MEDIA RELEASE  11 JUNE 2014

Top researchers recognised with NHMRC Excellence Awards

The National Health and Medical Research Council’s top prizes for excellence in health and medical research will be announced tonight at NHMRC’s 200th Council Dinner.

Federal Minister for Health Peter Dutton will be in attendance to present awards.

NHMRC CEO Professor Warwick Anderson praised the quality of the research being undertaken by the awardees.

‘Among this year’s twenty recipients are researchers whose work aims to deliver breakthroughs in areas such as Alzheimer’s Disease, cancer and immune disease,’ Professor Anderson said.

‘We are also delighted to recognise some very promising up and coming researchers who are on the path to join the ranks of our country’s very best minds in science.’

NHMRC’s Research Excellence Awards are presented to the top-ranked applicants across NHMRC’s funding schemes, with some special category awards such as the Marshall and Warren Award, which acknowledges the most highly innovative and potentially transformative research project in NHMRC’s Project Grants scheme.

This year also marks the inaugural NHMRC Rising Star Research Excellence Award which will be presented to Dr Sandra Campbell from James Cook University.

‘The Rising Star award is granted to the top-ranked application by an Indigenous researcher in our Early Career Fellowship Scheme,’ Professor Anderson said.

‘The inaugural recipient, Dr Campbell, is conducting research that seeks to maximise health outcomes for Indigenous women during pregnancy and ensure that their children get the best possible start in life.’

Dr Justine Gatt from the University of Sydney will celebrate her second award in as many weeks. Dr Gatt received the 2014 Commonwealth Health Minister’s Award for Excellence in Health and Medical Research last week, and will receive a Research Excellence Award for being the top-ranked Career Development Fellowship Scheme applicant in the Industry category tonight.

Profiles of the awardees are available at: www.nhmrc.gov.au/research-highlights
RESEARCH EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Marshall and Warren Award

Professor John Mamo

*Curtin University*

John Mamo is the Professor of Health Science and Head of the Vascular Biology Research Unit at Curtin University. Professor Mamo’s earlier work indicated that diets high in saturated fats could significantly increase the risk of a person developing Alzheimer’s disease. Through his Marshall and Warren Award, Professor Mamo will study ageing in mice to seek to identify if cerebral capillary dysfunction is associated with cognitive defects and investigate whether novel bioactive compounds reduce cerebral capillary dysfunction and cognitive decline.

Rising Star Research Excellence Award

Dr Sandra Campbell

*James Cook University*

Dr Sandra Campbell is an early career Aboriginal researcher with a PhD in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reproductive health epidemiology and a Master of Applied Epidemiology in Indigenous health. Through her NHMRC Rising Star Research Excellence Award, Dr Campbell will track the factors that minimize health risks for a cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women of childbearing age, and their children.

Highest ranked Project Grant

Professor Jamie Rossjohn

*Monash University*

Professor Jamie Rossjohn is a NHMRC Australia Fellow at Monash University. He is a leading international expert on processes central to infection and immunity. The Project Grant he and his team have been awarded will allow them to further their investigation into a type of T-cell, termed MAIT cell, that is found in abundance in the gastrointestinal system. Their research may pave the way for the development of drugs that could either stimulate or suppress activity of this type of T-cell, and serve as improved treatments for conditions such as tuberculosis and inflammatory bowel disease.
Highest ranked Program Grant

Professor Angel Lopez, Professor Michael Parker and Professor Timothy Hughes

University of South Australia

Professor Angel Lopez is the Head of the Cytokine Receptor Laboratory at the Centre for Cancer Biology of SA Pathology and the University of South Australia. Professor Lopez and his colleagues Professor Michael Parker and Professor Timothy Hughes will address the progression of leukaemia and relapse through their Program Grant by comparing the function of normal blood cells and leukaemia cells, and seek to create new knowledge, identify new drug targets and develop new drugs for the treatment of leukaemia.

Highest ranked Research Fellow

Professor Guy Marks

University of New South Wales

Professor Guy Marks is a respiratory physician and respiratory and environmental epidemiologist based at the Liverpool Hospital, South Western Sydney Clinical School, UNSW and at the Woolcock Institute in Sydney. Through his NHMRC Research Fellowship, Professor Marks will aim to improve our understanding of lung diseases including tuberculosis, chronic respiratory disease, and the health effects of air pollution. He will gather and translate the evidence on these lung diseases to help inform better policy and practices for lung and environmental health.

