

Sight + Sound

THE EYE AND EAR NEWS SPRING 2026



Hospital news

World-first eye cancer breakthrough. Geoff's sight-saving story.

Our people

Research powered by the people. Donors funding tomorrow's discoveries.

Patient chronicles

From patient to passionate supporter. Turning gratitude into lasting impact.

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



↑ Celebrating our volunteers during National Volunteer Week.



↑ Jacqueline Boxshall, Nurse Unit Manager and Charles Pillay, Theatre Technician.



“To everyone who gives their time, shares their story, volunteers, donates or leaves a gift in their Will – thank you.”

Welcome to Sight + Sound

In this edition of Sight + Sound, we celebrate both the big and seemingly small moments that define who we are as a hospital. From pioneering medical breakthroughs that are shaping better treatments for eye cancer, to quieter moments like a volunteer's warm welcome or a reassuring conversation with a family from one of our nurses, this edition celebrates the people who make the Eye and Ear such a special place.

You'll meet Geoff, whose story inspired an incredible response to our Winter Tax Appeal, helping ensure more patients can benefit from world-leading research and innovative treatments. You'll also meet Kaye, whose own experience as a patient led her to become a regular donor. Her story is a wonderful reminder that every contribution, no matter the size, helps build a healthier future for our community.

We recognise our own Emeritus Professor Richard Dowell AO for a lifetime of achievements that have transformed hearing care around the world. We congratulate our Patient Experience Award recipients, whose compassion has left a lasting impression on patients and families.

And we thank our volunteers, whose kindness and generosity continue to make every visit to the hospital a little easier.

To everyone who gives their time, shares their story, volunteers, donates or leaves a gift in their Will – thank you.

Your generosity is helping us deliver world-class care today while investing in the breakthroughs of tomorrow. Most importantly, it is giving hope to thousands of Victorians facing the prospect of losing their sight or hearing.

Thank you for being such an important part of the Eye and Ear community.

Yours sincerely,



Brendon Gardner
Chief Executive Officer

Hospital news



Donors hear the story behind a world-first breakthrough

This winter, supporters gathered for a special morning tea to hear from Geoff, whose extraordinary journey is inspiring hope for people facing eye cancer.

After a stroke left Geoff without sight in one eye, he was diagnosed with cancer in his remaining eye, facing the prospect of losing his vision completely. Thanks to a treatment breakthrough, Geoff became the first person in the world to receive a new therapy that helped save his sight.

Guests also heard from Dr Rod O'Day, who shared how international collaboration brought this innovative treatment to the Eye and Ear and what it could mean for thousands of patients. Geoff's story is a powerful reminder of what's possible when research, clinical expertise and community support come together. Read more on page 7.

To learn more about upcoming supporter events, contact our Philanthropy and Fundraising team at 1800 808 137 or fundraising@eyeandear.org.au.



King's Birthday Honour

Congratulations to Emeritus Professor Richard Dowell AO, who was recognised in this year's King's Birthday Honours for his distinguished service to audiology, cochlear implant development and tertiary education.

As a key member of Emeritus Professor Graeme Clark AC's pioneering team, Professor Dowell helped develop the multi-channel cochlear implant and was a founding member of the Eye and Ear's Cochlear Implant Clinic—the world's first public clinic of its kind.

His work has transformed the lives of countless people who are deaf or hard of hearing, while mentoring generations of audiologists who continue that legacy today.

- ↖ Donors attend our special morning tea, hearing about world-first breakthroughs.
- ↗ Emeritus Professor Richard Dowell AO (right) with his patient Scott Smith (left) who was the first child to receive a cochlear implant designed for children.

A warm welcome to Kate, our new philanthropy director

The Eye and Ear is delighted to welcome Kate Halford as our new Director of Philanthropy and Fundraising. Since joining the hospital, Kate has enjoyed meeting many of our generous supporters and hearing the personal stories behind their connection to the Eye and Ear.

"I've been inspired by the passion of our donor community," Kate said.

"Together with our clinicians, researchers and staff, I look forward to helping ensure more Victorians can access the world-leading care they need, now and into the future."



- ↓ Julia Marcon accepting her award from Executive Director Operations and Chief Nursing Officer, Leanne Turner.



Patient Experience Awards

Often it is the small moments in healthcare that stay with patients forever - a reassuring conversation, a thoughtful gesture or someone who takes the time to listen.

Our 2026 Patient Experience Awards celebrate those moments by recognising staff who have made an exceptional difference through the eyes of patients and carers. What makes these awards unique is that nominations come directly from patient feedback throughout the year.

Congratulations to Senior Otolaryngologist Associate Professor Jean-Marc Gerard, Emergency Nurse Julia Marcon and Inpatient Nurse Mya Michael. Thank you for the compassion, respect and kindness you bring to every patient and family you care for.

