Working together for BETTER HEALTH OUTCOMES

A five year journey and beyond



Maridulu Budyari Gumal

Working together for good health and wellbeing

Cancer

Clinical Academic Group

Foreword

It has been an absolute privilege to lead the SPHERE Cancer Clinical Academic Group (CAG) for the past five years. Supported by a $7M Cancer Institute NSW Translational Cancer Research Capacity-Building Grant, and with considerable support from the engine room, led by Professor Natalie Taylor (Deputy Lead), Professor Phoebe Phillips (former Deputy Lead), and the wider team. We have supported Early and Mid-Career researchers in performing high-quality, multi-disciplinary translational research, some of their work being highlighted in this booklet. The research programmes were split into four themes - Reducing Variation in Clinical Practice, Living Better with and after Cancer, Omics in Clinical Practice and Poor Outcomes Cancers.

We have worked with Sydney Cancer Partners and NSW Regional Cancer Research Network to support statewide initiatives which included a review of current cancer researcher and consumer needs in cancer research, the development of a NSW Cancer Research Education strategic plan, the development of an education portal (CREd Portal) and monthly education seminars. We have also supported the CINSW Cancer Summit and World Cancer Day with seminars and events.

My role has included overseeing the orderly development of research, the systems for awarding of grants, mentorship of the junior researchers and facilitation of additional collaborations.

It has been an absolute joy to watch the development of the group. I thank all who have played a role, especially the Cancer CAG executive and the Consumer Panel.

Professor Geoff Delaney, AM

Translating world-class research into better outcomes for people with cancer

Who are we?

The SPHERE Cancer Clinical Academic Group (CAG) is a flagship program of Maridulu Budyari Gumal, the Sydney Partnership for Health, Education, Research and Enterprise (SPHERE), an NHMRC-accredited Advanced Health Research and Translation Centre uniting health services, universities, and medical research institutes across NSW.

Our partners, including South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, South Western Sydney Local Health District, St Vincent's Hospital Sydney, Sydney Children's Hospitals Network, Western Sydney University, and University of Technology Sydney, collectively care for more than 40% of NSW's cancer population. This scale uniquely positions us to translate discovery into impact at pace, with an overarching aim to foster collaborative, high-quality research, education and innovation across the research pipeline with a focus on research translation.

The Cancer CAG operates within SPHERE's collaborative framework, bringing together a powerful consortium of leading research institutions. It is comprised of two existing Cancer Institute NSW-funded Translational Cancer Research Centres (TCRN, CONCERT) and the Garvan Institute (previously part of Catalyst TCRC). It also includes members of the Kids Cancer Alliance (KCA), the UNSW Centre for Primary Health Care and Equity (CPHCE) and UNSW Centre for Big Data (CBD). United by a shared vision, the Cancer CAG pursues four strategic research areas with the overarching goal of aligning and amplifying cancer research efforts to drive sustained, evidence-based advances across diagnosis, intervention, and patient support.



Faster translation from research to care



Improved outcomes for high-need populations



Strong collaboration across NSW

Caring for over **40%** of NSW's cancer population

Unified Platform for Cancer Impact

LEADERSHIP AND NETWORK STRENGTH

Under the leadership of Professor Geoff Delaney AM and Professor Natalie Taylor, the Cancer CAG has cultivated a high-performing network of Fellows, PhD scholars, clinicians, implementation scientists and consumers.

ACHIEVEMENTS AT A GLANCE

Leveraged funding	Publications	Collaborative projects	Grants applied
$252M (over five years)	**129** (over five years)	**36** (over 5 years)	**98** (over 5 years)

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Working with Community and Consumers

4 World Cancer Day events (in collaboration with SCP since 2024)

4 Collaborative Forums: Connecting Consumers with Researchers

Research Capacity Building

4 Cancer & Immunology Ideas Forums (in collaboration with SCP since 2024)

3 BIG Ideas sessions, **2 Statewide Cancer Research Conferences** (in collaboration with SCP and NSWRCRN)

Developed a **Local Cancer Research Education Strategy 2024-2026**

Building the Workforce

4 Career Pathway Workshops

1 Leadership Forum for MCRs

6 PhD Translational Skills Workshops

Over **40 Monthly Statewide Cancer Research Seminars** (in collaboration with SCP and NSWRCRN)

Service Delivery

1 Strategic Cancer Data Workshop

1 Implementation Science Incubator Session

Statewide Education Review

Co-designed NSW Cancer Research Education Portal (CREd)

Meet the team



Professor Geoff Delaney AM
Lead SPHERE Cancer CAG

Mitali Manzur / Stephanie Macmillan
Program Manager / Former Program Manager, SPHERE Cancer CAG

Chris Giacoumakis
Education Officer, SPHERE Cancer CAG



Professor Natalie Taylor / Professor Phoebe Phillips
Deputy Lead / Former Deputy Lead, SPHERE Cancer CAG

