



MEDIA RELEASE

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## Macular Disease Foundation Australia awards \$600,000 to researchers on World Sight Day

MDFA has awarded a further \$600,000 to three leading researchers in a prestigious event held at Admiralty House, the Governor-General of Australia's residence in Sydney, on World Sight Day (10 October).

The successful recipients of MDFA's Research Grants Program, which aims to reduce the incidence and impact of macular disease, were announced by His Excellency the Honourable David Hurley, Governor-General of Australia.

Macular disease is the country's leading cause of blindness and severe vision loss, affecting over 1.7 million people. MDFA has committed \$4.2 million to cutting-edge research since the program's launch in 2011.

"We are excited to be investing in three very different and equally important projects - all of which are making valuable contributions to tackling macular disease," said the MDFA's CEO, Dee Hopkins.

"This year one of our researchers is focusing on diabetic retinopathy (DR) and diabetic macular edema (DME) in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Diabetes-related vision loss is around five times higher among Indigenous Australians, so it's vital that we investigate the science, impact and mitigation of inequity and disadvantage."

Grants were also awarded to research investigating the potential for scar-less wound healing in age-related macular degeneration (AMD) patients, and new methods for improving detection and monitoring of the disease using optical coherence tomography (OCT). Program applicants are subjected to a rigorous evaluation process based on that of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), as well as international peer review.

MDFA is the leading not-for-profit organisation funding macular disease research in Australia.

Grant recipient	Research details
Professor Alex Brown  Aboriginal Health Equity Theme, South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute	<b>Project title:</b> <i>Defining the Risk and Epidemiology of Aboriginal Australian Macular Disease: The DREAM Project</i>  This research aims to advance understanding of the underlying social, psychological, environmental, behavioural, clinical, biological and metabolomic risk factors of diabetic retinopathy (DR) and diabetic macular oedema (DMO) among Aboriginal people. <b>CONT...</b>

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<p>Dr Audra Shadforth</p> <p>School of Environment and Science, Griffith University and Queensland Eye Institute</p>	<p><b>Project title:</b> <i>Investigating the potential for scar-less wound healing in age-related macular degeneration</i></p> <p>Late-stage AMD includes the development of sub-retinal fibrosis, and nearly half of eyes treated with anti-VEGF injections develop blinding scars within two years of treatment. This research will investigate the cells and mechanisms responsible for scar tissue formation under the macula, using emergent technologies and important clues from studies on human tissues capable of regenerative healing. This study aims to inform the development of new, sustainable treatments for AMD patients.</p>
<p>Dr Zhichao Wu</p> <p>Centre for Eye Research Australia</p>	<p><b>Project title:</b> <i>Novel prognostic imaging biomarkers for improved risk stratification in the early stages of age-related macular degeneration</i></p> <p>This research aims to investigate better methods for detecting and monitoring AMD using optical coherence tomography (OCT), an imaging technique, and artificial intelligence. The study will obtain imaging from 200 participants with intermediate AMD, which will inform clinical practice.</p>

### **Macular Disease Foundation Australia (MDFA)**

MDFA is the national peak body for macular disease. It is a not-for-profit organisation that promotes awareness, provides education and support services, and conducts and supports research, in addition to advocating in the best interests of patients, their families and carers.

### **MDFA Research Grants Program**

MDFA is a leading funder of research into macular disease. Since establishing its grants program in 2011, MDFA has committed \$4.2 million to 18 Australian researchers and 21 projects.

### **Macular disease**

Macular disease covers a range of conditions that affect the central retina (the macula) at the back of the eye. Macular disease can affect reading, driving and facial recognition, as well as the ability to carry out critical daily activities and see colours clearly. It is the leading cause of blindness and severe vision loss in Australia, where the two most common macular conditions are age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and diabetic retinopathy (DR), including diabetic macular edema (DME).

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