vision News



Spring 2025

Is myopia linked with the immune system in our eyes?

McCusker
Glaucoma Centre
receives a boost

Can we potentially diagnose cancer through the eye?

Associate Professor Holly Chinnery



From the **Managing Director**

Welcome to the Spring 2025 edition of Vision News.

We are delighted to share the latest updates from the Lions Eye Institute, where your support continues to drive tremendous progress in research, care, and community outreach.

This year has been filled with inspiring moments, from the excitement of the HBF Run for a Reason, where a record-breaking amount was raised in support of sight saving research, to the elegance of the Leeuwin Lunch for Telethon, which brought together guests united by a shared goal of improving the health and wellbeing of Western Australian children.



A highlight has been Associate Professor Holly Chinnery's groundbreaking research into immunology, which is paving the way for improved outcomes for young people across Australia. In this edition, we take a closer look at her latest work exploring how the immune system in the eye, specifically the cornea, might be linked to myopia (short-sightedness).

Major developments are also underway, including the redevelopment of our Nedlands theatre complex, the first major transformation of our hospital facilities since its original commissioning in 1996. Clinic facilities on level two will also be vastly improved. We have also welcomed Dr Benjamin Host, a clinician who brings a wealth of experience to our team, further strengthening our paediatrics and ophthalmic clinical care capabilities.

In other exciting research news, we are pleased to share stories about generous support from the McCusker Charitable Foundation to support our groundbreaking work at the McCusker Glaucoma Centre as well as support from the Perth Eye Foundation and the Charlies Foundation for Research to explore a novel imaging approach of the eye to detect cancer.

This year also marks a powerful milestone in our shared journey: 100 years since Helen Keller stood before the Lions International Convention and issued her unforgettable challenge for the Lions to become "Knights of the Blind." Her words sparked a century of action, and her call still echoes through everything we do at the Lions Eye Institute. Every sight saving surgery, every research breakthrough, every story of restored vision is part of the legacy she began in 1925.

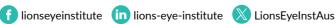
Above all, this edition is a tribute to you, our community of supporters. Your generosity fuels every breakthrough, every clinical advancement, and every step toward better vision for all. Thank you for helping us continue Helen Keller's vision and for helping us see a brighter future.

Best wishes

Dr Glen Power Managing Director, Lions Eye Institute

Follow us on social media







Nedlands redevelopment

In a major step forward for patient care, the Lions Eye Institute has begun major renovations of our licensed day hospital and adjacent clinical consulting areas on the second floor.

This transformative project will feature:

- A fully redesigned operating theatre complex
- A new dedicated Laser Vision suite
- A modern central sterilisation and supply department
- Expanded pre and post-operative beds and patient

This marks the first major redevelopment of our hospital facilities since their original commissioning in 1996 and represents a significant investment in state-of-theart medical equipment to support future growth and innovation.

The Department of Health approved the redevelopment concept in early 2025. Construction is scheduled to take place on a staged basis from late August 2025, with the initial stage being the creation of a new laser theatre for Lions Laser Vision. Transition to the new laser theatre is expected in early 2026 with completion of all redevelopment works anticipated in early 2027.

A carefully staged works program will ensure minimal disruption to service delivery while enhancing the quality and capacity of our facilities for years to come.





Visuals of the Nedlands theatre complex redevelopment

Welcoming Dr Benjamin Host to the Lions Eye Institute

The Lions Eye Institute is delighted to welcome Dr Benjamin Host to our clinical team.

Dr Host brings a wealth of experience in paediatric ophthalmology, strabismus, cataract surgery and general ophthalmology. His arrival further strengthens our commitment to providing high-quality, specialist eye care to the community.

We are pleased to have Dr Host join our team and look forward to the positive impact he will have on patients and families across Western Australia.



A record-breaking effort for sight saving research at the

2025 HBF Run for a Reason



10-month-old Cooper was born with a rare condition called Norrie Disease, a genetic disorder that affects vision and hearing

We are proud to share the outstanding results of the 2025 HBF Run for a Reason, held on Sunday, 25 May.

