

Spring 2026



Burnet
reach for the many

Thanks to You



Healthy ageing breakthroughs • 40 years of impact • Meet our supporters

Message from the CEO

The people behind our progress



It's now 40 years since the launch of the Macfarlane Burnet Institute for Medical Research, an institution founded on the belief that advances in medical research must reach the lives of the people who need them most.

That belief still drives us today. And if there is one thing we've learned, it's that progress depends on people – the lab-based researchers who explore difficult questions; the fieldworkers who know their communities; and the people like you, who choose to stand beside them.

This spring edition of *Thanks to You* celebrates some of those people.

You'll meet Dr Fredrick Charles, our Papua New Guinea Country Director, whose commitment to improving healthcare began as a child watching his mother work as a midwife in rural PNG.

You'll also meet some remarkable supporters: Tino Vescovi, whose lifelong fascination with understanding how things work – including his own health – sparked an interest in our healthy ageing research; and Audrey and Michael Wilson, whose support for Burnet grew from more than 20 years living, working and raising a family in PNG.

Their stories are a wonderful reminder that generosity can be motivated by curiosity, experience, trust, compassion; or by the simple, heartfelt desire to help and give back to others.

That spirit was evident in the outstanding response to our end-of-financial-year appeal, which raised more than \$200,000 for healthy ageing research. And it will be at the heart of Australia's inaugural Medical Research Giving Day in September – a time for people across the country to celebrate the extraordinary contribution medical research makes to all our lives.

In this issue, we also remember our much-missed colleague Dr Rob Center and honour his decision to remember Burnet with a gift in his Will. His gift will establish the annual Robert Center Awards, helping emerging researchers to develop their careers – a cause close to Rob's heart.

Across all these stories, I see the same spirit and values that have sustained Burnet for 40 years.

This is who we are: researchers, health workers, partners, collaborators, donors, colleagues and communities. And you.

Thank you for being part of Burnet's story – and for helping us strive for a more equitable world through better health.

Professor Brendan Crabb AC
Director and CEO

Thank you for helping us to support everyone to live longer and healthier lives

When we launched our campaign to support Dr Raffi Gugasyan's work on inflammageing (low-level inflammation that shapes how we age), we hoped you would share our belief that this research could open up new opportunities for people to live stronger, healthier lives as they age.

And you did! Thanks to generous donors like you, we raised over \$200,000 to advance this groundbreaking project – and we can't thank you enough.

We are especially grateful to our generous supporter Jenny T, who pledged to match the first \$50,000 donated by our community with a gift of her own. Thanks to your extraordinary response, that milestone was reached in just two weeks – unlocking Jenny's gift, doubling the impact of every dollar given, and creating incredible momentum for the campaign.

Already, your contributions are supporting our talented researchers and funding the laboratory equipment and data access they need to continue their research into inflammageing.

As Raffi reminds us, "We tend to think of ageing as something that happens later in life, but the biological processes that drive it begin much, much earlier."

By understanding those changes, researchers hope to find new ways to prevent disease before it develops, improve quality of life over time, and help more people remain healthy, active and independent as they grow older.

In other words, you're helping change what it means to grow old – so that more of us can continue living the lives we love as we age.



Image: Dr Raffi Gugasyan, Head, Diagnostic Markers and Chronic Immune Disorders.

From everyone at Burnet Institute – and especially Raffi and his team – thank you for believing in this research. We hope you'll enjoy this special thankyou message from Raffi, where he explains how your support is making a difference.

To watch a message of thanks from Raffi visit bit.ly/Raffithankyou or scan the QR code.





Dr Fredrick Charles: in his mother's footsteps

Burnet's PNG Country Director is helping bring quality healthcare to communities across Papua New Guinea.

Whether he's working in the Burnet offices in Port Moresby or on the road to some of Papua New Guinea's most remote communities, Dr Fredrick Charles begins each day with the same question: how can he and his team help more people access the healthcare they need to live healthier lives?

It's a sense of purpose that began taking shape long before he became a doctor. Growing up in rural PNG, he watched his mother, a midwife, care for women in labour without even basic resources, including electricity. Those early experiences inspired a lifelong commitment to bringing quality healthcare within reach of every community.

Today, as Burnet's PNG Country Director, Dr Charles is putting that commitment into practice across a wide range of priorities.

One of the most significant has been tackling drug-resistant tuberculosis (TB). In partnership with PNG's National Tuberculosis Program, the TB Alliance and the Australian Government, Burnet has helped introduce a new treatment regimen at two pilot sites. The all-oral BPAL/M regimen reduces treatment time from 18 months



to just six – a breakthrough that is making treatment easier to complete and helping people return to their families, their work and their communities sooner.

"Eventually, we would like to see the treatment expanded to all provinces in Papua New Guinea," says Dr Charles.

