

31 October 2023

## New research grants will help reduce infectious diseases and heart disease

### Viertel Foundation awards \$4 million to some of the nation's top medical researchers

Eight Australian medical researchers, who are among the best and brightest in the world today, will now receive additional funding through some of the country's largest medical grants.

More than \$4.1 million has been awarded today to three Australian medical researchers through the Sylvia and Charles Viertel Charitable Foundation Senior Medical Research Fellowships in association with Bellberry Ltd.

A further \$450,000 was awarded in one-year grants to an additional five clinician researchers.

The 2023 Viertel Senior Medical Research Fellows, who will each receive \$1.375 million over five years to support their work, are:

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| 1. <b>Dr Simon Foster</b>        | <b>QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute</b><br><b>–awarded Bellberry-Viertel Fellow for 2023</b> |
| 2. <b>Dr Jennifer Juno</b>       | <b>Peter Doherty Institute for Infections and Immunity</b>  |
| 3. <b>A/Prof Daniel Pellicci</b> | <b>Murdoch Children's Research Institute</b>  |

For the first time in the awards, all five of the \$90,000 one-year Clinical Investigator awards were awarded to women scientists:

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|-------------------------------|--|
| • <b>Dr Celina Jin</b>        | Walter and Eliza Hall Institute for Medical Research |
| • <b>Dr Prasanti Kotagiri</b> | University of Melbourne                              |
| • <b>Dr Elizabeth Paratz</b>  | Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute                   |
| • <b>Dr Claire Gordon</b>     | Austin Health  |
| • <b>Dr Anna Balabanski</b>   | Melbourne Health - The Royal Melbourne Hospital      |

Since establishment, the Viertel Foundation has awarded 64 Senior Medical Research Fellowships and 154 Clinical Investigator awards, ensuring important medical and health conditions, and the treatments for them, can be researched.

“Post the COVID pandemic, we owe so much to the medical research community,” said Jodi Kennedy, General Manager of Charitable Trusts and Philanthropy at Equity Trustees. “These past few years show what can be achieved when funding is provided to support experts to collaborate on major health crises.”

“As one of the largest philanthropic funders of medical research in Australia, we are always working with the sector to ensure funding is directed to make the greatest impact on the health challenges we have now – and ahead of us. That is the power of the legacy left by Sylvia and Charles Viertel more than 30 years ago.”

Bellberry CEO, Kylie Sproston, announced: “We are delighted that Dr Simon Foster is the Bellberry-Viertel Fellow for 2023, and becomes the fifth Bellberry-Viertel Fellow selected through our ongoing collaboration with the Viertel Foundation and Equity Trustees.”

“The Fellowships provide a five-year period of support and certainty that allows highly talented mid-career researchers to focus on and deepen their specific area of research. We know from the alumni



that this period of stability and productivity provides an acceleration to some of Australia's most talented future research leaders, creating a momentum that carries through their research careers," added Ms Sproston.

Professor Christina Mitchell AO, who is Co-Chair of the Viertel Foundation's Medical Advisory Board, along with Associate Professor Paul Ekert, said the candidates for 2023 exhibited the hallmark of all Viertel Foundation Fellows: exceptional quality and dedication.

"Our congratulations go not just to the recipients of this year's awards, but to all applicants who presented their impressive work to the Advisory Board. Each year we are impressed by what is being achieved by the Australian medical research community. We are proud to play a part in developing this extraordinary pool of talent and ensuring this important work continues," Professor Mitchell said.

The Viertel Foundation is managed in partnership with co-trustees Justice Debra Mullins AO (Chair), Paul de Silva and Peter Evans, and is one of Australia's largest charitable foundations, established with an initial bequest of approximately \$60 million. Today the Foundation is worth around \$215 million and distributes approximately \$8 million annually.

*More about the Sylvia and Charles Viertel Foundation is available [here](#).  
More about Bellberry is available [here](#).*

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## FELLOWSHIP RESEARCH PROJECT SUMMARIES

### **Dr Simon Foster, QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute**

Dr Foster leads the Pathological Signalling team within the Cardiac Bioengineering Group, using the Institute's world-leading cardiac organoids to explore different aspects of cellular communication and how they are dysregulated in heart disease. Cardiovascular disease results in a quarter of Australian deaths and accounts for one of the biggest health costs in the country. Dr Foster is undertaking ground-breaking work to develop therapies targeting cardiac fibrosis and heart failure, using collaborative networks established overseas in Denmark and the UK. As such, Dr Foster is helping to resolve a major unmet need in cardiovascular treatments.



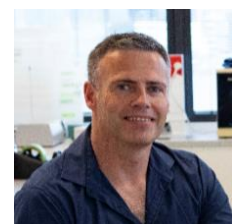
### **Dr Jennifer Juno, Peter Doherty Institute for Infections and Immunity**

Dr Juno is a laboratory head at the Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity with a strong interest in T cell immunology in the context of infectious disease. Her research focuses on understanding how T cells are required for vaccines to generate protective immunity against viruses. Effective vaccines are key to reducing the health and economic impacts of infectious diseases. The recent development of vaccines against COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) has highlighted the importance of new vaccine design approaches to maximise protection against infection and severe disease.



### **Associate Professor Daniel Pellicci, Murdoch Children's Research Institute**

Associate Professor Pellicci completed his PhD in 2013 at the University of Melbourne, prior to starting the Cellular Immunology laboratory at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute in 2018. His research is focused on understanding the role of unconventional T cells in fighting infectious diseases and harnesses state-of-the-art technologies to examine how unconventional T cells function in the body and can help future vaccine studies to prevent infectious diseases.





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