Despite wet weather, more than 40,000 participants, runners, joggers, walkers, and wheelers, came together in Western Australia's largest annual fitness and fundraising event, demonstrating the incredible power of community.

Among the many inspiring efforts, a dedicated team called Cooper's Crew played a key role in helping raise a record-breaking total for the Lions Eye Institute's sight saving research, our highest ever from this event.

Impressively, Cooper's Crew also ranked among the top three fundraisers in this year's HBF Run for a Reason event.

The team was formed in honour of Cooper, a young boy living with Norrie Disease, a rare genetic condition that causes blindness. Cooper's resilience and his family's determination inspired widespread support and media coverage.

We would like to thank every individual who donated, participated, fundraised, or volunteered. Your efforts have brought us closer to a future without preventable blindness.

The 2025 event raised over \$2 million for more than 350 charities and we are proud to have been so strongly represented. We look forward to continuing this momentum and hope you'll join us next year as we walk, run, and advocate for sight.

World-first research to explore a hidden link between myopia and the immune system



A global groundbreaking study at the Lions Eye Institute hopes to shed new light on one of the world's fastest-growing eye conditions, **myopia**, or short-sightedness. More than just an inconvenience, myopia when diagnosed in early childhood can lead to high myopia as an adult and cause other serious sight-threatening conditions such as cataract, retinal detachment and glaucoma.

Driven by a powerful collaboration between researchers in Perth and Melbourne, this pioneering work could transform how we understand and treat not just myopia, but a range of inflammatory and systemic diseases.

Associate Professor Holly Chinnery, a lead investigator at the Lions Eye Institute, is at the forefront of this exciting development. "This is the most exciting research of my career" she says. "For the first time, we can actually watch immune cells moving inside the human eye - something we couldn't even have imagined just a decade ago."

The project's focus is the **potential role of the immune system in the development and progression of myopia.** Although myopia has long been viewed as a genetic and structural issue, where the eye grows too long and distorts vision, emerging technologies are revealing that inflammation and immune activity might be quietly playing a role.

"If you'd asked me whether there is a link between myopia and the immune system five years ago, I would have laughed and thought, there's no link at all. But actually, as imaging technologies are improving in vision science, we are starting to measure more things in the human eye than ever before and we're starting to see some evidence for a potential link," said Associate Professor Chinnery.



Associate Professor Holly Chinnery working with her research team at the Lions Eye Institute laboratories

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Lincoln receiving his daily low-dose atropine eye drops to help slow the progression of his myopia

"This hypothesis opens up entirely new treatment possibilities," Associate Professor Chinnery explains. "If we can identify immune signals or pathways involved, we may be able to slow or prevent the progression of myopia in children, potentially even before symptoms start."

The research team is currently starting work on their **first human study**, targeting 40 young participants aged between 12 and 25. Half will have no vision impairment and the other half will have moderate to high myopia.

Using cutting-edge microscopy, researchers will collect tear samples and capture microscopic video footage of immune cells in the front of the eye. The goal? To determine whether children with myopia show different levels of immune activity compared to those with healthy eyes.

This research is world-first. It's bold, evidence-generating science that has the power to protect sight for the next generation, and maybe even reveal more about the body than we ever thought possible," said Associate Professor Chinnery.

In a follow-up phase, the team want to investigate how **atropine eye drops**, a treatment used to slow myopia, might be influencing the immune system. If there's a connection, it could completely reshape how doctors approach myopia management.

The implications go far beyond vision correction. This same imaging technique could help detect early immune responses in people with diabetes, multiple sclerosis, or even those recovering from stroke, transforming the eye into a window into the health of the whole body.

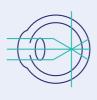
Associate Professor Chinnery and her collaborator Professor Laura Downie at the University of Melbourne are pursuing patent protection for a **world-first imaging technique**, putting Australian science at the global forefront of eye and immune research.

"We're in a unique position," Associate Professor Chinnery says. "We have the equipment, the expertise and the excitement. What we need now is support to scale up, expand our clinical studies, and unlock answers that could change lives."

