

Media Release

The Hon Jaala Pulford MLC

Minister for Employment

Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy

Minister for Small Business



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RESEARCH BOOST TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND TREAT CORONAVIRUS

The Victorian Government is backing cutting-edge medical research projects to better understand, prevent and treat coronavirus.

Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy Jaala Pulford today announced the seven beneficiaries of the Government's \$5.5 million *COVID-19 Research Fund*, which will support continued jobs growth in a sector that already employs tens of thousands of Victorians.

The Murdoch Children's Research Institute will use human-derived stem cells to better understand the virus's effects on different organ systems in the body, including the lung, heart, kidneys, brain, immune system and blood vessels, to support the development of targeted treatments.

The multi-agency study – which includes partners from the Doherty Institute, Monash University, and the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute – has benefitted from Australia-first custom-built stem cell processing equipment with sections sourced from Japan and Switzerland.

Among other grant recipients, the Burnet Institute and University of Melbourne will conduct separate studies focusing on improving our understanding of COVID-19 immunity, while Barwon Health will conduct a study in regional Victoria to determine the long-term biological, physiological and psychological impacts of coronavirus.

Alfred Health, Eastern Health and Bendigo Health will undertake projects examining the impacts of coronavirus on the workforce, with a focus on healthcare and other frontline workers.

Separately, the *Victorian Medical Research Acceleration Fund* will provide \$3 million to fund 12 projects across a range of research fields, including a team at RMIT that is exploring a new way to manage viral infections, which could allow for the repurposing of existing drugs to fight coronavirus.

Victoria is home to 12 independent medical research institutes that employ more than 4,800 people. The state's wider medical research sector supports more than 30,000 jobs across institutes, universities and industry.

The *COVID-19 Research Fund* was created in May as part of \$8.5 million committed to the work of Victoria's world-leading research institutes to better understand transmission, immunity and the long-term health impacts of coronavirus. An initial \$3 million was allocated to accelerate existing projects relating to COVID-19.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy Jaala Pulford

"We're backing our world-leading researchers to better understand, prevent and treat coronavirus."

"Victoria is a standard bearer in medical research – and we're putting this expertise to work in the global fight against this deadly virus."

Quote attributable to Theme Director of Cell Biology at MCRI, Professor Melissa Little

"It is becoming clear this virus can cause longer-term damage to the body's vital organs. Our new research program will generate a wide variety of stem cell derived human tissues to improve our understanding of disease pathology, change clinical care and hasten the rollout of targeted treatment options."

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