Highest ranked Practitioner Fellow

Professor Jonathan Kalman

University of Melbourne

Professor Jonathan Kalman is a clinician-scientist who leads both clinical and research groups in the Department of Cardiac Arrhythmias at the Royal Melbourne Hospital and University of Melbourne. Professor Kalman will use his NHMRC Practitioner Fellowship to help us develop a better understanding of the causes and mechanisms of Atrial Fibrillation, with the aim of developing improved methods of prevention and treatment.

Highest ranked Career Development Fellowship – Clinical, Level 1*

Dr Nicholas Wood

University of Sydney

Dr Nicholas Wood is a staff specialist general paediatrician and senior lecturer in the Discipline of Paediatrics and Child Health at the University of Sydney. Through his Career Development Fellowship 1 in the Clinical stream, Dr Wood will be conducting research on adverse events following immunisation with the aim of improving policy and practice and promoting confidence in the safety of vaccines.
**Highest ranked Career Development Fellowship – Clinical, Level 2***

*A/Prof Allen Cheng*

*Monash University*

Allen Cheng is Associate Professor of Infectious Diseases Epidemiology in the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine at Monash University, as well as an infectious diseases physician and Deputy Head of the Infection Prevention and Healthcare Epidemiology Unit at Alfred Health in Melbourne. The aim of Associate Professor Cheng’s Career Development Fellowship is to prevent and treat significant infections in the community and in hospitals, focusing on influenza, hospital-acquired infections and use of antibiotics, and clinical infectious diseases.

**Highest ranked Career Development Fellowship – Population Health, Level 1***

*Dr Bette Liu*

*University of New South Wales*

Dr Bette Liu is a medically trained epidemiologist, senior lecturer at the University of New South Wales and Senior Science Advisor at the Sax Institute. Through her Career Development Fellowship Dr Liu will develop methods for electronic data collection to enhance the data collected in large prospective studies such as the 45 and Up Study. Dr Liu will use these data sources to conduct research informing the prevention of infectious diseases in adults.

**Highest ranked Career Development Fellowship – Population Health, Level 2***

*A/Prof Terrence Haines*

*Monash University*

Associate Professor Terry Haines is the Director of the Allied Health Research Unit at Monash Health and Monash University. He is a physiotherapist and health economist by training and now focuses on conducting health services research across a range of health care settings. During his fellowship he will lead several projects including a trial introducing GPs as staff at aged care facilities to reduce hospital admissions and improve resident care, and an evaluation of the benefits and cost effectiveness of weekend allied health service on acute medical and surgical wards.

**Highest ranked Career Development Fellowship – Industry, Level 1***

*Dr Justine Gatt*

*University of Sydney*

Dr Justine Gatt is a Senior Research Fellow and Group Leader at the Brain Dynamics Centre at the University of Sydney Medical School. Her work focuses on mental health, and understanding the characteristics that define resilience in people who are able to positively adapt in the face of adversity. Through a broad study of twins, she will determine the gene, environment and brain factors that contribute to resilience, and find ways to promote these
features in people who may be less resilient. Dr Gatt is also the recipient of the 2014 Commonwealth Health Minister’s Award for Excellence in Health and Medical Research.

**Highest ranked Career Development Fellowship – Biomedical, Level 1***

**Dr Kathryn Holt**  
*University of Melbourne*

Dr Kathryn Holt is a laboratory head in the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at the University of Melbourne and the Bio21 Institute. In 2013 she was awarded a L’Oreal Women in Science fellowship. Dr Holt will use her Career Development Fellowship to investigate a number of things including how antibiotic resistance emerges and spreads, and how bacterial colonisation of the airways during childhood contributes to infection and the development of asthma.

**Highest ranked Career Development Fellowship – Biomedical, Level 2***

**Dr Oliver Sieber**  
*Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research*

Dr Oliver Sieber is Head of the Colorectal Cancer Genetics Laboratory at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research. Dr Sieber’s research will focus on understanding the molecular pathology of bowel cancer, in particular, the key determinants of cancer susceptibility, prognosis and drug response. This work will advance our understanding of fundamental bowel cancer biology and open up avenues for new diagnostic and therapeutic strategies, ultimately aimed at improving clinical management and achieving better outcomes for patients with bowel cancer.