Mehna Alacozy
Project Officer, SPHERE Cancer CAG

SPHERE Cancer CAG Research Fellows

- A/Prof Antoinette Anazodo
- Dr Ben Kong
- Dr Frank Lin
- Dr Georgie Kennedy
- Dr George Sharbeen
- A/Prof Joanna Fardell
- Dr Minh Tran
- A/Prof Merran Findlay

Meet the team cont'd

SPHERE Cancer CAG Area of Focus Leads

A/Prof Therese Becker
Prof David Goldstein (Former Lead)
Cancers with Poor Outcomes

Prof David Thomas
Bringing 'Omics' to Clinical Practice

Prof Winston Liauw
Reducing Variation in Clinical Practice

Prof Meera Agar
Living Better With and After Cancer

SPHERE Cancer CAG Consumer Advisory Panel

Heri Bustamante
Jeff Cuff
Christine Goodman
Kathryn Leaney
Gino Iori
Phil Mendoza-Jones
Gill Stannard
Sue Suchy
Peter Sploc
Vanessa Yenson

SPHERE Cancer CAG Executive

David Campbell
Prof Elgene Lim
Prof Geoff Delaney AM
Gino Iori
Prof Julie-Anne White
Prof Meera Agar
Prof Natalie Taylor
Dr Peter Wejbora
Dr Richard Mitchell
A/Prof Tara Roberts
A/Prof Therese Becker
Prof Winston Liauw

Former Executive members:
Prof Chris White
Prof Michelle Haber AM
Prof Phoebe Phillips
Prof David Goldstein

Research Focus Areas

1. Cancers with Poor Outcomes
2. Bringing 'Omics' into Clinical Practice
3. Reducing Variation in Clinical Practice
4. Living Better with and After Cancer

Cancers with poor outcomes

Lead: A/Prof Therese Becker

Prioritising brain, pancreatic, ovarian and rare cancers, where survival gains have lagged. We are advancing novel models of care, clinical trials and translational strategies to improve outcomes in advanced disease.

Research Fellow: Dr George Sharbeen

Dr Sharbeen's fellowship has been a period of rapid growth, both in leadership and research impact. He has stepped into a co-lead role of the Pancreatic Cancer Translational Research Group at UNSW, building a strong publication track record and contributing to the field at a national level, including joining the Australasian Pancreatic Club Board.

His work brings together engineers, cancer biologists and clinicians to tackle one of the most challenging cancers. Through these collaborations, he has driven more than ten major grant applications and secured over $600,000 in competitive funding to advance new therapeutic approaches.

At the research level, Dr Sharbeen has shown that pancreatic tumours respond very differently to standard chemotherapy, highlighting the need for more personalised treatment strategies. In parallel, he is advancing



a promising nanomedicine approach, with leading candidates now being validated in clinically relevant models.

Together, this work is building a pipeline of new targets and therapies, moving closer to more effective and individualised treatments for pancreatic cancer.

Research Fellow: Dr Ben Kong



Dr Kong has built a strong foundation for a translational research program that connects clinical practice with scientific discovery. Working across the clinical and scientific interface, he has developed collaborative projects that bring together clinicians, researchers and students to address real-world challenges in cancer care.

Alongside this, Dr Kong has stepped into a growing leadership role, supervising honours students and supporting new research initiatives.

Key milestones from the research networks he has fostered include establishing a clinical–scientific collaboration with the Metals Targeted Therapy and Immunology Laboratory at UNSW to validate basic science discoveries in patients. This work has led to involvement in a national grant application to translate these ideas into a mesothelioma clinical trial. Dr Kong's expertise in clinical trial design has also enabled him to serve as principal investigator on an academic imaging trial, extending collaborations beyond the hospital sector.

With these networks and projects now established, Dr Kong is continuing to expand his program of work, with a clear focus on translating research into meaningful improvements in patient care.

"I am indebted to the SPHERE CAG for the collegiate support they have given me to allow my organic growth as a researcher. I believe this will continue to pay dividends well into the future, shaping my thinking and aspirations in the years to come."

Dr Ben Kong

Bringing 'Omics' into Clinical Practice

Lead: Professor David Thomas

Harnessing genomics, proteomics and metabolomics, and integrating them with clinical and radiological data, to enable precision diagnosis and personalised treatment.

Research Fellow: Dr Minh Tran



Dr Tran's work is focused on turning complex clinical data into insights that can be used in real time to support cancer care. At UNSW, he has developed AI-powered tools that bridge the gap between raw data and clinical decision-making.

His work spans two complementary areas. In clinical trial informatics, Dr Tran co-led the development of Eva, a breast cancer trial navigator that uses natural language processing and advanced AI to match patients to suitable clinical trials. In parallel, he built automated pipelines to extract key information from pathology reports, converting unstructured text into usable data for treatment decision support.

He has also developed deep learning approaches to analyse immunohistochemistry images, enabling more precise classification of tumour and surrounding tissues and revealing patterns within the tumour microenvironment.

Together, these tools form a practical, scalable toolkit that is helping research teams move faster from data to insight, supporting more efficient and reproducible precision oncology.

