



Northern Community Health  
and Research Foundation

# NCHRF Research Impact Update

Derek Frewin  
Award Recipients

2017 - 2024

## A message from the Chair

We know that research, and the people who undertake it, must be supported if we are to achieve greater knowledge and improved medical and health outcomes. We also know that the sharing of this knowledge with practitioners, students and professionals across the medical and community health spectrum is equally essential.

The Derek Frewin Early Career Researcher Award recognises and supports the contribution of talented health and medical researchers at a time when they are just beginning their careers.

More than this, the award opens important doors for these researchers, enabling them to win funding to and amplify the impact of their research in academic fields and general practice. It is for this reason that the NCH Research Foundation offers this award.

In these pages you will find snapshots of some of the recipients of this important award, and you can also find out more about their work, and the work of the NCH Research Foundation, on our website.

The NCH Research Foundation Board and I take this opportunity to again congratulate our past recipients, and to commend the dedication and contribution of Emeritus Professor Derek Frewin AO to education, research and clinical practice.

**Nino Di Sisto**  
Chair

## The Derek Frewin Early Career Researcher Award

The Derek Frewin Early Career Researcher Award was established by the Northern Community Health and Research Foundation in 2017, in recognition of the outstanding contribution of Emeritus Professor Derek Frewin AO to both the NCH Research Foundation and the University of Adelaide.

Professor Frewin has been at the forefront of medical and community education for almost 60 years, including heading the new Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Adelaide, continuing in this role until his retirement from the University in 2005. He was a recipient of the University of Adelaide Distinguished Alumni Award in 2025 and was appointed as an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2003 for his service to the advancement of medical education, his research in the field of hypertension and his service to the community which included a focus on aged care and drug addiction.

Professor Frewin joined the Northern Community Health & Research Foundation in December 2005 as a member of the Board and continued to serve in this role until his retirement in May 2017. He was awarded Life Membership in November 2016. The Derek Frewin Early Career Researcher Award was established in his name in recognition of his unfailing dedication to mentoring and inspiring students throughout his career.



**Emeritus Professor Derek Frewin**  
*AO MD, FRACP, FRCP, FRACMA*

**2017**  
RECIPIENT



## Associate Professor Rajiv Mahajan

*MBBS, PhD, FRACP, FCSANZ, FHRS*

*Associate Professor of Medicine, Clinical lead for Cardiac Electrophysiology (EP) and Pacing, NALHN, Lyell McEwin Hospital and University of Adelaide*

Associate Professor Mahajan leads the Heart Rhythm Research Program for the Northern Adelaide Local Health Network, where his research group works on various projects on cognitive function in patients with atrial fibrillation (AF), use of machine learning and precision health in the management of patients with AF. He has also established an EP and Pacing Fellowship program at NALHN.

Professor Mahajan intends to focus on brain health in patients living with AF in coming years and is keen to see progress integrating machine learning with AF. His team has developed a medical app to help physicians and patients co-manage AF, providing self

education and efficacy for patients and enabling implementation of guideline-directed AF management for physicians.

The Derek Frewin Early Career Researcher Award provided vital introductions to the research community in NALHN for A/Prof Mahajan, supporting him to gain access to mentors and secure research funding from the THRF and MRFF. In turn, this has enabled him to attract PhD students and researchers and establish the clinical EP Fellowship Program. He is now working towards developing a comprehensive AF program and AF Centre of Excellence at NALHN.

**2018**  
RECIPIENT



## Associate Professor Tongzhi Wu

*BClinMed, MClintMed, PhD*

*External Funded Research Fellow, Adelaide Medical School, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, University of Adelaide*

Associate Professor Tongzhi Wu leads a research team investigating the mechanisms of nutrient sensing in the gut, and examining how modulating gut function - through dietary strategies or pharmacological agents - can optimise blood glucose control in people with type 2 diabetes.

Associate Professor Wu says he is excited by the accelerating pace of discovery in diabetes research and the opportunities to translate these findings into meaningful health outcomes, along with opportunities to bridge the gap between laboratory findings and real world applications. His research team is now moving into investigating the dietary

impact of glucose handling in the kidneys, initiatives of relevance to prevention and management of type 2 diabetes.