For children like Lincoln, an 11-year-old with a strong family history of myopia, this research could one day be life-changing. While clinical impact may still be years away, support for our research today ensures that by the time Lincoln is older, we will have a much clearer understanding of how and why myopia progresses, including whether the immune system plays a role. That knowledge could unlock earlier diagnosis, better disease management, and ways to protect future generations from vision loss.

What is Myopia?

Also known as short-sightedness, myopia is a condition where the eye grows too long from front to back, making it hard to focus on distant objects.



What causes it?

Genetics: Children with one or both parents affected are at higher risk.

Environment: Less time outdoors and increased screen use are major behavioural drivers.

Why is it increasing?

Modern lifestyles mean children are spending more time indoors and using screens earlier and more often. These shifts are contributing to a global myopia epidemic, with predictions that half the world's population may be myopic by 2050.

A world-first patented imaging technique is revolutionising the > way we can observe immune cells at work in the human eye

Why does it matter?

The World Health Organisation has reported a global rise in myopia among young children, including six-year-olds, raising concerns about early-onset cases. When myopia develops at a young age, it tends to progress more rapidly and significantly increases the risk of serious eye conditions later in life, such as retinal detachment, glaucoma, cataracts and even permanent vision loss. While glasses and contact lenses can correct blurry vision, they don't stop the disease from worsening.



Power of philanthropy: Partnering for hope

At the Lions Eye Institute, hope is at the heart of everything we do, and it's made possible through you.



This year, we've continued to witness just how powerful partnerships can be. From individual donors and philanthropic foundations to community volunteers and research collaborators, the support we receive has a direct and lasting impact on people living with vision loss.

Your generosity helps fund not just our research, but the people behind it. Laboratory technicians, clinicians, scientists and support staff whose dedication is turning bold ideas into real-world treatments. It ensures our teams have the tools they need to explore new frontiers in ophthalmology,

from gene therapy and regenerative medicine to next-generation diagnostics.

Your support also empowers us to train the next generation of eye health leaders through fellowships and education programs, ensuring that the future of eye care is in safe, compassionate, and capable hands.

From all of us at the Lions Eye Institute: thank you. Thank you for your trust, your belief in research, and your continued commitment to a future where no one must face vision loss and impairment alone. Together, we are working toward a future of better vision for all.



McCusker Charitable Foundation commits \$1.25m to support glaucoma research



The Honourable Malcolm McCusker AC, KC, Mrs Tonya McCusker AM pictured with Professor Bill Morgan

We are delighted to announce a transformative new investment in glaucoma research, made possible by the McCusker Charitable Foundation, one of Western Australia's most respected philanthropic institutions.

The Foundation has pledged \$1.25 million over five years to support the McCusker Glaucoma Centre, a team of researchers, clinicians and scientists at the Lions Eye Institute with a proven track record of success in developing original scientific ideas into clinical practice. This research promises to protect the vision and provide long-lasting results for hundreds of thousands of glaucoma patients.

This generous funding will advance a game-changing project to optimise patient outcomes in glaucoma surgery using novel imaging of the conjunctival lymphatics – potentially transforming how this complex condition is managed worldwide.

Glaucoma affects over 80 million people globally and is the leading cause of irreversible blindness. Often progressing with little to no symptoms until significant damage has occurred, it is known as the "silent thief of sight." While modern surgical techniques can effectively reduce intraocular pressure, the long-term success of these procedures varies greatly from person to person.

At the Lions Eye Institute, our team is taking a new and promising approach, focusing on the lymphatic system of the eye, a critical but under-explored pathway for fluid drainage after surgery.