**Highest ranked Development Grant**

**Professor Mark Walker**  
*University of Queensland*

Professor Mark Walker is the Director of the Australian Infectious Disease Research Centre at the University of Queensland. His research focuses on the mechanism by which the bacterium group A streptococcus (GAS) causes invasive disease. These diseases range from mild skin infections such as pharyngitis, scarlet fever, impetigo, and cellulitis, to severe diseases such as septicemia, streptococcal toxic shock syndrome, and necrotizing fasciitis. Professor Walker aims to provide proof-of-concept data to minimise risk for industry partners on the road to human trials and the development of a safe GAS vaccine.

**Frank Fenner Early Career Fellowship**

**Dr Michael Roche**  
*Monash University*
Dr Roche is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Department of Infectious Diseases at Monash University where he is working to better understand the earliest steps of the HIV life cycle. His PhD focused on how the virus became resistant to a new antiviral drug, and his research earned him the prestigious Mollie Holman Medal from Monash University.

Elizabeth Blackburn Fellowship

Clinical

Professor Bronwyn Kingwell

Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute

Professor Bronwyn Kingwell is a NHMRC Senior Principal Research Fellow and at the Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute in Melbourne, is Executive Director, Science Policy and Head of the Metabolic and Vascular Physiology Laboratory. She has made contributions to the understanding of diabetes and cardiovascular disease through her clinical and basic research into novel physiological actions of high-density lipoprotein, particularly on glucose metabolism. Professor Kingwell’s vascular studies have translated to new medical management strategies and clinical guidelines for arterial diseases, including Marfan syndrome and peripheral artery disease.

Elizabeth Blackburn Fellowship

Public Health

Professor Lisa Maher

UNSW - The Kirby Institute for infection and immunity in society

Professor Lisa Maher is a leading international public health researcher. She has extensive experience in research, surveillance, program development and service delivery with people who inject drugs, sex workers, people living with HIV and other vulnerable groups in North America, Asia, Australia and the Pacific. Professor Maher has been an investigator on grants totalling more than $AUD 54 million, has more than 230 publications and has provided technical advice to UNAIDS, AusAID, DFID, World Bank, WHO and the Global Fund. Her NHMRC research focuses on designing and testing new approaches to preventing infectious diseases, such as HIV and hepatitis C, in vulnerable populations.

Elizabeth Blackburn Fellowship

Biomedical

Professor Katharina Gaus

University of New South Wales

Professor Katharina Gaus is an NHMRC Senior Research Fellow at the University of New South Wales. She received her PhD from the University of Cambridge in 1999 and has led the Cell Membrane Biology group since 2005. Her research aims to better understand the molecular mechanisms of the decision-making processes of immune cells. She was awarded
the Young Investigator Award from the Australia and New Zealand Society for Cell and Developmental Biology (2010), the Gottschalk Medal from the Australian Academy of Science (2012) and the New South Wales Science and Engineering Award for Excellence in Biological Sciences (2013).

**Gustav Nossal Scholarship**

**Biomedical**

Mr Jia Li

*Centenary Institute*

After completing his Bachelor and Masters degrees at Sun Yat-sen University in China, Jia moved to Australia to work at the University of Sydney and Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, where he investigated a cancer that affects a type of white blood cell. He is now a researcher in the Vascular Biology Program at the Centenary Institute, Sydney working to understand how microRNAs regulate blood vessel permeability. He hopes to develop new therapies to inhibit vascular leak, a complication of many diseases such as stroke and cancer.

**Gustav Nossal Scholarship**

**Clinical**

Dr Michael Low

*Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research*

Michael has commenced a PhD at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute for Medical Research via the University of Melbourne with a specific focus on cell biology and the genetic changes that allow for the development of cancers, in particular plasma cell myeloma. The protein MCL-1 is over expressed in all cancers, so by defining the regulation of MCL-1 expression in cancer cells, Michael aims to reveal the molecular pathways and mechanisms that sustain high expression and thus cancer progression.

* Level 1 is for applicants who completed their PhD in the last two to seven years. Level 2 is for applicants who completed their PhD in the last seven to twelve years.*