

# THIS IS YOUR TRIBUTE

AUTUMN EDITION 2023

**New research  
shows why  
veterans  
are struggling to find  
and keep employment**

**How long term  
PTSD changes  
brain structure**

**Is saliva the key  
to early detection  
of liver disease?**

Photo Credit: Department of Defence by MECC Division

**GALLIPOLI**  
MEDICAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Gallipoli Medical Research Foundation  
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MEDICAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION



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accredited research institute  
and a registered charity.

## From the CEO

Welcome to our first Tribute for 2023!

This year marks the start of a new strategic plan (2023-2027) with the vision of undertaking "Research to Restore Lives". We begin this journey with a new Chair of our Board, Dr Amanda Dines. Dr Dines is an Air Commodore in the Royal Australian Air Force and currently serves in a part time capacity as the Director General Health Reserve – Air Force. Since 2014 she has also served as an Honorary Aide de Camp to the Governor General of Australia. Dr Dines joined the GMRF Board in 2020 and we look forward to working more closely with her in this new position. I would also like to acknowledge and sincerely thank Mr Liam Kelly KC for his voluntary commitment to the GMRF Board as Director and Chair since 2015 and we wish him all the best for the future.

I am excited to share some of our latest updates with you in this edition. We discuss why veterans are struggling to find and keep employment (on page 4); our researchers explain how brain structure can change for people with long term PTSD (on page 6); and we hear from Professor Darrell Crawford on his study into how testing saliva may help to detect liver disease (on page 8).

I also want to take a brief moment to thank Jane O'Brien, our dedicated Chief Operations Officer of over 15 years who finished up at GMRF in December 2022. As a parting gift Jane very generously donated \$5,000 to the Foundation which earns her a place on our honour board – a wonderful reminder and legacy of Jane's commitment to GMRF over the years. We will miss her smiling face but wish Jane all the best for the future and look forward to seeing her at the 2023 Supporter High Tea!

Miriam Dwyer CEO



## GMRF CEO appointed to new Queensland Veterans' Council

In November 2022, Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk announced a new Queensland Veterans' Council to shine a light on the needs of Queensland's veteran community.

"The Council will have direct access to my Government, to provide advice on matters affecting veterans throughout the State," said the Premier.

GMRF CEO, Miriam Dwyer, was appointed alongside five other key members of the community to advise the Council, consult with the veteran community and help the Council advise the Premier.

"I am honoured to have the opportunity to use the academic networks and innovative research at my fingertips to inform the Council and advocate for veterans.

This initiative is a positive step towards improving the quality of life for veterans and their loved ones," said Ms Dwyer.

The Assistant Minister to the Premier for Veterans' Affairs, Mr Bart Mellish, said the new statutory body would strengthen support for current and ex-service personnel.

"The Council will be at the heart of matters relating to our veterans and the ex-service organisations supporting them in the community," said Mr Mellish.



## Contributors



**Dr Madeline Romaniuk**  
Principal Investigator  
Veteran Mental Health Unit



**Professor Darrell Crawford**  
Director of Research



**Professor Rachel Thomson**  
Head of Respiratory Research



**Rane Saffioti**  
Cancer Wellness  
Program Coordinator



**Dr Suzanne Elliott**  
Associate Director  
of Clinical Trials

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# Veteran employment research explores the transition from military service to civilian life



Contributing researcher  
Dr Madeline Romaniuk



**Securing civilian employment is a key component of a successful transition from military service to civilian life. Yet this is a challenging experience for veterans.**

Research into veterans' employment published by GMRF in 2022 has highlighted the main challenges faced by veterans in finding and keeping employment after they leave the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

The study involved interviewing veterans about their lived experience of transitioning out of military services to civilian life, including experiences of civilian employment, with four significant themes emerging as barriers to employment:

1. Starting over, including finding work and starting from the bottom again;
2. Mental health, including perceived discrimination and impaired functioning;
3. Interpersonal cultural difficulties, including communication styles, teamwork and varied work ethic in civilian employment settings;
4. Organisational differences, including the variations between military and civilian organisational systems.

The study was led by GMRF lead researcher Dr Madeline Romaniuk, who said increased knowledge of the barriers faced during the transition to civilian employment may help inform the development and delivery of services for veterans and help shape the separation process to improve support for transitioning Defence personnel.

"This study highlights the need for evidence-based 'transition to employment' initiatives to target factors affecting not just obtaining employment initially, but also employment retention among veterans," said Dr Romaniuk.