- ↓ Brooke Walker (Eye and Ear Emergency Nurse and proud Wonnarua, Gringai woman), Natalie Tieri (Mirring Ba Wirring), Kiernan Ironfield (Darug man and professional Yidaki player) and Carleen Miller (Mirring Ba Wirring).



Reconciliation at the Eye and Ear

National Reconciliation Week provided an opportunity to pause, listen and reflect on this year's theme, *All In*.

At the Eye and Ear, reconciliation means building stronger partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and delivering culturally safe care that improves health outcomes.

Staff learned about the Baagon Walert Walert project and its message of healing, connection and respect, while Darug man Kiernan Ironfield shared the cultural significance of the Yidaki and its enduring connection to Country, ceremony and healing.

- ✓ Our beautiful volunteers celebrating their special week.



Celebrating National Volunteer Week

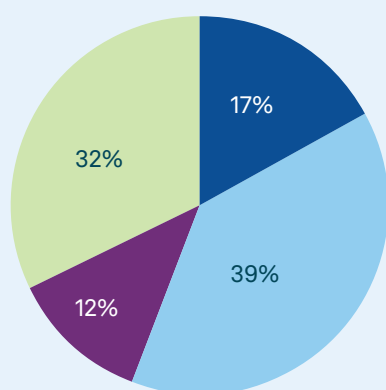
Whether offering directions, a friendly conversation or reassurance during a difficult day, our volunteers help make every visit to the Eye and Ear a little easier.

During National Volunteer Week, patients and hospital staff came together to thank the remarkable people who generously give their time to support others.

To every volunteer, thank you. Your kindness, compassion and welcoming smile make a lasting difference to patients and families when they need it most.

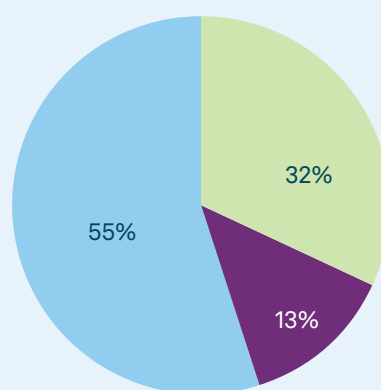
The difference you make

Your generosity continues to make a real difference at the Eye and Ear. Thanks to the support of our donor community, we raised more than \$1.2 million in the last 12 months to help fund world-leading patient care, vital medical equipment and research. We are deeply grateful for your support. The graphs below show where our funding came from and how it was invested to improve outcomes for patients.



Where our funding came from (FY26)

- Donations
- Bequests
- Trust and foundations
- Estates



How the funding was spent (FY26)

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



New operating table for surgery patients

Earlier this year, the hospital purchased a new state-of-the-art Denyer XRT5000 operating table. This was made possible by generous funding from the Joe White Bequest. It forms part of a modernised fleet of operating tables supporting around 12,000 eye and ear surgeries each year. The new table makes a huge difference to patient comfort and safety, allowing staff to position patients more effectively during surgery. With less manual positioning of patients, staff are also facing less strain and lower injury risk.

For nearly four decades, the Joe White Bequest has played an integral role in modernising our equipment and advancing specialist eye and ear care for Victorians.

← Jacqueline Boxshall, Nurse Unit Manager and Charles Pillay, Theatre Technician.

“We are sincerely grateful for the generosity of those who donate to support clinical research conducted by our hospital staff. Thanks to the support of donors, this vital work can continue to improve patient care and treatment options while helping researchers develop new knowledge that shapes the future of eye and ear health.”



Dr Birinder Giddey, Executive Director Medical Services and Chief Medical Officer

Donor support fuels the next generation of research

Thanks to the generosity of our donor community, the Eye and Ear has announced the recipients of the 2026 Eye and Ear Research Grants.

Made possible through gifts from individuals and generous bequests, these grants help researchers pursue innovative projects that have the potential to improve diagnosis, treatment and outcomes for patients with eye and ear conditions.

This year's funding round attracted an exceptionally high standard of applications, reflecting the strength of research across the Eye and Ear. The grants support projects that will generate valuable evidence and lay the groundwork for future breakthroughs.

We are grateful to the many supporters who have chosen to invest in research. Their generosity is helping clinicians and researchers answer important questions, explore new treatments and advance care for future generations.

The 2026 Research Project Grant recipients are:

- Associate Professor Jwu Jin Khong: Investigating ex-vivo activity of immunotherapeutics in the treatment of thyroid eye disease
- Professor Stephen O'Leary: Perilymphatic Sampling in Cochlear Implants
- Dr Marc Sarossy: Improving Diagnostic Accuracy in Ethambutol and Linezolid Toxic Optic Neuropathy
- Dr Laura Ross: Predictors of Irreversible Vision Loss in Giant Cell Arteritis: A Cohort Study at The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital
- Drs Brendon Lee, Joshua Meyerov, Milton Louca and Elsie Chan: Ocular Trauma in Australia: Epidemiology, Visual and Surgical Outcomes, Prognostic Factors and Economic Costs from The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Trauma Registry

Congratulations to all recipients. We look forward to sharing the progress and impact of these projects with our supporters in the years ahead. Your support continues to make groundbreaking research at the Eye and Ear possible.

