

20 August 2026

**AUSTRALIA'S HEALTH AND MEDICAL RESEARCH AND INNOVATION CELEBRATED
AT RESEARCH AUSTRALIA'S 22nd ANNUAL AWARDS**

The nation's leading health and medical researchers, innovators, advocates and philanthropists have been recognised at Research Australia's 22nd Health and Medical Research Awards this evening in Sydney with Professor Tracey O'Brien AM, CEO, Cancer Institute NSW and NSW Chief Cancer Officer leading proceedings as Master of Ceremonies.

Research Australia's Chair, Professor Dawn Freshwater, reflected on the importance of the Awards. "They honour and celebrate Australia's outstanding researchers and innovators, and those who support their work across the health and medical research innovation pipeline. Health and medical research doesn't succeed through research alone. It takes data innovators, implementers, and everyone who translates discovery into impact. Tonight's awards celebrate that whole pipeline, not just the parts that make headlines".

In a speech on the night, Research Australia CEO & Managing Director, Nadia Levin, called for a new co-investment fund between government, industry and philanthropy to enable smarter investment across health and medical research and innovation.

"We excel at discovery, but the 'valley of death' stalls breakthroughs before they become therapies, devices, care models and companies. Australia needs a new blended capital model that brings together public, philanthropic and private funding to make research initiatives investable, and to finally start addressing that gap between discovery and translation.

For too long, health and medical research has been treated as a good deed - a public health imperative, rather than an economic and productivity engine. The truth is investment in research and innovation yields health and fiscal dividends. But an economic engine is only as strong as the people powering it, and right now we're losing almost one in three people trained to find the next cure, diagnostic tool or novel technology", Ms Levin said.

The prestigious Peter Wills Medal, which recognises an individual who has made an outstanding, long-term contribution to building Australia's international reputation in areas of health and medical research was awarded to Professor Melissa Little AC, whose engineering of the world's first human kidney organoids has redefined how kidney disease is studied and treated worldwide. Published as a landmark *Nature* cover story, her lab-grown "kidneys in a dish" have shifted global research away from animal models and flat cell lines toward complex, functioning human tissue, laying the foundation for a future where transplantable kidneys are grown, not just donated.

"Seeing the passion Peter Wills had for the sector motivated me to remain actively involved in advocating for medical research and showed me how critical it is to engage the wider community in what we do," Professor Melissa Little AC said.

Professor Kathryn North AC, Chair of the Australian Medical Research Advisory Board and Executive Director of the Murdoch Children's Research Institute gave the keynote address.

"The next iteration of Australia's excellent medical research infrastructure is a system in which Australians retain agency over the knowledge and health solutions that will shape all our futures. Sovereign capability means more than keeping Australian expertise onshore. It means having the capacity to generate, govern and use Australian data, technologies, clinical trials and manufacturing capability for Australian benefit, in ways that are universally trusted, secure and above all, equitable," Professor Kathryn North AC said.

A full list of winners follows.

ENDS

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2025-26 Award Winners

Peter Wills Medal: Created in honour of Research Australia's Founding Patron, Peter Wills AC, the Peter Wills Medal is the flagship award and recognises someone who has made an outstanding, long-term contribution to building Australia's international reputation in areas of health and medical research and fostering collaboration for better health.

Winner – Professor Melissa Little AC (Murdoch Children's Research Institute)

Discovery Award: This Award recognises an early career researcher (anytime from qualification but no more than 5 years past PhD) whose paper/patent/discovery has already demonstrated its importance or impact.

Winner – Dr Caitlin Jones (University of Sydney)

Advocacy and Philanthropy Award (sponsored by AbbVie): This Award recognises and congratulates exceptional contributions made by research champions who help raise community awareness and understanding of the importance of health and medical research.

Winner – Neil and Norma Hill Foundation

Frontiers Research Award (sponsored by UNSW Sydney): This Award recognises transformative research that could revolutionise health outcomes in Australia and internationally.

Winner – The Cancer Blueprint – Associate Professor Arutha Kulasinghe (University of Queensland)

Digital and Data Health Innovation Award (sponsored by Digital Health CRC): This Award recognises an individual or team whose innovation is considered to represent one of the most impactful new data innovations in the health and medical research sector within the past five years.

Winner – A National Infrastructure for Linked Data Innovation (Data Connect Australia)

Health Services Research Award (sponsored by Bond University's Institute for Evidence-Based Healthcare): This Award is for an individual or team who has provided leadership and made an outstanding contribution to health services research; driven research that has led to a significant improvement in healthcare; and/or has championed the development of the health services research field.

Winner – Associate Professor Chris Freeman (University of Queensland)

ABOUT RESEARCH AUSTRALIA

Research Australia is the national peak for health and medical research and innovation. For more than 25 years, we have been Australia's only whole -of-system convener for the sector. Our sector is worth over \$250 billion in both private and public investment. Our 120+ member organisations span researchers, scientists, industry leaders, engineers, clinicians, funders, innovators, and advocates.

THE AWARDS

The Research Australia Health and Medical Research Awards have been held annually since 2003 to celebrate the incredible people who make a difference to all our lives through their contribution to health and medical research. In 2026 we celebrate 22 years of the Research Australia Health and Medical Research Awards. We recognise, reward, and remember the amazing achievements of previous nominees, finalists, and winners. As the sector's signature event, these awards bring together passionate researchers, politicians, philanthropists, policymakers and corporations from Australian universities, medical research institutes, not-for-profit organisations, and large commercial organisations in the health and medical industry.