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## Viertel Foundation announces \$3.6 million in medical research fellowships

The prestigious annual Sylvia and Charles Viertel Charitable Foundation Senior Medical Research Fellowships have been announced for 2017, committing just over \$3.6 million to three researchers undertaking leading edge research into fighting cancer, schizophrenia and antimicrobial resistance.

The 2017 Senior Medical Research Fellows are:

- Associate Professor Kathryn Holt, Department of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology and Bio21 Institute, University of Melbourne
- Associate Professor Alexander Fornito, Monash Institute of Cognitive and Clinical Neurosciences, Monash University
- Associate Professor Di Yu, Group Leader, Department of Immunology and Infectious Disease, Australian National University

Each Fellow will receive \$1.225 million (\$245,000 per year for five years) to support the critical work of Australia's most outstanding mid-career researchers and continue the development of their expertise.

The Fellowships are awarded with a commitment to encouraging excellence and gender equality in the fields of medical and scientific research. This year is the second year the Foundation has collaborated with Bellberry Ltd to support the program, which was established in 1995 and has supported 46 research projects since then.

Professor Peter Leedman, Chairman of the Viertel Foundation's Medical Advisory Board, said: "We warmly congratulate the recipients of the 2017 Fellowships. The Foundation firmly believes in this investment in the future and is proud to support the work of these talented researchers.

"Many of our past Fellows are now world-leaders, supporting great research teams in Australian research institutions. Some have achieved research translation, with their developments now supporting health treatments and better outcomes for the population," he said.

Jodi Kennedy, Equity Trustees' General Manager of Charitable Trusts and Philanthropy, said Equity Trustees was committed to supporting the objectives of the Viertel Foundation, and honoured to be trustee of one of Australia's largest charitable foundations which distributes around \$7.5 million annually.

"In recognition that gender equity in science is a significant issue, each year at least one of the Senior Medical Research Fellowships will be awarded to a female candidate," said Ms Kennedy.

"This is in line with the Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) program launched by the Australian Academy of Sciences. The proportion of women in science progressing from early career roles through to senior leadership positions is significantly below the proportion of men advancing their careers in this way – which is why it is important that women in science are properly supported. The Viertel Foundation Fellowships demonstrate one of the ways that philanthropy can have a real impact – in this case sending the message to women scientists that there is support for them, as well as serving as an example to other funders of research."

Bellberry CEO, Kylie Sproston said it was critical that there was a focus on 'mid-career': "We know that within the Australian research community, 10 years post-PHD is a critical time for the establishment of research careers," she said.

“There are many talented researchers and few opportunities like this. These Senior Medical Research Fellowships offer five years of stability during which talented mid-career researchers can deliver research outcomes, shape their teams, develop future research strategies, and build the momentum that can sustain the rest of their research careers. In this way, we aim to support individual researchers and their research teams, and also invest in the vibrancy and future of the Australian research sector as a whole,” Ms Sproston explained.

Equity Trustees manages this Foundation in partnership with fellow trustees – Mr George Curphey OAM (Chairman), Mr Rex Freudenberg, Justice Debra Mullins.

Click the link for more about the [Sylvia and Charles Viertel Charitable Foundation](#) and [Bellberry Ltd.](#)

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## **Fellowship Research summaries**

### ***Associate Professor Kathryn Holt***

#### ***Department of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology and Bio21 Institute, University of Melbourne***

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) poses a huge threat to modern medicine, as the safety of healthcare is compromised by a lack of effective antibiotics to treat infections that can arise as a side-effect of life-saving procedures like surgery, transplants, chemotherapy and intensive care. A/Professor Holt applies genomics technologies to investigate how AMR emerges and spreads, from the level of individual patients to hospital networks, as well as interaction with the environment and the food chain, right through to regional and global dissemination of superbugs. Ultimately this work will inform local and global strategies for tackling the AMR crisis.

### ***Associate Professor Alexander Fornito***

#### ***Monash Institute of Cognitive and Clinical Neurosciences, Monash University***

Schizophrenia is a devastating illness that alters a person’s relationship with reality. A/Prof Fornito will combine brain imaging, brain stimulation, genetics and mathematical modelling to identify the brain circuits and molecules that impact risk for schizophrenia, and to develop targeted therapies designed to reduce disease risk.

### ***Associate Professor Di Yu***

#### ***Department of Immunology and Infectious Disease, Australian National University***

Cytotoxic T cells are the major immune cell type that is responsible for killing infected or cancerous cells in our bodies. To perform their killing functions effectively, cytotoxic T cells can form specialised subsets that localise to specific tissues and organs. A/Prof Yu will work on investigating the molecular mechanisms of a new subset of cytotoxic T cells known as follicular cytotoxic T cells that regulate the competence and the balance of immune responses, with the aim of harnessing this newly identified cell type to come up with new ways to treat diseases including HIV and B cell lymphoma.

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# Media Release



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