Research Fellow: Dr Frank Lin

Dr Lin's work sits at the intersection of oncology, genomics and AI, tackling one of the biggest challenges in modern cancer care: turning complex genomic data into clear, actionable decisions for clinicians.

Over the course of his fellowship, this focus has grown into building collaborative, open-access ecosystems that improve how evidence is shared and applied in practice. By developing AI-enabled decision-support tools and embedding them into clinician workflows, Dr Lin has shown how technology can lift both the quality and equity of cancer care.

A key achievement has been the co-design and co-leadership of a precision medicine Multidisciplinary Team model at Prince of Wales Hospital, creating a pathway for integrating research into routine care and extending specialist expertise to more patients.



Now working at a system level, Dr Lin is helping shape national frameworks and contributing to emerging international standards for AI and informatics in oncology, ensuring advances in precision medicine translate into real-world impact.

"I am incredibly grateful for the support of the SPHERE CAG and the collaborative environment that made this growth possible."

Dr Frank Lin

Living better with and after cancer

Lead: Professor Meera Agar

Reimagining survivorship and supportive care, from diagnosis to end-of-life, to ensure more people live well, longer. Our research drives person-centred, affordable and scalable models of care.

Research Fellow: A/Prof Joanna Fardell

What began as an idea is now transforming care for children and young people with cancer. A/Prof Fardell's work has taken patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs) from concept to real-world implementation, with trials now underway at Sydney Children's Hospital and plans to scale across the state.

At its core, this work is about ensuring that children and adolescents and young adults (AYAs) are heard. By systematically capturing their experiences, symptoms and concerns, care teams can respond earlier — reducing treatment burden, and delivering more tailored, supportive care throughout the cancer journey.

A/Prof Fardell's impact extends beyond a single site. By building



national momentum, she is now leading a roundtable to drive harmonisation and scale the implementation of PROMs across Australia, helping embed the voices of young patients into cancer care at a systems level.

Research Fellow: A/Prof Merran Findlay



A/Prof Findlay is a Fellow of Dietitians Australia and Advanced Accredited Practising Dietitian. She brings a clinician's perspective shaped by years on the frontline of cancer care, where she has seen both the challenges faced by patients and carers and the pressures clinicians navigate within constrained health systems.

Her work focuses on an often overlooked but critical issue: the impact of malnutrition and sarcopenia on cancer outcomes. Despite negatively impacting survival, treatment tolerance and complications, these factors are rarely captured in health system data.

Through the fellowship, A/Prof Findlay has worked alongside data scientists and collaborators to use real-world clinical data to better understand variation in supportive care, while making the contributions of allied health and nutrition more visible within cancer systems.

This work is helping to drive a broader vision of a learning health system, where supportive care is recognised as a core component of high-quality cancer care and more fully integrated into how care is delivered, measured, and improved.

"The fellowship provided a rare opportunity to work alongside an exceptional group of fellows, data scientists and mentors. Together we are using real-world clinical data to better understand variation in supportive care and to make the contributions of allied health and nutrition care more visible within cancer systems."

A/Prof Merran Findlay

Reducing Variation in Clinical Practice

Lead: Professor Winston Liauw

Using big data to identify and reduce unwarranted variation in cancer care. We are building robust data platforms that promote consistency, quality and equity across the health system.

Research Fellow: Dr Georgina Kennedy

When Dr Kennedy began her fellowship, her work was deeply technical : building data systems for individual studies and working project-by-project through complex clinical datasets.

Today, she's helping reshape how cancer data is used across the health system. Dr Kennedy now leads the development of the Cancer Variations (CaVa) Data Platform — a shared infrastructure designed to bring multiple institutions together, enabling collaborative research with privacy and governance built in from the start.

She has also released key tools as open-source Python packages, allowing other researchers and health services to use and build on this work, rather than starting from scratch.

What began as behind-the-scenes technical work is now laying the groundwork for something much bigger: using real-world clinical data to reduce variation in cancer care and drive more consistent, equitable outcomes for patients.



"What I'm most proud of is that this isn't just technical work for its own sake, because it's laying the groundwork for routine clinical data to be used to genuinely improve how cancer care is delivered."

Dr Georgina Kennedy

THE NEXT CHAPTER

Research programmes are never complete, including this one. Some of our researchers have been awarded additional funding to continue their research, others have developed new collaborations and are working up ideas for future grant funding. A survey of SPHERE Cancer CAG members in 2025 on future capacity-building ideas resulted in four all-day workshops in September and October 2025. This has resulted in the thrust for our next Capacity Building Grant on facilitating data sharing and efficiency.

Early efforts are underway to facilitate these collaborations and funding.

SPHERE CANCER CAG COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

NSW Government Health South Western Sydney Local Health District

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St Vincent's Hospital Sydney

ACU Australian Catholic University

UTS University of Technology Sydney

UNSW Sydney

Western Sydney University

The Sydney Children's Hospitals Network

Children's Cancer Institute

NeuRA Discover. Conquer. Cure.

The George Institute for Global Health

Ingham Institute Applied Medical Research

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