From the research, Dr Romaniuk recommended initiatives that aim to address unemployment and under-employment for veterans.



**These initiatives should focus on preparedness, education, and expectation management for both veterans and civilian employers and colleagues.**

**A focus should also be on interpersonal and organisational cultural differences including structure, teamwork, role clarity and feedback; an understanding of military skills; and reduction of mental health stigma and potential discriminatory practices,” said Dr Romaniuk.**

Read more about our transition to employment study, including initiatives recommended by our researchers to address unemployment and under-employment for veterans:



**RSL**  
Queensland

**This research was funded by RSL Queensland, who help ADF veterans and partners of current or former Defence members to take the next step towards finding meaningful employment through the nationally available RSL Employment Program.**

RSL Queensland Deputy CEO Veteran Services, Troy Watson said: “RSL Queensland is proud to partner with Gallipoli Medical Research Foundation and fund this important piece of research.”

Whether veterans are transitioning into civilian life or relocating, we know that finding meaningful employment is crucial in helping create purpose and direction. Our award-winning RSL Queensland Employment Program recognises this and helps veterans and Defence partners secure employment through career counselling, application assistance, interview coaching and connections with potential employers.

“Our aim is to connect veterans with long-term, meaningful employment and to help employers tap into the talent pool of veterans who are ready to work.

“RSL Queensland remains committed to investing in research, targeted programs and proven initiatives to make the transition from service to civilian life as easy, smooth and accessible as possible.”



# Researchers explore brain changes linked with longer-lasting PTSD



Contributing researcher  
Dr Madeline Romaniuk



**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a condition that develops in response to exposure to life-threatening or traumatic events. It can impact the whole person, including their mental and physical health and how they cope with everyday life.**

Research published by GMRF is helping to grow our understanding of PTSD and how it can affect both the body and brain.

A recent study by our researchers led by Dr Madeline Romaniuk, featured Vietnam veterans who experienced trauma and were involved in combat during military service. A portion of the veterans had a PTSD diagnosis and had experienced chronic symptoms for an average of 30 years. The study used medical imaging techniques, including MRI, to measure changes in brain structure.

Findings showed that certain areas of the brain were different between the groups. Compared to veterans without PTSD, veterans with chronic PTSD showed differences in areas of the brain that play a role in how we:

- experience fear
- process emotions
- retrieve negative memories
- anticipate unpleasant stimuli (like threat detection).

Half the number of people living with PTSD appear to respond well to available treatments. Data from this study is helping to move researchers forward to better understand the needs and most effective approaches for treatment for all people who experience PTSD symptoms.



**Uncovering the neurological associations and establishing the biological impact of PTSD may help us better understand chronic or treatment-resistant symptoms in this group of veterans and plan and adjust treatment accordingly,”**  
said Dr Romaniuk.

## Finding support

Whether someone has been living with PTSD symptoms for a short or long time, it is important they know that effective treatment is available to support recovery and minimise the impact on them and their family.

If you or a loved one are interested in finding out more about trauma and PTSD symptoms, consider talking to a GP or mental health provider for information about symptoms and the range of effective treatments and support options that could be tailored to your unique experience.

## 24/7 Support Services

### Lifeline

13 11 14

[lifeline.org.au](https://lifeline.org.au)

### Open Arms

1800 011 046

[open-arms.gov.au](https://open-arms.gov.au)





# Compassion may help reduce your PTSD symptoms

Contributing researcher  
Dr Madeline Romaniuk



**Researchers have found that Compassionate Mind Training (CMT) can have a positive impact on veterans with PTSD and their partners, helping to reduce the severity of PTSD symptoms.**

CMT aims to help people develop self-compassion, compassion for others and openness to receiving compassion from others.

With a reported 85% of current serving and recently discharged ADF members experiencing a traumatic event at some point during service, targeting compassion and self-compassion during therapeutic activities may be helpful for people with PTSD.

“Living with PTSD can be enormously challenging, not just for the individual veteran, but also for the veteran’s whole family system, including partners, children and parents,” said Dr Madeline Romaniuk, lead researcher at Gallipoli Medical Research Foundation, who ran the pilot study.