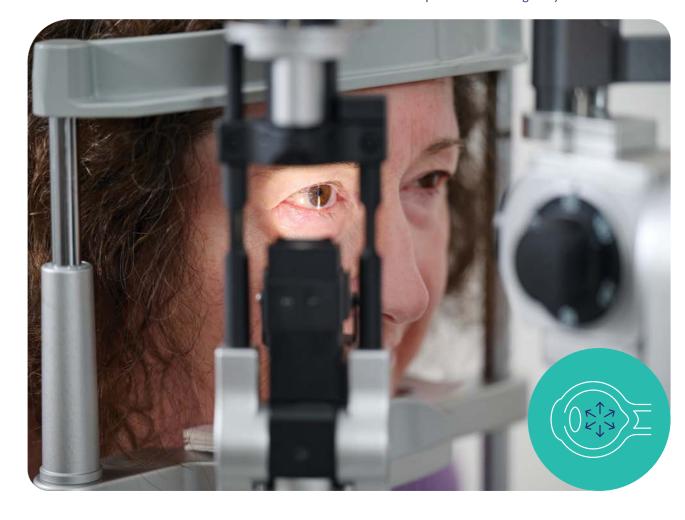
To the McCusker Charitable Foundation, and to every donor, advocate, and supporter who stands with us, we extend our heartfelt thanks. Your belief in the power of research and innovation makes our mission possible. **Together, we are building a world where better vision outcomes are not only possible, but within reach.**

The team of scientists and clinicians at the McCusker Glaucoma Centre has developed a bespoke, non-invasive imaging system capable of imaging the lymphatic capillary network. This system is a world-first and has the potential to dramatically improve success rates of all surgical procedures for glaucoma by providing greater accuracy for stent positioning. This could unlock a new era of personalised glaucoma care, where surgery is tailored to each patient's unique situation.

By understanding how lymphatic drainage pathways function, researchers hope to create surgical strategies that reduce complications, improve pressure control, and extend the longevity of surgical success. Furthermore, this imaging system provides a window to the lymphatic system which has implications for new discoveries in cardiovascular disease.

This investment comes at a critical time, as the burden of glaucoma continues to grow with Australia's ageing population. By funding pioneering research that explores new frontiers in ophthalmology, the McCusker Charitable Foundation is helping bring us closer to a future where no one loses their sight to preventable diseases.

Glaucoma patient Jill receiving an eye examination





Promising new treatments for children with Usher syndrome



The 2025 Leeuwin Lunch for Telethon brought together friends, supporters, and researchers for an inspiring afternoon, showcasing the powerful impact of community giving on life-changing medical research.



Guests were moved by a heartfelt update from Bronwyn, the devoted mother of two young boys living with Usher syndrome, a rare genetic condition that affects both hearing and vision. Bronwyn's story served as a poignant reminder of the urgent need for research-driven solutions for families navigating inherited diseases.

Thanks to the generous support of the Channel 7 Telethon Trust and Rhonda Wyllie, the Lions Eye Institute has been able to acquire a cuttingedge stem cell robot, a vital tool in the search for treatments that could save the sight of children like Bronwyn's.

Under the leadership of Associate Professor Fred Chen and Dr Samuel McLenachan, our research team has already made promising progress. Using this advanced medical device, their team has designed ten potential therapeutic compounds, with two showing early promise as viable treatments for Bronwyn's sons Eamon and Kealan.

This progress is not just scientific, it is deeply personal. For families like Bronwyn's, these breakthroughs represent hope where once there was doubt. They are tangible proof that community-driven research has the power to change lives.

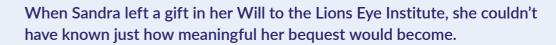
This important development was also recently covered by The West Australian, further amplifying public awareness of the Institute's work and the critical role donors play in advancing medical science.

The 2025 Leeuwin Lunch was more than a gathering, it was a powerful affirmation of what is possible when philanthropy meets purpose. From the donors who fund equipment and research, to the scientists who pursue new frontiers of knowledge, and the families who share their personal journeys, each plays a vital role in our collective mission.

Sandra's gift of sight A lasting legacy for future

A lasting legacy for future generations

55 She would be so proud to know she's helping future patients."



Fiercely independent, endlessly curious, and a lifelong lover of sport, Sandra lived her life with purpose, and that spirit continues through the impact of her generosity.

Sandra had a deep connection to the Lions Eye Institute as a patient living with macular degeneration, a progressive eye condition that gradually affects central vision. Despite the challenges it brought, Sandra was determined to stay engaged and independent. She embraced life with enthusiasm, whether it was watching her beloved Eagles, following the Perth Scorchers, cheering on Olympic athletes, or learning to use her iPad.

"She always had a thirst for knowledge and loved keeping up with the world," family member Geoffrey shared. "She never let anything hold her back."

