

# Sight + Sound

THE EYE AND EAR NEWS SPRING 2025



## Hospital news

Celebrating 40 years of the  
Cochlear Implant Clinic

## Our people

Meet our Clinical Director of  
Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT)

## Patient chronicles

Ariel's story of hope  
and hearing

The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital is committed to achieving equality in health status between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Aboriginal Australians. We acknowledge that the land we meet and work upon is the traditional lands of the Kulin Nation. We value the diversity and strength of our people and communities.



2

Hospital  
news



4

The difference  
you make



6

Our  
people



7

Patient  
chronicles




↑ Brendon Gardner, CEO of the Eye and Ear, presenting Laureate Emeritus Professor Graeme Clark AC with a cochlear shaped shell to commemorate his contribution as the pioneer of the cochlear implant on the 40th anniversary of the Cochlear Implant Clinic and his 90th birthday.



↑ Baby Ariel, our cover girl, shortly after her first cochlear implant at 16 months old. Read her story on page 7.





“One of the highlights has been celebrating the 40th anniversary of our Cochlear Implant Clinic, where more than 5,000 people have received life-changing care.”

# Welcome to Sight + Sound

Welcome to the Spring edition of Sight + Sound. I'm delighted to share with you some of the incredible stories and milestones from the past six months at The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital (Eye and Ear) - made possible thanks to your generous support.

One of the highlights has been celebrating the 40th anniversary of our Cochlear Implant Clinic, where more than 5,000 people have received life-changing care. This milestone is a testament to decades of innovation, dedication, and the generosity of supporters like you.

In this edition, you'll read about the impact of your donations - funding state-of-the-art equipment and vital research that helps us deliver world-class treatment to every patient who walks through our doors.

September also marks *Include a Charity Week*, and we're honoured to share the story of Carryl, who first came to the hospital as an eight-year-old patient and has now chosen to leave a gift in her Will. Her story is a powerful reminder of how lasting legacies can shape the future of care.

We're also celebrating personal milestones, like Ariel, who has been with us since she was just four months old. Now eight, Ariel has “graduated” from the Cochlear Implant Clinic, with her hearing improving so much that she no longer needs speech pathology appointments. You can read her inspiring story on page 7.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Sight + Sound. Every achievement we celebrate is made possible by the kindness and commitment of people like you. Thank you for being part of our community and for helping us continue to care, innovate, and change lives.

Yours sincerely,



**Brendon Gardner**  
Chief Executive Officer

# Hospital news



## Donors attend Winter Tax Appeal event

In May, we were delighted to welcome some of our generous donors and bequestors to a special morning tea that brought our Winter Tax Appeal to life.

Guests heard from Melissa, whose daughter Ariel received her first cochlear implant at just 16 months old. Melissa shared their emotional journey – from diagnosis to the joy of seeing Ariel thrive. Today, Ariel plays the violin, dances, and attends school with her twin sister.

We also heard from John Fisher, a grateful patient who received his cochlear implant later in life and now volunteers at the Eye and Ear. The event featured insights from Dr Jaime Leigh, Acting Director of the Cochlear Implant Clinic, and Professor Stephen O'Leary, who shared exciting developments in cochlear implant research and demonstrated cochlear simulations in the Surgical Skills Lab.

To learn more about upcoming events, contact our Philanthropy and Fundraising team at 1800 808 137 or [fundraising@eyeandear.org.au](mailto:fundraising@eyeandear.org.au).

## Welcoming our new Board Chair

We are pleased to welcome Ms Melanie Eagle as the new Board Chair of the Eye and Ear. Melanie joined on 1 July, bringing extensive experience in governance, policy reform, and leadership across government, healthcare, and the not-for-profit sector.

We also extend our sincere thanks to outgoing Chair Dr Sherene Devanesen AM for her decade of outstanding leadership. Her vision and dedication have guided the Eye and Ear through a period of remarkable growth and innovation. We are deeply grateful for her service and lasting legacy.



↑ Donors and bequestors heard from Professor Stephen O'Leary and watched demonstrations of cochlear implant simulations in our Surgical Skills Lab.

↑ New Board Chair of the Eye and Ear, Melanie Eagle.





↑ Scott Smith, recipient of the 1st device manufactured for children and Hudson Steward (aged 6) who shares his birthday with Professor Clark.

## Celebrating 40 years of the Cochlear Implant Clinic

On 20 August, we marked a major milestone – 40 years since the establishment of the world's first public Cochlear Implant Clinic and the first-ever implantation of a multi-channel cochlear implant specifically designed for children.

Since its founding, the Clinic has transformed over 5,000 lives, and this event paid tribute to the impact cochlear implants have made for each of these people and their loved ones.