**We know from existing research that practicing compassion and self-compassion may be an important addition to psychological therapy for victims of trauma. Findings indicate that as compassion levels increase, PTSD levels decrease, so it’s important to explore these potential benefits for veterans.”**

For the ex-service personnel participants, PTSD symptoms steadily decreased over the course of the CMT intervention. Specific findings also included:

- An improvement in compassion-based experiences
- A reduction in depressive, anxiety and stress symptoms
- A reduction in external shame and self-criticism
- An increase in quality of life
- An increase in relationship satisfaction for the duration of the program.

“The results showed that the use of CMT for ex-service personnel with PTSD and their partners might particularly help in the ongoing reduction of PTSD, anxiety and stress symptoms and the improvement of compassion-based experiences, including reduced feelings of shame and self-criticism,” said Dr Romaniuk.

The study was a collaboration between GMRF and the Compassionate Mind Research group at The University of Queensland and was proudly funded by the Medibank Health and Wellbeing Fund.

Read more:





# Saliva revolutionising how liver cirrhosis is detected



Contributing researcher  
Professor Darrell Crawford

**GMRF researchers are aiming to improve early detection of liver cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), particularly in rural and remote areas and communities with high Indigenous representation, through a simple saliva test.**

People with liver cirrhosis have an increased risk of developing hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), a type of liver cancer, which has the the fastest growing rate of cancer-related deaths in Australia. Considering the majority of HCC develops in livers with underlying cirrhosis, recognising this disease early is crucial, yet difficult.

“Death rates from HCC in Queensland are higher in regional and remote areas than in metropolitan centres and this is further amplified in communities with high Indigenous representation,” said GMRF Director of Research, Professor Darrell Crawford, who is Chief Investigator on this project.

**“Early identification of cirrhosis is critical to identify the at-risk individuals who will benefit from further investigations to detect HCC when curative therapies are more likely to be successful.”**

Current methods of diagnosis, including transient elastography and liver biopsy, are only available in major centres, with limited access for those living in regional or rural areas.

Previous studies undertaken by our researchers’ show that proteins found in blood and used to indicate cirrhosis are also found in saliva. Using saliva – a more easily collected

and transported body fluid – to diagnose cirrhosis may make diagnostic strategies more accessible in remote areas.

**“The development of a simple saliva test will revolutionise the way cirrhosis is currently detected, especially in rural and Indigenous communities,” said Professor Crawford.**

This project is aiming to reduce the necessity for patients to undergo invasive procedures, such as liver biopsy, which carry a significant risk.

“Once cirrhosis is confirmed, patients can undergo surveillance for HCC and other complications such as portal hypertension, ensuring detection at earlier stages.”

Learn more about our Liver Research Unit:





# International speakers headline the 2022 NTM Symposium in Brisbane

Contributing researcher  
Professor Rachel Thompson



**In November 2022, our Respiratory Research team hosted the Nontuberculous Mycobacteria (NTM) Symposium in Brisbane. The three-day conference attracted national and international specialists in clinical and research areas, with presentations aimed at sharing knowledge, discussing research and facilitating collaboration.**

The first day of the Symposium focused on topics for health professionals with NTM-diagnosed patients. Presentations covered natural history of NTM infections, management of complex infections, environmental exposures and NTM in Cystic Fibrosis.

Current research was the highlight of day two with keynote presentations from international speakers sharing the latest research findings and opportunities for collaboration:

- Koza Morimoto, MD, PhD – Japan
- Ho Namkoong, MD, PhD, MPH – Japan
- Louis Chai, MBBS, MRCP, PhD – Singapore
- Ka Lip Chew, MBBS, FRCPath, FRCPA – Singapore

- Elisa Ignatius, BA, MD, MSc – USA
- Ieuan Evans, MRCP, PhD – UK

The final day's presentations were dedicated to patient information. People affected by NTM and their loved ones travelled to Brisbane from all over Australia to learn more about the disease, exposure reduction, physiotherapy management and coping with chronic illness.

GMRF and the organising committee would like to thank the generous NTM Symposium sponsors for helping make this event possible.

## Feedback from attendees

"It is unusual to attend an event where so many of the sessions are of interest and relevant to one's area of practice."

"As this was the first time this Symposium was held in Australia, it was great to be able to hear from so many international speakers covering such a diverse range of topics."

## POWERED BY PURPOSE

Our commitment to transforming the lives of people with rare diseases drives what we do.



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# Ann's clinical trial story



Contributing researcher  
Dr Suzanne Elliott



**Two weeks after retiring in 2015, and just before a planned tour of Australia, Ann was diagnosed with stage three melanoma.**

"It was just like a bomb hitting me; I was in disbelief," says Ann.