Images top and above: Improving quality care for mothers and babies is a top priority for Dr Charles and his team in PNG.

Burnet's PNG Country Director, Dr Fredrick Charles.



And the work doesn't stop there. Tuberculosis will remain a major focus, but Dr Charles and his team also have an ambitious vision for the years ahead: expanding into new provinces, strengthening community-based TB and HIV services, improving care for mothers and babies, developing youth-friendly health services, and advancing efforts to reduce malaria and dengue.

The recent resurgence of polio in parts of Papua New Guinea has reinforced why this work matters. Strong health systems don't just respond to outbreaks – they help prevent them.

“

With strong government leadership, community engagement and partner support, we can make PNG polio-free again,” Dr Charles told ABC Radio's Pacific Beat program.

It's work made possible by people like you, who choose to stand alongside Papua New Guinea, not only in moments of crisis, but in the steadfast work of building stronger health systems that will prevent the crises before they begin and serve generations to come.



To learn more about how Burnet is supporting Papua New Guinea in rolling out new treatment for drug resistant tuberculosis visit bit.ly/BurnetbacksPNG or scan the QR code.



Images top and above: Shorter, simpler treatment is changing the outlook for people with drug-resistant tuberculosis in PNG. Dr Charles and his team in PNG have an ambitious vision for the years ahead to strengthen community-based TB and HIV services.

A matter of trust: why Audrey and Michael Wilson back Burnet

The Wilson family's support for Burnet is built on decades of experience in Papua New Guinea – and confidence in the people leading the work.

When Audrey and Michael Wilson married, they didn't have much time for a honeymoon. Instead, just two weeks later, they boarded a plane for Kano in the hot, dry north-east of Nigeria to teach at a boys' high school.

"We heard a BBC broadcast saying that Nigeria desperately needed teachers, so we thought, 'Oh, that would be a good thing to do,'" Audrey recalls. "So, we finished our first year of teaching, and we trotted off there right after we got married."

After seven years in Nigeria, and the birth of their first child, the Wilsons traded the arid lands of West Africa for the blue of the Pacific, taking up teaching positions at the University of Papua New Guinea; Michael in education and Audrey in chemistry.

"Michael's old professor from London University contacted us and said, 'There's a job that's just right for you in Port Moresby. Why don't you go and do that?' – so we did!"

For the next two decades, PNG was home – and the couple dedicated themselves to teaching an emerging generation of scientists, teachers and leaders. Along the way, their family of three grew into a family of five. At Port Moresby International High School, the Wilsons' youngest son, Andrew, befriended a fellow student by the name of Brendan Crabb – now Burnet's Director and CEO.

"Andrew used to sit beside Brendan and copy his chemistry – or so he tells me," laughs Audrey.

Decades later, it was Brendan's deep, personal understanding of Papua New Guinea that gave Audrey the confidence to become a regular Burnet donor.



Image: Audrey and Michael Wilson and their two children.

"I trust the people that work at Burnet," she says. "I trust them to do the things that are really worth doing, for the people that need it."

After their children finished high school, Audrey and Michael settled in Australia, working at the University of Wollongong until their retirement. Knowing all too well that many PNG families still miss out on the healthcare they need, they recently deepened their commitment to Burnet's health and research programs supporting women and children in Papua New Guinea.

"We haven't ever done anything that pays masses of money," Audrey says. "But giving is just what you do, isn't it? You can't live well yourself and not be helping others."

For the Wilsons, generosity has never been an exceptional choice. It's just how life should be lived.

Donor story

Looking in the right direction

After decades of exploring his own health challenges, Tino Vescovi found a kindred spirit in Dr Raffi Gugasyan and his research into healthy ageing.

There is a moment from childhood that Valentino Vescovi – known to friends and family as Tino – will never forget.

He had arrived in Australia from Italy with his family just weeks before and grappled with the unfamiliar language. Then one afternoon, walking home from his schoolhouse in Victoria's Central Highlands, he suddenly realised he had been thinking in English. English!

The joy of that breakthrough never left him. As a student, Tino was always at his happiest exploring how things worked and searching for new and better ways of doing things. After completing a master's degree in science, he built a successful career in electronics research and development.

Tino was born in a small village in the mountains to the north of Venice during World War II, and at the age of two, contracted diphtheria.

"For a couple of weeks, I was teetering between life and death. They didn't know if I was going to make it," he recalls. "As you can imagine, there weren't many doctors around. All my Mum could do was pray."

Tino survived, but the illness left him with damaged lungs, chronic bronchitis and, later, decades of debilitating migraines, following a course of powerful antibiotics.