Thank you

Our people

This edition, we're looking back at some of the people who built the Eye and Ear and created the strong legacy we carry forward today.

A life of service – Bessie McPhail

Nurse Bessie McPhail was born in 1875 in Inverness, Scotland, and arrived in Australia with her family when she was still a child.

Bessie enlisted with the Australian Army Nursing Service in 1916, serving overseas during the First World War. Across Scotland, England, France and Alexandria, she cared for those affected by war before returning home in 1919. For her service, she was awarded the 1914–15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Her commitment to caring for others continued long after the war. Before joining the Eye and Ear in 1927, Bessie worked at Anzac House, supporting returned soldiers living with severe disabilities.

When the Second World War created new challenges, the hospital once again looked to Bessie to lead. She stepped into the role of Acting Matron as more nurses enlisted and left to support soldiers, as she herself had done decades earlier. From 1940 to 1945, she guided the hospital through a period of uncertainty, providing steady leadership until 1945.

Bessie retired soon afterwards, having devoted 18 years to the Eye and Ear. Her story is a reminder that the history of our hospital is shaped by people whose compassion, resilience and sense of duty extended far beyond its walls.

As we reflect on the people who built the Eye and Ear's legacy, Bessie McPhail stands as an enduring example of service to her country and the generations of patients who benefited from her care.



➤ Bessie McPhail. Photo © www.vwma.org.au

➔ The Eye and Ear in the 1940's.

Patient chronicles

Behind every breakthrough is a patient whose life has been transformed. Thanks to the support of our generous donor community, the Eye and Ear continues to pioneer new treatments and deliver world-leading care when patients need it most.

Geoff's story inspires hope

After losing the sight in his left eye following a stroke, Geoff was dealt another devastating blow. During a follow-up appointment at the Eye and Ear, he was diagnosed with melanoma, or eye cancer, in his remaining eye, the only eye he had left to see his family, including his 13 grandchildren.

"I was shattered," Geoff recalled. "My right eye was everything."

Faced with a large and aggressive tumour, Geoff's medical team looked beyond standard available treatments. Working with colleagues across Australia and drawing on emerging international research, they developed a new treatment approach that had never been used before. Geoff became the first person in the world to receive this groundbreaking therapy.

Months of intensive therapy followed. But the results were remarkable.

The tumour shrank by 90 per cent, making surgery possible and preserving Geoff's remaining vision. Today, his melanoma has stopped growing, and while he continues to attend regular check-ups, he is grateful for every moment he can still see the people he loves.

Geoff's story is a powerful reminder of what can happen when world-class clinicians, researchers and innovative treatments come together. It also highlights something equally important: breakthroughs like these don't happen in isolation.

They are made possible by a community of supporters who believe every patient deserves access to the very best care.

We're delighted to share that Geoff's story inspired an incredible response to our Winter Tax Appeal. Together, our generous supporters donated a record-breaking \$208,077 to help bring more life-changing research, pioneering treatments and compassionate care to people facing sight-threatening conditions.



To everyone who supported this year's appeal, thank you. Your generosity is helping transform today's research into tomorrow's treatments, ensuring more people can benefit from the world-leading care the Eye and Ear provides.

↑ Geoff during his treatment.

↓ Geoff with five of his 13 grandchildren.



Supporters in the spotlight

Kaye's connection to care

For Kaye, a routine visit to the optometrist turned out to be anything but routine.

Just days earlier, she had bumped the back of her head on a metal bar at the end of a bushwalk. Apart from briefly “seeing stars”, it seemed like nothing more than an amusing mishap. But during her eye check-up, her optometrist spotted a significant retinal tear and immediately referred her to the Eye and Ear's Emergency Department.

Over the following weeks, Kaye returned to the hospital four times as specialists worked to repair the tear and protect her sight.

“I was astounded by the uniqueness of the service and that it was available to the public,” Kaye says. “I felt I owed the hospital my support.”

She began making annual donations, but after retiring, she decided to become a regular giver.

“Regular giving made me much more systematic about my donations,” she says. “It's simple, and it makes me feel like I'm contributing to something worthwhile.”

For Kaye, giving regularly is about more than convenience. She believes ongoing donations help the hospital invest in opportunities that can make a lasting difference, from supporting research and innovation to helping staff continue learning and growing.

Being a regular donor has also given Kaye something she hadn't expected: a sense of belonging.