"I thought 'it just doesn't happen'. We don't think about melanoma or take the 'slip, slop, slap' message seriously enough. I was raised in a generation that used to put baby oil on us!"

Ann underwent surgery to remove lymph nodes and glands before her treating specialist, Professor Victoria Atkinson, invited her to participate in a clinical trial of an immunotherapy treatment.

"Once the melanoma goes through the skin into the bloodstream, micro-deposits can hide away from treatment. So at Stage 3 having it removed, doesn't mean that micro-deposits are not hiding somewhere waiting to come back," says Dr Suzanne Elliott, Associate Director of clinical trials at GMRF.

Dr Elliott continued, "There is a large group of people who will have recurring cancer within 5 years. So it is a consideration for people to participate in these trials so we can assess if the trial treatment will prevent further growth or even test if it can fully eradicate the cancer. This is an alternative option, rather than just to wait, see and hope it doesn't come back."

"I didn't know anything about clinical trials before this, but I thought I had nothing to lose and everything to gain; I had five children," says Ann.

Ann completed the clinical trial in 2016 and is still being monitored by GMRF's Clinical Trials Unit as part of the trial.

“

**I've had a marvellous story; my prognosis was about five years, and I'm going into my eighth year of no melanoma," says Ann.**

And Ann is full of appreciation for the opportunity to be part of the trial.

"To the researchers and the companies that fund the research, what can I say? Words can't express my appreciation for their work."

*Sadly, not all trials are successful and not every participant responds well to the trial treatment like Ann did. Our trials are coordinated in partnership with Greenslopes Private Hospital, Ramsay Pharmacy and the Cyril Gilbert Cancer Centre.*



Learn more about  
how clinical trials  
can make a difference







**After a long journey to treat a cutaneous squamous cell carcinoma (cSCC), doctors told Greg he was out of options.**

Shortly after, Greg was offered a chance to join a clinical trial being coordinated by GMRF's Clinical Trials Unit and Greenslopes Private Hospital. Greg became the first participant on this trial in Australia and experienced positive results.

**"I cannot tell you how much of a relief it was when they said it was reducing in size. That was in the first two-to-three months. It was hard to cope; now it doesn't affect what I want to do," said Greg.**

Having personally witnessed the benefit of this research, Greg's sister Susan – a CommBank employee – nominated GMRF for the CommBank Staff Foundation Community Grants program. As a result, GMRF's research received a \$10,000 boost!

**"**

**Research has the power to save lives, and our community needs it now more than ever. We are incredibly grateful to Susan and CommBank for helping us enhance the health of all Australians through important research," said GMRF CEO, Miriam Dwyer.**

*Sadly, not all clinical trial stories are as positive as Greg's. But these important medical investigations can be a lifeline for many people with limited treatment options and they are critical to advancing science.*

## CommBank Gives Back

CommBank employees have been supporting Australian communities through Community Grants and their workplace giving program, since 1917.

## Brisbane locals aiming to raise \$100,000 for cancer research

In January 2024, a group of Brisbane locals from the DCM Landscaping team will be climbing to Mount Everest Base Camp to raise funds for GMRF.

The group were inspired to raise funds after witnessing the impact of cancer on their close friend (a husband and father of 2 young children) who was diagnosed with stage 3 bowel cancer.



Find out more





## 12 Gallipoli Medical Research Foundation



# Get moving at home

No special equipment necessary - just a comfortable chair with back rest, towel, water bottle and positive attitude to get started.

## Shoulders Press-Warm out

Sit on the chair with your feet flat on the floor and a straight neutral spine.

Open your arms to the side at shoulder height with your elbows bent and hands up. Breathing in, press your hands upwards above your head with your shoulders.

Breathe out while you briefly hold the arms extended with soft elbows. Inhale, then slowly lower the arms to the start position while slowly breathing out.

Repeat 10 times



## Bicycle

Sit comfortably on the chair with your feet flat on the floor, shoulder width apart. Bring your hands behind your ears and keep your chin lifted.

Breathing in, twist your torso, bringing one elbow across the centre of your body and lift the opposite knee up to meet your elbow. Exhale while coming back to the start position. Repeat with your other elbow and knee.