Receiving the Derek Frewin Early Career Researcher Award provided crucial recognition at a pivotal time in Associate Professor Wu's career, aiding him to secure significant additional funding for expansion of his research. His work to date on nutrient 'preloads' in type 2 diabetes has influenced research and practice internationally, while his research on taste sensing mechanisms in the gut and kidneys has led to two patents and partnerships with industry.

**2019**  
RECIPIENT



## Dr. Sebastian O Sterling

*BSc, MD, PhD*

*Radiology Registrar, The Royal Adelaide Hospital, Post-doctoral Fellow, University of Adelaide and Senior Clinical Lecturer, University of Adelaide*

Sebastian Sterling's research is focused on immunology. He has two main projects currently underway, one exploring the effects of high-dose zinc supplementation in Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), and another investigating using AI for pancreatic volumetric analysis in type 1 diabetes. In addition to these projects, Sebastian assists PhD students with study design, teaches medical students, engages in continuing discussion with senior scientists at international biotechnology firm Vivodtn in Philadelphia, and still finds time to undertake locum shifts in emergency medicine and provide support to rural healthcare services.

Sebastian's future research plans include a project investigating the use of radiolabelled monoclonal antibodies to assess individual responses to treatment for autoimmune diseases

and certain cancers. Sebastian says the fusion of radiology, immunology and AI is a compelling prospect with a view to enabling innovative precision-based approaches, such as radio-immunology, leading to personalised treatments for patients.

Sebastian describes receiving the Derek Frewin Early Career Researcher Award as a pivotal moment in his academic journey, enabling him to continue to contribute to research and foster the interdisciplinary collaborations that are so important in medicine and science.

### **2020 Recipient:**

*Dr Roula Ghaoui  
BMBS, PhD, FRACP  
Consultant neurologist  
Royal Adelaide Hospital*

**2021**  
RECIPIENT



## Dr. Vasilios (Bill) Panagopoulos

*BBiotech, PhD*

*Senior Research Fellow, Prostate Tumour Microenvironment and Therapeutics Laboratory, Affiliate Senior Lecturer, School of Biomedicine, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, The University of Adelaide and Faculty Fellow, South Australia Health and Medical Research Institute, (SAHMRI)*

Dr Panagopoulos' research focus aims to improve therapeutic outcomes for patients with prostate cancer, breast cancer, and multiple myeloma, particularly in cases where treatment resistance and immune suppression mechanisms are not yet fully understood. He also teaches investigative cell biology at the University of Adelaide and is an Associate Member of the Centre for Cancer Biology.

With a long-term vision of driving innovative research to significantly improve outcomes and advance the field of prostate cancer treatment, Dr Panagopoulos is keen to explore emerging immunotherapy modalities and achieve the clinical research goal of delivering an effective therapeutic strategy to repress inflammation

and immunosuppression within the tumour microenvironment.

Dr Panagopoulos says receiving the Derek Frewin Early Career Researcher Award was a significant honour that offered valuable recognition from his peers, and enhanced his professional visibility, in addition to increasing his confidence to pursue innovative research ideas and leadership opportunities. Since receiving the award, Dr Panagopoulos has gone on to publish extensively in his field, secure funding in excess of \$670,000 for his research and, through his teaching, foster the next generation of researchers among his students.

**2022**  
RECIPIENT



## Dr. Ashleigh Hull

*BMedRadSc(Hons), PhD*

*Lecturer in Nuclear Medicine, Allied Health  
& Human Performance, University of South Australia*

Dr Hull currently teaches undergraduate nuclear medicine students at the University of South Australia alongside her research activities in the development of radiopharmaceutical therapy and complementary diagnostic radiopharmaceutical for pancreatic cancer. With funding support from Tour de Cure, her team will advance into preclinical animal studies in late 2025.

Dr Hull says she is excited about the many advancements and opportunities in nuclear medicine. These include the development of new therapeutic and diagnostic radiopharmaceuticals, as well as technological innovations such as PET/CT scanners that offer improved and quicker imaging capabilities with lower radiation doses.

Having grown up on South Australia's Eyre Peninsula, Dr Hull is also interested in developing technology and services to improve access to nuclear medicine and medical radiation services for regional and rural communities.