We were honoured to welcome Professor Graeme Clark AC, who delivered a special lecture in the week of his 90th birthday. The event commemorated the pioneering surgery he and Dr Robert Webb performed, implanting the first cochlear implant designed for children, which changed the lives of children with hearing loss around the world. It was a fitting tribute to the Clinic's legacy of innovation and Professor Clark's extraordinary contributions to hearing health.

## Support the Eye and Ear while you shop

Did you know your grocery shopping can support the Eye and Ear?

Through the Ritchies Community Benefit Program, every time you shop at Ritchies in Victoria, NSW, or Queensland, you can help raise funds for the hospital, at no extra cost to you!

It's easy to get involved:

- Download the Ritchies Card App from Google Play or the Apple Store, or pick up a physical card in-store
- Nominate 'The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital' as your chosen charity
- Shop and scan your card—0.5% of your spend goes to us!

Your support helps us continue delivering world-class care in eye and ear health.

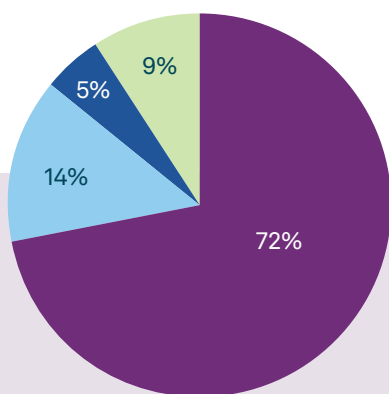
Download the Ritchies app!

**RITCHIES IGA**  
Where the Community Benefits

# The difference you make

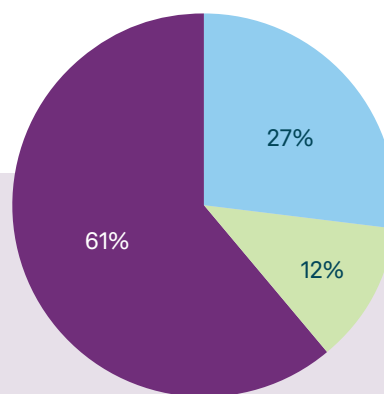
Here's a snapshot of what donated funds have been used for lately, and how your support is making a real difference.

**Where our funding came from (FY25)**



- Bequests
- Donations
- Estates
- Trust & foundations

**How the funding was spent (FY25)**



- The hospital's greatest needs
- Research
- Medical equipment

## Your gifts at work – a milestone year for philanthropy

Thanks to your generosity, the 2025 financial year was a milestone year for philanthropy at Eye and Ear. Together, we raised \$3.49 million - our highest philanthropic income in over six years. This incredible result reflects the trust and commitment of our donors. To each of you who contributed to this result: thank you for making it possible.

Our Winter Tax Appeal, inspired by Ariel's story - a young cochlear implant recipient - raised \$157,968, the highest appeal income in over a decade. Your support will help change more lives like Ariel's. (Read her story on page 7.)

# Thank you!

“We are extremely grateful for the generosity of those who donate to the hospital. Thanks to your donations, we have been able to purchase crucial equipment for our Peri-operative Suite. On behalf of our patients and staff, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to our donors.”



**Sinead Cucanic,**  
Director Surgical  
Services

## Medical equipment and research recently funded by donations



### Nerve Integrity Monitoring Systems

With support from the Muriel and Les Batten Foundation, we acquired two Nerve Integrity Monitoring Systems - essential tools in ENT surgeries that help locate facial nerves, reducing damage risk and improving outcomes for around 750 procedures annually.



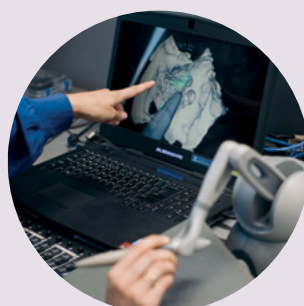
### Colour ultrasound scanner

A generous gift from Collier Charitable Fund enabled the purchase of a colour ultrasound scanner, vital for diagnosing Giant Cell Arteritis, an autoimmune disease that can cause blindness or become life-threatening. The scanner allows targeted biopsies, helping doctors confirm diagnoses quickly and begin treatment to protect patients' vision and health.



### Research into eye socket lesions

Thanks to donor Michael Halprin and an Eye and Ear research grant, Dr Thomas Hardy is investigating genetic links in orbital cavernous venous malformations - common eye socket lesions that especially impact middle-aged women and can lead to chronic pain and vision loss. This research could enable earlier diagnosis, better treatment, and reduced surgical risks, ultimately preserving vision and improving patients' quality of life.