Repeat 5 times

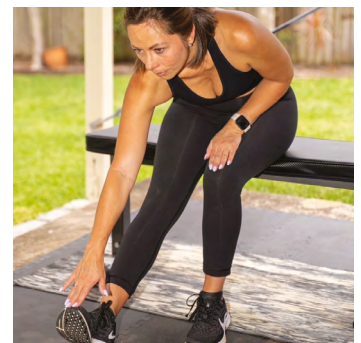


## Stretches

Sit with your feet flat and parallel on the ground. Step one foot forward, slowly bending your chest and hips forward.

Reach your arm to touch the top of your foot (tiptoes). Hold for 10 to 20 seconds, then release and slowly come back to the initial position. Repeat with your other foot.

Keep breathing normally during all the stretching - don't hold your breath at anytime.



Have you or a loved one been diagnosed with cancer through Greenslopes Private Hospital? Find out how you can join the Cancer Wellness Program and improve your cancer journey:



## Reminder!

- > ***This information, including the pictures, description, and comments, is for educational and informational use only.***
- > ***Make sure you check with your doctor, physio or other health professional before doing any new movements.***
- > ***Stop if you feel pain and let someone else know if you're trying anything new.***
- > ***Keep hydrated during your exercise and have someone with you.***
- > ***If you live alone, have your phone close by or an emergency button with you.***



# Community fundraisers smash goal just days before Tasmania Trek

**Members from the National Fire Industry Association (NFIA), led by NFIA Patron and GMRF supporter, Brian Davies and his wife, Liz, spent 4 days trekking through Tasmania's Freycinet and Bay of Fires all in the name of research.**

The group of more than 20 trekkers spent over 18 months fundraising in the lead up to the trek, aiming to raise \$500,000 for important research at GMRF and Queensland Brain Institute (QBI). The group reached their goal just hours before kicking off the trek, raising over \$504,000.

In 2019, Brian established the NFIA Patron's Walk for Charity – a mammoth trek raising money for critical research at GMRF and QBI.



"We are so grateful for the support of Brian and the NFIA community. We receive no government funding; our research really relies on the generosity of wonderful people like Brian, Liz and the NFIA team," said GMRF CEO Miriam Dwyer.

"It is such a great privilege in life to be able to support the medical research performed by GMRF and QBI by way of our walk. Every Australian is touched in some way by the horrible diseases and conditions we raise funds for, in addition to assisting our returned veterans. We also have a lot of fun along the way!" said Brian.

The 2022 NFIA Patron's Walk for Charity would not have been possible without the support of Angel Sponsors.

With thanks to our Angel Sponsors



## Where are the funds going?

**Money raised from this trek will fund a research project that aims to understand the experiences of veterans in suicide crisis.**

Part of the project will involve creating effective educational training videos to help educate first responders from Queensland Police Service (QPS) and Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS), veterans and families about how to help veterans in suicidal crisis.

**The videos will cover:**

- Providing advice when responding to veterans in suicide crisis

- First-hand experience from veterans who have interacted with QPS when suicidal, and the experience of QPS officers and QAS paramedics who have cared for veterans in suicide crisis
- Navigating challenging conversations: understanding military culture, trauma, substance use, physical risk and engaging with veterans in suicide crisis.

This important research will further equip QAS and QPS first responders with crucial resources to support them when helping our veterans. It is hoped these insights and training materials will help save the lives of many veterans.





## 2022 GMRF Research Awards

In November 2022, GMRF held the annual Research Awards Night, proudly supported by Ord Minnett. Attendees heard the latest from our researchers and keynote speaker, GMRF Honorary Professorial Fellow, Dr Nicola Fear who was visiting GMRF from Kings College in London.

Winners from last year's Innovation Grant Awards shared findings from their short-term research projects, while 2023 recipients, Ranee Saffioti and Jordyn Woodward, were presented an award for their project, A Pilot Study to Assess Participation in a Cancer Wellness Program and its effect on Cancer Patients Self-Reported Quality of Life Measures by grant sponsors Thynne & Macartney.

**ORD MINNETT**

**Thynne  
Macartney  
Lawyers**



## Help future generations through the power of research

Each year, Gifts in Will help advance the life-changing research underway at GMRF and allow us to support the people in urgent need of support through other non-research based programs.

Get in touch with our friendly team to learn more about how you can make a lasting difference for future generations.

Call 07 3394 7284 or email [hello.gmrf@ramsayhealth.com.au](mailto:hello.gmrf@ramsayhealth.com.au) for a commitment-free conversation about leaving a gift in your Will.

## The future is in your hands

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to advance research.

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### 3. Payment details:

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Expiry Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Research to restore lives**