

Media Release

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier



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VICTORIA'S HEALTH AND MEDICAL RESEARCHERS HONOURED

Some of Victoria's sharpest research minds have been honoured at the prestigious 2015 Premier's Award for Health and Medical Research held last tonight at Government House.

Now in its 21st year, the Premier's Health and Medical Research Awards recognise and celebrate the outstanding achievements of Victoria's early-career health and medical researchers.

The recipient of the 2015 Premier's Award for Health and Medical Research is Dr Peter De Cruz from the Departments of Gastroenterology and Medicine at the Austin Medical Centre.

Dr De Cruz's research findings have significantly advanced the field and have been instrumental in the development of therapies that may help to treat Crohn's disease, a chronic inflammatory disease of the intestines that affects around 75,000 Australians and is projected to increase to 100,000 by 2022.

Also recognised in this year's Awards are Dr Daniel Pellicci from the University of Melbourne, Dr Lucille Rankin and Mr James Rickard from the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research.

Victoria is a world-leader in health and medical research. In the *2015-16 Victorian Budget* the Andrews Labor Government has invested in new technologies, new facilities, and new projects to enable and advance medical research. The Government has also provided funding to support and attract clinical trials to Victoria.

The Government has this week released a Discussion Paper to guide the development of a Victorian Health and Medical Research Strategy to identify Victoria's priorities in health and medical research, promote innovation, and prepare our State for the economic and healthcare opportunities on offer both nationally and internationally.

The Premier's Health and Medical Research Award recipient and commendees were selected by a panel of eminent health and medical researchers representing a diversity of disciplines, research institutes and universities.

Quotes attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

"Health and medical research has the power to change and save lives. Every day, we are learning more about diseases, finding quicker diagnoses, developing better, more targeted treatments, and working towards discovering cures."

"These Awards recognise the immense talent of early-career researchers here in Victoria, and I congratulate this year's recipient, Dr Peter De Cruz, and all of this year's commendees."

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health, Jill Hennessy

"Victoria is leading the world in health and medical research, with innovative and inspiring work being undertaken in our hospitals, medical research institutes, and universities."

"We have some of the world's best clinicians and researchers right here in Victoria, and the Government wants to support them to continue to do their fantastic work."

Quotes attributable to Parliamentary Secretary for Medical Research, Frank McGuire:

"Health and medical research improves the health of our community, creates jobs, and contributes to our state's economy and that's why we're absolutely committed to supporting it and investing in it."

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About the recipient and commendees of the 2015 Premier's Award for Health and Medical Research

Dr Peter De Cruz - Recipient

Dr Peter De Cruz is a Staff Specialist and Head of the Inflammatory Bowel Disease Service at Austin Health, and a Senior Lecturer at the University of Melbourne. Dr De Cruz undertook his PhD in inflammatory bowel disease at St Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne and his postdoctoral fellowship was undertaken between Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge and St Mark's Hospital in London. Dr Peter De Cruz, together with Professor Michael Kamm from the University of Melbourne, initiated and coordinated an international study of 174 patients with Crohn's disease to trial a more proactive approach to post-operative care. The results of this study have been outstanding and were published in *The Lancet* in 2014. The study found that participating patients experienced significantly fewer recurrences and required fewer surgeries than would otherwise have been required. The results have changed practice internationally. Dr De Cruz's research findings have significantly advanced the field and have been instrumental in the development of therapies targeted at specific gut bacteria that may help to treat Crohn's disease.

Dr Daniel Pellicci - Commendee

Dr Daniel Pellicci is an NHMRC early career research fellow in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at the University of Melbourne. Dr Pellicci is a T cell immunologist who specialises in the study of innate T cells that recognise lipid antigens. Lipid reactive T cells make up an important component of the immune system and have the ability to modulate immune responses to infections, cancer, allergens and self-tissue. The aim of Dr Pellicci's PhD was to investigate how Natural Killer T cells recognise foreign lipids like those from bacteria, and the self-lipids from human cells. His work has provided critical knowledge into how Natural Killer T cells participate in infectious and non-infectious diseases. Dr Pellicci's research provides fundamental insight into the biology Natural Killer T cells and their importance in the immune system, which will have an impact on a range of diseases.

Dr Lucille Rankin - Commendee

After obtaining her PhD in Molecular Immunology at the University of Melbourne, Dr Rankin completed her doctoral research on investigating the transcriptional regulation of innate lymphoid cells at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research. Dr Rankin has recently moved to the USA to take up a position as a Post Doctoral Scientist at the Weill Cornell Medical College at Cornell University in New York. Dr Rankin is the recipient of the Dora Lush Postgraduate Research Scholarship, a Harold Mitchell Travel Fellowship and an Australasian Society for Immunology travel bursary. Dr Lucille Rankin's doctoral research has shown that the T-bet gene is essential for the generation of a specialised population of innate lymphoid cells. By finding the molecular switches responsible for generating innate lymphoid cells, Dr Rankin's research has provided valuable new insights into how we might target these cells in diseases such as irritable bowel syndrome.

Mr James Rickard - Commendee

Mr Rickard initially trained as a physiotherapist at La Trobe University before he developed and pursued an interest in biomedical research, which led him to commence PhD studies in medical biology in Associate Professor John Silke's laboratory at La Trobe University. The laboratory subsequently moved to the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research where Mr Rickard completed most of his PhD research while enrolled through Melbourne University. Mr Rickard is about to submit his PhD thesis and is in the second year of studying graduate entry medicine at Monash University with a goal of becoming a clinician scientist, pursuing both medical research and clinical practice. During his PhD research, Mr Rickard characterised two proteins, including one called RIPK1, that regulate Tumour Necrosis Factor, and established that their absence causes cell death, leading to inflammation. This research has provided significant insight into the therapeutic potential of inhibiting cell death in inflammatory disease.