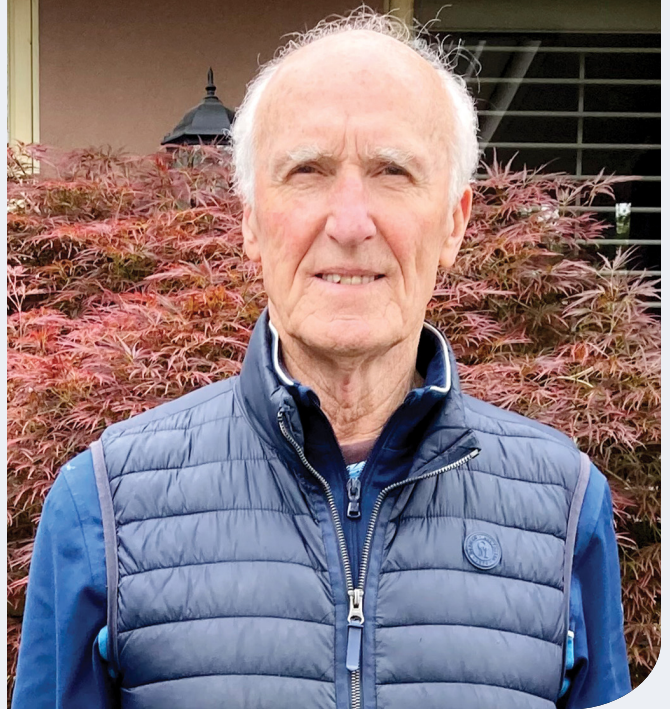


Image: At 84 years young, Tino knows just how important it is to keep his body healthy.

In his 50s, he made changes to his diet, including taking a probiotic to help restore his gut health. Within days, his migraines ceased, and he has not had one since. He says the changes left him feeling healthier, more energetic and less prone to illness.

It's little wonder, then, that Burnet's research into inflammageing, led by Dr Raffi Gugasyan, caught Tino's attention. Rather than accepting declining health as an inevitable part of ageing, Raffi and his team are exploring how changes in the immune system contribute to age-related illness, with the aim of helping more people stay healthier for longer.

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"As you can imagine, there weren't many doctors around. All my Mum could do was pray."

To Tino, those are questions worth asking – and he was quick to make a contribution to Burnet's healthy ageing research.

"Raffi is saying the immune system is critical, and we need to better understand how it works," he says, animated by the similarities between his own health experiences and the knowledge being gathered by the Burnet team. "He's looking in the right direction."



Forty years, built together

Long-time Burnet donor and retired trust manager Margaret has always believed you can learn a lot about an organisation from its people.

It was something she first thought about when looking for a care home for her mother. Rather than judging places by their buildings or facilities, she talked to the people who worked there. How long had they stayed? Were they happy? Did they care about what they were doing?

Years later, as a guest at a Burnet International Women's Day lunch, Margaret found herself noticing the same things as she chatted with Institute staff around the table.

"The people ... have been here for so long, and they're so passionate about what they do," she says. "People are proud to work here, and happy to stay."

As Burnet celebrates its 40th anniversary, Margaret's reflections are a reminder of what has sustained the Institute from the beginning: a shared sense of purpose and a community of people committed to making a difference.

Burnet was established in the 1980s, when the scientific, social and political challenges of the HIV epidemic seemed almost overwhelming.

In response, Professor Ian Gust, then leading the virology laboratory at Fairfield Hospital, proposed an independent medical research institute that would reach beyond the laboratory to tackle complex public health challenges, ensuring the benefits of research reached the people who needed them most no matter how much they earned, where they lived or their cultural background.

Over the next four decades, generations of researchers and health leaders have dedicated themselves to that vision. Alongside them have been the donors – people from across Australia and around the world who have formed their own enduring relationships with Burnet.

For retired microbiologist and donor Elizabeth, it's always been about seeing research put to work.

Image above: Following Sir Macfarlane Burnet's death in 1985, the fledgling institute was named in his honour, officially launching as the Macfarlane Burnet Centre for Medical Research.

"Some institutes do research and then you don't quite know what happens," she says. "Burnet does the good research but then applies it."

Andrea and Leigh were drawn to Burnet for much the same reason. Their support for the decade-long Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies program reflects their belief that research takes time and patience and should lead to real-world change.

“

We know there's a really high chance that the research we're funding will have real impact," says Leigh. "Not just another citation, but lives being saved."

After years of connection with Burnet, donors Chris and Laurie have named the Institute as one of the major beneficiaries of their estate.

"The organisation is so well managed and the people who are doing the managing are so good at their jobs," says Laurie, who spent most of his life working in finance. "It gives us a lot of confidence that this organisation is really worth supporting."

Forty years is a significant milestone for the Institute, built on the individual commitments of Margaret, Elizabeth, Leigh, Andrea, Chris, Laurie – and countless others. Whether you've supported Burnet for decades or have only just joined us, thank you for being part of those 40 years.