Recently, Sandra's executors, cousins Stephen and Geoffrey, visited the Lions Eye Institute to see firsthand the impact of her bequest. They met with researcher Dr Jessica Mountford, whose team is among many at the Institute benefitting from a vital piece of research equipment, the Bioptigen OCT system, funded through Sandra's bequest.

This cutting-edge imaging technology is used across a wide range of vision research areas, from myopia and inherited retinal diseases to glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration. By enabling researchers to examine the eye in incredibly fine detail, it plays a key role in accelerating discoveries and the development of new treatments.

Sandra's gift has had an immediate impact," said Dr Mountford. "It's supporting research that could ultimately change lives for people with many different eye conditions."

For Sandra's family, the visit was moving, a moment to reflect not only on her life, but the ongoing contribution she's making to others.

"Knowing Sandra's donation is supporting the kind of research that will help people like her, just feels right," says family member, Geoffrey. "She would have loved this."

Gifts in Wills play a powerful role at the Lions Eye Institute. They allow us to invest in equipment and research that may otherwise be out of reach – helping to uncover new answers and improve lives.

If you're considering leaving a gift in your Will to the Lions Eye Institute, or would simply like to have a conversation about what's involved – we'd love to hear from you.

Because just like Sandra, your legacy could help unlock the next big breakthrough in eye health.

To learn more about leaving a gift in your Will, please contact Darren Nicholls by emailing darren.nicholls@lei.org.au or by calling his direct line on (08) 6382 0551.

Executors Stephen and Geoffrey with family members, Judy and Jodi



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The power of a gift

Sandra's legacy through research

Thanks to a generous bequest from the late Sandra Noni Gray, researchers at the Lions Eye Institute are harnessing the power of Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) to advance critical work in understanding and treating a wide range of vision-threatening conditions.



Personalised plaque on the Bioptigen OCT system

Helping Dr Jessica Mountford's myopia research

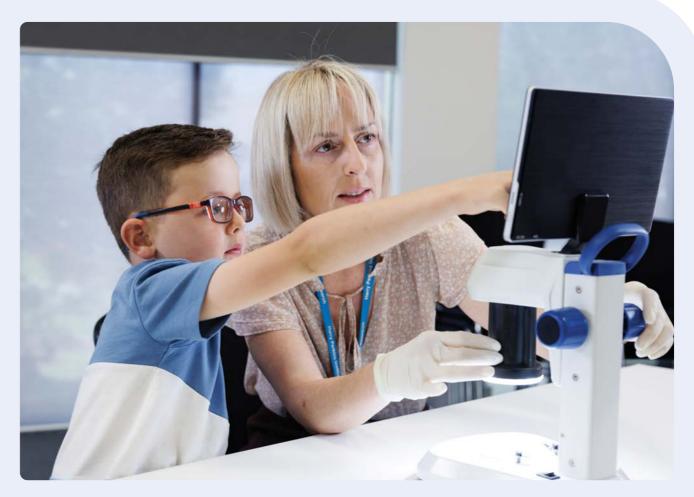
Dr Jessica Mountford and her team in the Functional Molecular Vision Lab are using OCT to explore the complex genetic mechanisms behind myopia. This high-resolution, non-invasive imaging technology allows them to visualise the internal structures of the developing eye in zebrafish larvae from as early as three days post-fertilisation.

"OCT provides us with precise measurements of eye dimensions, such as axial length and lens size, which are essential for understanding how the eye grows and why it sometimes grows abnormally," Dr Mountford explains. "It's a vital part of our screening platform for studying the genetic drivers of myopia."

With this advanced equipment, researchers can track emmetropization (the normal growth of the eye) and monitor how changes in specific genes influence the development and progression of myopia in living models. This work lays the foundation for future therapies to slow or prevent myopia in children.

Dr Jessica Mountford (left) at the zebrafish facility





Dr Jessica Mountford with Lions Eye Institute patient Angus

Supporting a broad range of groundbreaking research

While Dr Mountford's research is one compelling example, the benefits of Sandra's gift extend far beyond a single lab.