Dr Hull says receiving the Derek Frewin Early Career Researcher Award strengthened her curriculum vitae, supported her professional visibility, and played a crucial role in securing additional research funding for her work. Her future research focus includes the use of radiopharmaceutical therapies for non-oncological conditions, such as neurodegenerative dementias or inflammatory conditions such as sarcoidosis.

**2023**  
RECIPIENT



## Dr. Jessica Stanhope

*BPhysio(Hons), BMus, MCLinEpid(Dist), PhD, FRSPH*

*Senior Research Fellow, School of Public Health, The University of Adelaide  
Chief Medical Scientist, Rheumatology Unit, The Queen Elizabeth Hospital*

Dr Stanhope is Chief Medical Scientist in the Rheumatology Unit at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital, and a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Public Health at The University of Adelaide.

Dr Stanhope's research is focused on establishing whether green space exposure can be used to improve health outcomes, with a particular focus on the prevention and management of chronic pain and arthritis. Her work involves integrating epidemiological and qualitative approaches, along with spatial and exposure science and animal models to make causal inferences, including about the mechanisms involved.

Dr Stanhope's work is now recognised internationally and she is a frequent organiser and contributor to global education events. She is a member of the Executive Committee of the Environmental Physiotherapy Association and the Executive Committee of the Ecological Health Network's Healthy Ecosystems Healthy People Initiative.

Dr Stanhope says winning the Derek Frewin Early Career Researcher Award marked a turning point in her career by highlighting the value of the work she was doing. The award also enabled her to fund a Masters in Clinical Epidemiology, ultimately leading to a role in full-time research.

2024  
RECIPIENT

## Dr. Patrick Asare

*B Pharm, MPhil, PhD*

*MRFF-Funded Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Laboratory Manager,  
Department of Thoracic Medicine, School of Medicine, University of Adelaide*



Dr Asare is a respiratory research scientist and project lead affiliated with the University of Adelaide and the Central Adelaide Local Health Network. His research focuses on the pathophysiological mechanisms driving chronic respiratory diseases, with specific interests in inflammation, micronutrient dysregulation, and the microbiome.

Dr Asare is leading two major projects: one investigating the health impacts of bushfire smoke exposure and another, funded by the MRFF, evaluating zinc supplementation as adjunct therapy in COPD patients. He also supervises research students and works with respiratory physicians and consumer representatives to ensure patient-centred research design and implementation.

Dr Asare plans to establish an internationally recognised research program focused on micronutrient-microbiome interactions and their role in respiratory disease progression. "I plan to expand my translational research portfolio by developing clinical trials that bridge laboratory findings with patient outcomes. I also hope to continue contributing to policy-relevant research that informs respiratory health strategies in Australia."

Dr Asare says winning the Derek Frewin Early Career Researcher Award opened doors to new collaborations, invited presentations, and leadership roles, and gave him the confidence to pursue bold research questions to lead large-scale studies.



## Northern Community Health & Research Foundation

The Northern Community Health & Research Foundation (NCHRF) is a dedicated, volunteer-led not-for-profit organisation committed to enhancing the health and wellbeing of communities in the northern communities of Adelaide. Our focus is primarily on the inner north districts of the Corporations of Prospect, Walkerville, and Port Adelaide & Enfield Area, where we aim to create sustainable improvements to health outcomes through research, partnerships, and community programs.

The Foundation's mission is to facilitate improving health outcomes for the northern communities of Adelaide. We work to achieve this by strategic investment in both research and community-based health programs, ensuring that support is given to both local

and broader health initiatives. We provide funding support to research and initiatives that benefit health and medical research, as well as community health programs in these areas.

NCHRF aims to improve health outcomes in the northern communities by:

- Funding grants for South Australian health and medical research
- Investing in and promoting initiatives to foster better health outcomes in northern communities
- Partnering with local health groups and organisations to ensure impactful delivery of services and programs

**Visit our website at [nchrf.com.au](https://nchrf.com.au) to find out more.**

## Partners



Thank you to our partner, Van Diemen Foundation. We acknowledge the pending merger of the University of South Australia and The University of Adelaide and look forward to continuing the partnership.



**Northern Community Health  
and Research Foundation**

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