### 2025 Research Grants awarded

In April, thanks to donor and bequestor support, we awarded 10 research grants to advance eye and ear health. Projects include gene therapy for glaucoma, cochlear implant mapping, and treatments for retinal detachment and hearing loss. This donor-funded research is driving innovation and improving patient outcomes across key specialties.

# Our people

The heart of the Eye and Ear: Meet Associate Professor Jean-Marc Gerard



Associate Professor Jean-Marc Gerard is Clinical Director of Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) Services and Head of the Otology Unit at the Eye and Ear. Originally from Belgium, he moved to Melbourne after leading Otology at the Cleveland Clinic in Abu Dhabi and heading the Otology and Neurotology Department at the University Hospital Saint-Luc in Brussels.

Jean-Marc oversees surgical and outpatient ENT services, drives clinical strategy, supports research and innovation and ensures patients receive exceptional care. He also mentors staff and helps shape the future of ENT services at the hospital.

We sat down with Jean-Marc to learn what inspires him - both in and beyond his work.

“We've made incredible progress in hearing restoration in using cochlear implants but there are some new emerging therapies like drug, cell and gene therapy ready to be developed and tried.”

**Associate Professor Jean-Marc Gerard**

**Q: What inspired you to specialise in ENT medicine?**

A: My father was an ear surgeon, so I grew up around it - though I planned to choose a different path. But I fell in love with ear surgery during my ENT training. It's rewarding to restore the sense of hearing and improve quality of life on babies up to old patients. I initially started my training to do head and neck surgery, it's anatomically complex and beautiful to operate on.

**Q: Can you share a moment in your career that's stayed with you?**

A: I was once asked to remove the tonsils of a prominent UAE leader. Instead of operating on him, I ended up at his palace smoking a water pipe after proving that his symptoms were allergy-related.

**Q: What motivates you at work?**

A: Making patients and colleagues happy, and delivering efficient care using the latest technologies and clinical guidelines.

**Q: What was your childhood dream job?**

A: I wanted to be a pilot but had to do my mandatory military service before starting pilot training which I wasn't too keen on. I chose medicine - the longest course I could find - and by the time I graduated, military service was no longer required.

**Q: Your message to our donor community?**

A: We've made incredible progress in hearing restoration in using cochlear implants but there are some new emerging therapies like drug, cell and gene therapy ready to be developed and tried. With donor support, it will help to get the tools, people, and research to make it happen.



# Patient chronicles

## Ariel's journey: from silence to sound

Eight-year-old Ariel has spent much of her young life at the Eye and Ear - so much so that her family lovingly calls it their second home. Today, we're celebrating a remarkable milestone: Ariel's hearing has improved so significantly that she's being discharged from ongoing care.

Ariel was born profoundly deaf in both ears. Her diagnosis was life-changing, and her parents, Melissa and Charlie, found themselves navigating a new and uncertain world. "We spent so much time at the Eye and Ear with the Cochlear Implant Clinic team - I call them Ariel's A-team," Melissa shares. "They helped us every step of the way."

Ariel's journey was made even more complex by the discovery of very thin cochlear nerves - responsible for carrying sound signals from the inner ear to the brain. This condition can limit the effectiveness of cochlear implants, making her path to hearing even more challenging.

She was just four months old when she first came to us. Melissa recalls, "Denise, Ariel's speech pathologist, told me, 'We are guided by your instincts, and we're going to give her every chance.' That gave me hope."

At 16 months, Ariel underwent her first cochlear implant surgery, followed by a second a few months later. But surgery was only the beginning. For babies, learning to hear is a gradual process - introducing sound gently so they become curious rather than overwhelmed.

Our speech pathologists worked closely with Melissa and Charlie, helping them notice subtle signs that Ariel was responding to sound and encouraging them to reinforce those moments with love and positivity. At the time of her surgery, Ariel's hearing baseline was that of a newborn. Closing that gap took years of dedication, therapy, and trust.



"It's like a marathon," Melissa says. "You have to keep training the brain again and again. You have to have faith, but sometimes you wonder if it's really working. That's what the Eye and Ear does - it keeps working with you and for you, even when the odds are against you."

Today, Ariel plays the violin and swims like a mermaid. Her ability to hear music and maintain balance in the water, despite her hearing loss and middle ear issues, is a profound testament to her resilience and the care she received.

Ariel's story is one of courage, hope, and the power of expert care. We're honoured to have been part of her journey.

Thank you to every one of you who donated to our Winter Tax Appeal, which told Ariel's story and celebrated the important work of the Cochlear Implant Clinic. An incredible \$157,968 was donated - the highest appeal income we've seen in over a decade.