Originally introduced into ophthalmology in 1991, Optical Coherence Tomography has become an essential research tool. Thanks to Sandra's generous bequest, the Lions Eye Institute was able to acquire the Bioptigen OCT system, an advanced imaging device that directs low-intensity near-infrared light into the eye and captures the small amount reflected back. The result is a highly detailed, three-dimensional image showing fine structures of the retina, cornea, iris, lens and vitreous.

OCT's unique advantages – its non-invasive nature, exceptional resolution, and ability to detect

microscopic structural changes make it indispensable for studying a wide array of eye diseases.

At the Lions Eye Institute, **five research groups** now rely on OCT to investigate ocular conditions such as:

- Myopia
- Retinitis pigmentosa
- Stargardt disease
- Usher syndrome
- Glaucoma
- Inherited retinal diseases
- Age-related macular degeneration
- Drug delivery systems for novel treatments

"OCT allows us to visualise how the eye responds to genetic changes or therapeutic interventions," says Dr Mountford. "It's helping us push the boundaries of what's possible in eye research."

Thanks to Sandra Noni Gray's vision and generosity, this cutting-edge equipment is enabling discoveries that will ultimately improve, and preserve, sight for generations to come.





Your eyes might hold the key to catching cancer early

Ever thought about your eyes being a window to your overall body health?

The Lions Eye Institute has recently received grants from the Perth Eye Foundation and the Charlies Foundation for Research (through the Bright Ideas and Ray Florence Shaw grants) to further explore a novel ocular imaging approach using Optical Coherence Tomography (OCTA) to detect virtually every type of human cancer. This game-changing technology has the potential to transform healthcare delivery by providing an early, safe and non-invasive way to diagnose cancer.

As we continue to push the boundaries of medical innovation, the Lions Eye Institute is proud to be at the forefront of this groundbreaking project that has the potential to revolutionise the way we detect and diagnose solid organ cancers.

The problem is simple: solid organ cancers (such as ovarian cancer, lung cancer, breast cancer and prostate cancer) are one of the most common causes of death in Australia, and delay in diagnosis is a major factor in survival rates.

The current challenges in cancer screening include:

- There currently being no reliable screening tests for some cancers such as ovarian cancer
- The need for separate tests for different types of cancer
- Invasive diagnostic tests that are expensive, painful and often lack sensitivity
- Access to appropriate services

Our solution aims to address these issues head-on by developing a world-first single test that can detect multiple cancers using OCTA.

Almost every human cancer produces molecules known as growth factors. The team at the Lions Eye Institute has shown that these molecules can interact with blood vessels in the eye to cause them to proliferate, a process referred to as angiogenesis. Angiogenesis of the eye, therefore, serves as a biomarker for cancer.

By developing a clinical biomarker of solid organ cancers, we can not only improve patient outcomes but also provide significant benefits beyond cancer detection. This includes opening new lines of research in cancer biology, enabling in vivo monitoring of cancer therapy and aiding the development of new anti-angiogenesis treatments.

The team led by Professor Balaratnasingam and Associate Professor Paula Yu, is comprised of experts from ophthalmology, oncology and image analysis. As well as our own researchers from the Lions Eye Institute's Physiology and Pharmacology team, we are collaborating with Associate Professor Tarek Meniawy, a medical oncologist from Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and Dr Brendan Luu, who is undertaking a PhD thesis in cancer-induced retinal angiogenesis at The University of Western Australia.

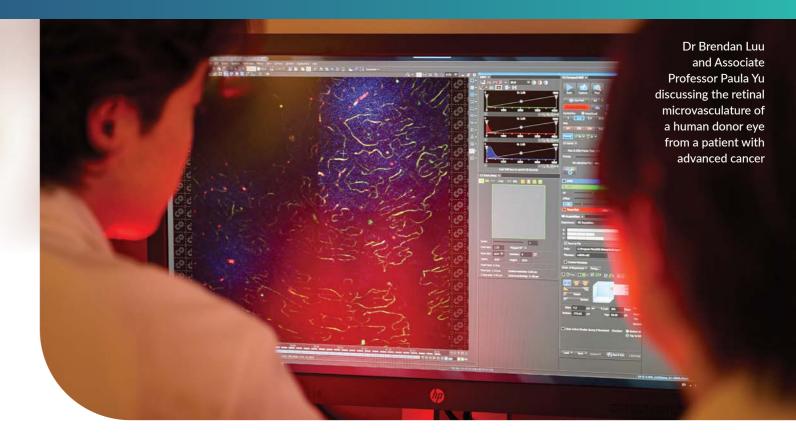
The grants will provide new scientific knowledge in the field of retinal angiogenesis, aid our understanding of retinal microvascular diseases, and validate a novel retinal imaging biomarker that will greatly enhance knowledge and assist clinical trials in oncology.