Through donor events, she's enjoyed meeting people from all walks of life who share a common desire to make a difference. “It's like being part of a community,” she says. “Everyone has their own connection to the Eye and Ear, but we're all supporting the same purpose.”

One event that particularly stayed with her was the hospital's staff awards.



“It gave me a real insight into the culture of the organisation,” Kaye says. “There was such genuine warmth and friendship in the room. You could see how much people valued and supported one another.”

As she settles into retirement, Kaye plans to continue giving each month.

“I'd encourage anyone who's thinking about becoming a regular giver to give it a go,” she says. “You don't have to make a huge donation. Small, regular gifts add up over time and help create a reliable source of support. It also feels good to know you're part of something that's making a real difference.”

Join Kaye and a special community of supporters who are helping to protect the sight and hearing of Victorians every single day.

Friends of the Eye and Ear

Friends of the Eye and Ear is our regular giving program. By becoming a Friend, your monthly donation will help prevent vision and hearing loss, support cutting-edge treatment and ensure world-class care for those who need it most.

Regular gifts provide the hospital with stability and confidence to plan ahead, allowing us to invest in the best possible care, equipment and research.

➤ Kaye Cleary, one of our Friends of the Eye and Ear.

In your words

Here's what some of our patients told us recently about their experience at the hospital:

"Very caring, patient and nothing was too much trouble. The can-do attitude of staff is superb, especially when we are not at our best."

Peter

"I was absolutely blown away by how fantastic and smooth the process was. The facility was very clean and the staff were exceptional. Thank you."

Rocio

"In every department I was treated with respect and professionalism. The staff and nurses and doctors gave me confidence and hope. Thank you so much."

Carol

"Magnificent facility with world-class services, staff and architecture. Very caring and professional. I am impressed with the treatment I received."

Christopher

Did you know?

- The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital is Australia's only specialist stand-alone hospital dedicated to eye, ear, nose and throat care.
- The Eye and Ear delivers more than half of Victoria's public eye surgery and, with our partners, all public cochlear implant services across the state.
- In 2025–26, the hospital provided more than 229,000 episodes of care, including:
 - 164,926 outpatient appointments
 - 47,543 emergency attendances
 - 17,522 inpatient admissions
- More than 100 specialist clinics diagnose, monitor and treat eye, ENT and balance disorders.
- Over 1,100 staff work at the Eye and Ear, including more than 400 medical specialists, 300 nurses and 100 allied health professionals.
- The Eye and Ear celebrated 160 years of caring for Victorians in 2023.
- The Eye and Ear is a founding member of the World Association of Eye Hospitals.
- Volunteers have been supporting patients since 1922—that's more than 100 years of dedicated service.
- More than 16,000 interpreter appointments were provided in 2024-2025, helping patients communicate in 89 different languages.

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

Please accept my once-off donation of \$ _____

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

via: (please tick) ☐ MasterCard

☐ VISA ☐ Cheque

Card no: _____

Expiry date: ____ / ____

Cardholder's name: _____

Signature: _____

☐ Please email my receipt

Privacy Statement: The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital respects your privacy and all information is treated in confidence.

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

Support the Eye and Ear

Donate

Your tax-deductible gift helps deliver vital care, treatment and research to prevent vision and hearing loss. Since 1863, we've been at the forefront of specialist eye, ear, nose and throat care. Your support helps us expand our impact into the future.



Leave a legacy with a gift in Will

For over 160 years, Gifts in Wills have helped the Eye and Ear advance patient care, research and treatment.

To learn how you can leave a lasting legacy visit <https://eyeandear.org.au/support-the-eye-and-ear/include-a-gift-to-the-eye-and-ear-in-your-will/> or call 1800 808 137.

Turn your shopping into support for the Eye and Ear

Turn your grocery shop into a donation. Simply join the Ritchies Community Benefit Program and nominate The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital. Every time you shop and scan, 0.5% of your spend is donated to support the hospital, at no extra cost to you.

Download the Ritchies Card App or pick up a card in store, choose the Eye and Ear as your charity, then shop and scan.



Enjoy big savings while supporting the hospital

An Entertainment Membership gives you access to valuable offers on dining, shopping and experiences while supporting the hospital. Best of all, 20% of every membership purchased is donated directly to the Eye and Ear. Find out more at <https://eyeandear.org.au/support-the-eye-and-ear/entertainment-membership/>



Phone: 1800 808 137
Email: fundraising@eyeandear.org.au

32 Gisborne Street
East Melbourne
Victoria 3002

eyeandear.org.au

- TheRoyalVictorianEyeandEarHospital
- @EyeandEarHosp
- royal-victorian-eye-&-ear-hospital

The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital respects your privacy and all information is treated in confidence.

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

If you do not wish to receive further mailings, please phone 1800 808 137.

Sight + Sound is published bi-annually.
©The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital.
August 2026. ABN 81 863 814 677