Margaret Parker, long-time Burnet donor and trust manager.

To hear more reflections from the supporters who have been part of the Burnet journey, watch this special 40th anniversary video: <https://bit.ly/4rmVgG8>.



40 | YEARS OF
IMPACT
1986-2026

In 2026, we're celebrating 40 years of global impact and innovation as a leading health and medical research institute. Since 1986, we've worked to address emerging and existing health needs, always with health equity at the forefront. Our legacy has been built by you – our valued supporters – our people, communities and partners, who work together to turn research into real-world health outcomes. We're building on our legacy of discovery to delivery over the past four decades and moving forward to renewed momentum and purpose for our next 40 years, because while we have achieved a lot, there is so much more to do.

Rob Center's lasting gift to the next generation

Dr Rob Center, who passed away in July 2025, was a deeply respected leader and colleague at Burnet and left a lasting impression on many peers, students and early-career researchers across the Institute.

Beyond his scientific achievements, he was known for his generosity, collaborative spirit, willingness to share knowledge, and commitment to supporting and mentoring others.

Reflecting the type of man he was, Rob left a generous gift in his Will to Burnet. To honour his work and life, the annual **Robert Center Awards** have now been established.

The awards will support emerging members of the Burnet community across our Life Sciences, Public Health and International Development programs, helping talented individuals progress their careers in much the same spirit that Rob supported others throughout his own.

Rob's family have given their full support, and feel these awards truly reflect his deep personal commitment to training emerging scientists – something he was passionate about and thoroughly enjoyed.

Please contact bequests@burnet.edu.au or call Bronwyn on 0412 871 919 if you'd like to know more about leaving a legacy that matters.



Image: Dr Rob Center, a respected Burnet researcher and mentor whose legacy will support generations to come.



What inspires you?

We really enjoy hearing from our supporters – the stories of how and why you first came to support us are so varied and interesting. If you'd like to be featured in an upcoming edition of *Thanks to You*, we'd love to hear from you.

Please get in touch via giving@burnet.edu.au

A life well lived; a legacy that continues

Ted Deering lived an extraordinary 100 years. A long life, marked by a generosity that extends well beyond his own lifetime.

Ted made his first gift to Burnet Institute in 1993, and this commitment remained important to him throughout his life.

In his final wishes, Ted expressed two things that mattered deeply to him. To be buried alongside his parents, and to support medical research.

There is something very special about these wishes. One speaks to the enduring importance of family and the people who shaped his life. The other looks to the future – to discoveries yet to be



Image: Ted Deering's remarkable life spanned 100 years, and his generosity will reach far beyond it.

made, lives yet to be changed, and the possibility of a healthier world for generations to come.

Ted's recent bequest to Burnet is now part of that future.

We are deeply grateful for his commitment to medical research, from his first gift more than 30 years ago, to his final act of generosity.

His life may have spanned a century. His legacy has the potential to reach far beyond it.

Make your Will. Protect what matters.

Having a Will in place is one of the most important things you can do for the people and causes you care about, providing peace of mind and ensuring your wishes are known.

Creating your Will is simple and can be done online, in your own time, with support along the way. Once you've provided for those closest to you, you may also wish to consider leaving a gift in your Will to Burnet. Your gift, whatever its size, can help fund life-changing medical research and public health programs, helping create a better, fairer and healthier world for generations to come.

For more information visit safewill.com/burnet or scan the QR code.



Our 2026 Supporter Connection Survey is coming soon

Keep an eye on your inbox or letterbox for your opportunity to share your thoughts and help shape how we stay connected with you.

Your feedback helps us understand what matters most to our supporters, so we can continue sharing the stories, research and updates that are most meaningful to you.

We'd love to hear from you.

**Burnet
Supporter
Connection
Survey**

2026



Thank you for your commitment to providing better healthcare for all. It is through your dedication and generosity that Burnet's researchers can create accessible health solutions for people locally and across the world.

I'm inviting you to fill out this supporter survey now, even if you've previously completed one. Your views still matter to us.

We'd like to learn more about you and why you support Burnet's work to ensure no-one is left behind.

Your answers will help us to share stories and updates that are more meaningful to you. They also give great encouragement to our staff by reminding them that caring supporters like you are standing beside them.

Please complete the survey and return it to me in the reply-paid envelope provided by **Friday 13 November 2026** or scan the QR code to fill in the survey online.

Thank you for your kindness and support.



Professor Brendan Crabb AC
Director and CEO



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Overseas

Burnet has offices in Papua New Guinea, Myanmar and Vanuatu, and also contributes to research and public health programs in many other countries across Asia, the Pacific, Africa, Europe, and North America.



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