What is Angiogenesis?

Angiogenesis is the process your body uses to grow new blood vessels. It's a normal and important part of healing and growth. But in cancer, tumours can use angiogenesis to feed themselves and grow. That's why some treatments focus on stopping this process – to help slow or stop the cancer.

Image illustrating tumour angiogenesis, including growth factors (blue dots) that stimulate angiogenesis



The science behind our approach

Tumours in the human body fulfil their need for oxygen and nutrients by establishing new blood vessels, a process known as tumour angiogenesis. This allows tumours to sustain growth and facilitates their spread (metastasis) to distant organs in the body, by providing pathways for cancer cells to enter the circulation.

Research has shown that the concentration of growth factors in human blood is significantly elevated in people with cancer. The effects of growth factors on the tumour microenvironment are well understood, however the effect on more distant blood vessels in the body is less clear.

Our project will focus on the retinal microcirculation and we will recruit patients with systemic cancer and compare their retinal OCTA images with those of healthy people's eyes.

At its core, our approach uses OCTA to non-invasively image the retinal microcirculation, which is affected by cancer-induced growth factor elevations. This innovative imaging technique allows us to capture high-resolution images of the capillaries and vasculature in the retina, providing valuable insights into the physiological processes that occur in response to cancer.

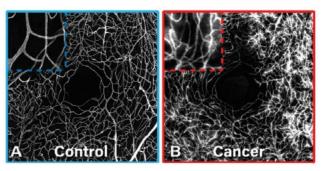
Our team has spent years refining our OCTA technique, and we are proud to have developed a method for detecting cancer-induced changes in the retinal microcirculation, which we are excited to further test and refine.

The journey ahead

We are grateful for the support of the Perth Eye Foundation and the Charlies Foundation for Research. This funding will enable us to take this project to the next level and bring it one step closer to becoming a reality.

These grants represent a significant milestone in our research journey and are an important foundation for what comes next. We plan to expand on this research by applying for further funding and collaborating with other experts in the field. Our ultimate goal is to bring this technology to the bedside, where it can be used to improve patient outcomes and save lives.

We are excited to see where this work will take us. With your continued support, we believe that this project has the potential to make a significant impact on the lives of cancer patients and their families.



OCTA images showing retinal vascular density and permeability are significantly increased in cancer patients



Spring 2025 vision News 15



Become a Sight Saver today

90%

of vision loss is preventable or treatable. Together we can be the solution.

By becoming a Sight Saver, and donating to the Lions Eye Institute each month, you can help uncover research breakthroughs, transform lives and give hope to people facing blindness and eye disease.

Sight Saver members receive:

- research updates
- · event invitations throughout the year
- a tax deductible receipt at the end of each financial year

Giving monthly allows the Lions Eye Institute to plan ahead for future sight saving research with the knowledge that your support is ongoing.

Setting up your regular donation is easy.

- You choose the donation amount.
- All donations are tax deductible and a receipt is sent automatically at the end of each financial year.
- You can opt out or change your donation amount at any time.

Please fill out the form below (indicating monthly payment) and return it to our reply paid address, or call Carolyn McAdam in fundraising on (08) 6382 0566 to set up your automatic monthly donation.

Yes I want to save sight

Please accept my donation of \$				
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I would be interested to learn more about how I can include the Lions Eye Institute in my Will.			Mail to:	
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We recognise the generosity of donors in materials such as our annual report and recognition hoards			Or call (08) 9381 0777	