# Supporters in the spotlight

The people and partners contributing to our hospital

## Leaving a legacy with the Eye and Ear

For over 160 years, generous legacy gifts and bequests have helped the Eye and Ear invest in critical medical equipment, hospital redevelopment, and groundbreaking research to prevent vision and hearing loss. These gifts ensure we can continue providing high-quality care and treatment for generations to come.

*Include a Charity Week* (2–8 September) is a time to reflect on your Will and consider leaving a gift to a charity close to your heart - like the Eye and Ear.

One of our bequestors, Carryl, knows firsthand the life-changing impact of our care. As a child, she suffered from painfully swollen, itchy eyes and developed an ulcer on her right eye. Though the ulcer subsided after treatment at the Eye and Ear, her vision was permanently affected - she retains only 10% sight in that eye.

Years later, while studying law at university, Carryl's eye allergies flared up again. She returned to the Eye and Ear for treatment that helped preserve her remaining vision.

"I was able to finish my law degree, get a decent job, and contribute to the world," Carryl says.

"Even leaving a little bit in your Will makes a difference. It's easy to do, and you'll feel like you've contributed to something meaningful - not just to the hospital, but to the people it serves."

**Carryl, an Eye and Ear bequestor**

"It also meant the vision I still have is protected instead of deteriorating further."

When asked why she chose to include a gift to the Eye and Ear in her Will, Carryl shared:

"I never would have achieved what I have in life if my vision had been destroyed. The staff and services of the hospital improve the quality of people's lives. Even leaving a little bit in your Will makes a difference. It's easy to do, and you'll feel like you've contributed to something meaningful - not just to the hospital, but to the people it serves."





## Our volunteer – meet Sonia

In just 10 months, Sonia has become an integral part of the Eye and Ear community. Originally from the UK, Sonia moved to Melbourne with her Australian-born husband and began volunteering as a way to find her feet and connect with her new city.

“Both my in-laws have eye and ear issues, so this felt like the right place to volunteer,” Sonia shares. “Everyone is so friendly, and it’s nice to contribute and give something back.”

Sonia started on our Concierge desk, welcoming patients, providing directions, and supporting families and visitors. She now makes thank-you calls to donors - a role she finds deeply rewarding. “People just want to talk, and it gives them time to connect. They’re often surprised to get a call. Many are former patients and share stories about how wonderful the care was here.”

Her advice to anyone considering volunteering at the Eye and Ear? “Don’t hesitate - just do it. We all have different skillsets, and I’ve met some wonderful people here with infectious energy who’ve become my go-to. For someone like me, in the gap between retiring or semi-retiring, you can fill your time helping with purpose.”

To find out more about how you can become a volunteer at the Eye and Ear, contact the Volunteer Coordinator on 9929 8658.

# In your words

Here’s what some of our donors told us recently about why they support the hospital:

**“I was a patient - Dr McCombe saved my eyesight.”**

Carolyn

**“This is my second visit and my treatment and procedures were outstanding. Very friendly, polite and professional. Big thumbs up!”**

Noelene

**“I was once treated at your centre - a bone (fish) was stuck in my throat - you saved my life!”**

Eva

**“Fantastic service from start to finish. Such a pleasure to know we have such a top class, professional and compassionate health system.”**

Marcel



# YES, I would like to give the gift of Sight + Sound by donating today.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Donor ID (If known): \_\_\_\_\_

Please tell us what motivated you to give  
or email us at [fundraising@eyeandear.org.au](mailto:fundraising@eyeandear.org.au)

Please accept my once-off donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

OR, I wish to make a monthly gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

via: (please tick) ☐ MasterCard ☐ Money order

☐ VISA ☐ Cheque  
(payable to The  
Royal Victorian Eye  
and Ear Hospital)

Card no: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Cardholder's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Please email my receipt

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*You can view our Philanthropy and Fundraising Privacy Statement online at <https://eyeandear.org.au/philanthropy-and-fundraising-privacy-statement>.*

ABN 81 863 814 677

## Ways to donate:



Please tear off this coupon and  
return in the reply paid envelope.



<https://donate.eyeandear.org.au/>  
or scan the QR code.



Call us on 1800 808 137 to make a  
payment over the phone.



Donate via the cashier in the main  
hospital foyer.



Please send me information about including  
a gift to the Eye and Ear in my Will.



I have already included a gift to the  
Eye and Ear in my Will.

All donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible.



I do not wish to receive further communication  
from The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital.





Give  
the gift  
of Sight +  
Sound




### **The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital**


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Cover photo: Ariel, cochlear implant recipient.  
Photo taken by Photobat.

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<https://eyeandear.org.au/philanthropy-and-fundraising-privacy-statement>.

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Sight + Sound is published bi-annually. ©The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital. September 2025.

ABN 81 863 814 677