community,”**

‘It was not just about the numbers for St Vincent’s or ticking a box, the focus was on opening up new career pathways and putting in the right supports to ensure Aboriginal staff feel safe, welcome, understood and want to stay.’

Improvements to the hospital’s recruitment strategy has also put an emphasis on finding the right person for the job, which has involved working more closely with managers to look at all roles within St Vincent’s as potential areas that can be opened to indigenous staff as well.

‘It has opened up a dialogue for managers that haven’t had indigenous staff before and is changing mindsets,’ Chris says. ‘This is helping to build relationships and trust and we now are being recognised in the Aboriginal community as an employer of choice.’





# Love Your St Vincent's

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