

Media Release

Ingrid Stitt MP

Acting Minister for Health

Acting Minister for Health Infrastructure

Acting Minister for Ambulance Services



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NEW CELLULAR LAB TO BACK VICTORIAN BLOOD CANCER RESEARCH

The Allan Labor Government is celebrating the opening of a new cellular laboratory at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, which deliver more local research into blood cancers than ever before.

Acting Minister for Health Ingrid Stitt today toured the facility alongside Professor Hang Quach and her hardworking lab team – one of Australia's largest haematology clinical trial units, with more than 130 active clinical trials currently recruiting patients to uncover life-changing treatments.

While haematology at St Vincent's covers all blood disorders, cancers remain a focus due to the severity and the absence of a cure in many cases – with survival dependent on effective therapies being available via clinical trials.

Made possible through more than \$500,000 from the Labor Government to cover equipment purchases and building works, the new and larger cellular lab is expected to help meet what Professor Quach has described as the most pressing and unmet medical need for blood cancers: access to CAR-T cell therapies and T cell engagers.

Increasing this access will help to identify effective life-changing treatments beyond what is available as the standard of care in Australia for these conditions, providing the possibility of a cure to some lymphoma, acute leukaemia and long-term control for myeloma.

Research into blood cancers requires a range of specialised cells, including chimeric antigen receptor T cells (also known as CAR-T cells). These cells are genetically engineered to bind to cancer cells and kill them, and each CAR-T cell is specifically made to fight a certain kind of cancer antigen.

The Labor Government has supported the renowned Professor Quach – who is the Head of the Haematology Department and Director of Research at St Vincent's – through a Clinical Research fellowship in 2017 for \$797,500 over four years via the Victorian Cancer Agency (VCA).

The VCA remains a proud supporter of cutting-edge medical research and treatments and backs a range of other initiatives seeking a cure for blood cancers – awarding nine early and mid-career research fellowships in blood cancer over the last three years.

Victoria is globally recognised as a leader in clinical cancer trials receiving significant backing from the Labor Government, including more than \$103 million in the *Victorian Budget 2023/24* to increase access to highly specialised therapies and genetic tests for people with rare diseases and cancer, including CAR-T therapies.

Construction has also commenced on the Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery – Australia's first hospital-based biomedical engineering research centre at SVHM, adding to Melbourne's rapidly growing biomedical precinct.

Backed by a \$60 million Labor Government investment, it will bring together experts from hospitals, research institutes and universities under the same roof for collaborative research and development.

Quotes attributable to Acting Minister for Health Ingrid Stitt

"Victoria has long been a world leader in clinical trials targeting life-threatening cancers – this new lab will play a pivotal role in supporting the discovery of treatments, giving hope of a cure to those living with these diseases."

"Clinical trials are the greatest chance our doctors have in finding a cure for blood cancer – the remarkable work undertaken by Professor Quach and her team is going to go a long way to changing and saving lives."

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