Sydney
Children's
Hospitals
Foundation

Sydney Children's Hospitals Foundation

Impact Report

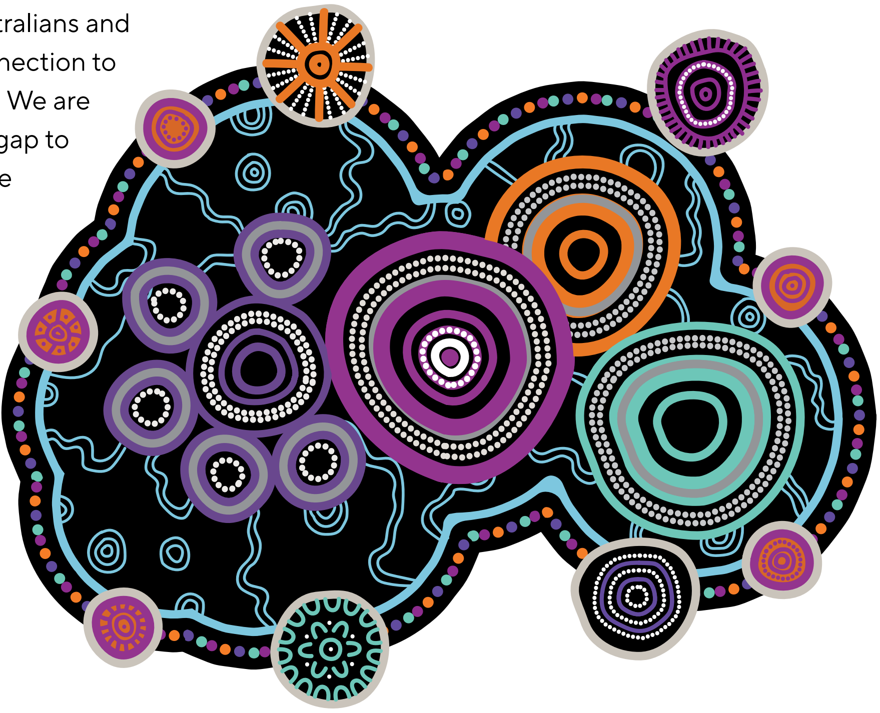
FY25

All in for kids' health

We are the Movement of Many, different people from all walks of life. With one foot at the frontline and one in the future, we're here for those who deserve our all. To help all sick kids, no matter where, no matter what.

Acknowledgment of First Australians

Sydney Children's Hospitals Foundation (SCHF) acknowledges First Australians and recognises their continuous connection to country, community and culture. We are committed to helping close the gap to achieve equality in health and life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



"In Unity We Heal."
Artwork by David Williams of Gilimbaa.

Front cover photo: Artaban, 17 years old, trauma.

Contents

Our FY25 impact ambassadors

Meet Roza

When one-year-old Roza was rushed to Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick (SCH) after a sudden seizure, her tiny body was battling the perfect storm of infections – COVID, parainfluenza, enterovirus and adenovirus all at once.

Roza was critically ill. While doctors and nurses worked tirelessly to keep her alive, a social worker stayed by her mums, Clodagh and Hayley, offering comfort through the longest hours of their lives. At one point, Roza had to be manually ventilated on five occasions.

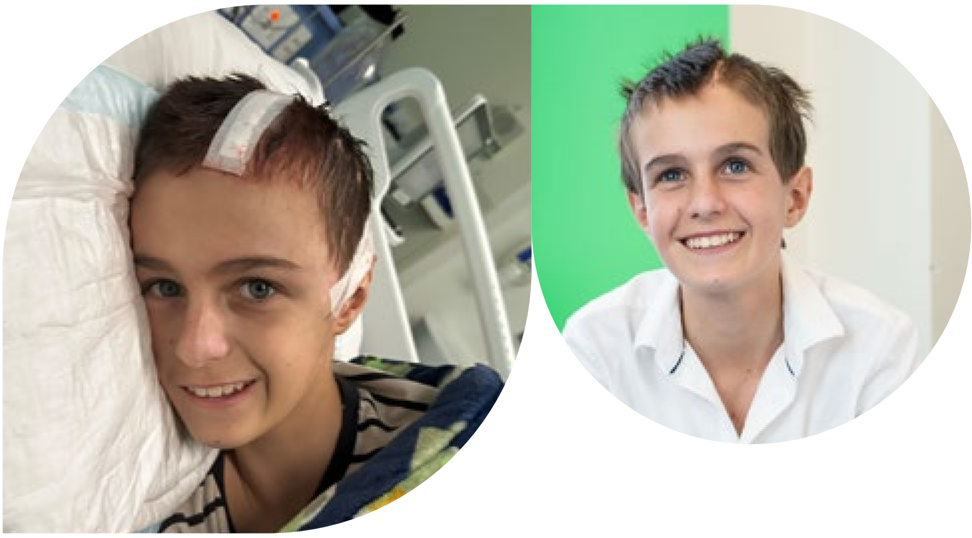
A coordinated team of 15-20 paediatric specialists moved quickly and decisively – emergency physicians, Intensive Care Unit (ICU) nurses, anaesthetists, respiratory staff – all working in perfect sync to stabilise Roza during those critical moments.

World-class simulation training had prepared the team to respond under extreme pressure, giving Roza the best chance when every second counted.

When Roza finally woke up, she opened her eyes and asked for a strawberry - a moment her mums will never forget.

Now home and thriving, Roza is full of energy and joy. Clodagh and Hayley have since run the City2Surf in support of SCHF to give back for the care that saved their beautiful daughter’s life, a meaningful way to connect with the place and the people who helped bring Roza home.

Learn more about the Learning Health Initiative supporting more effective management of respiratory infections (page 38).



Meet Artaban

When 14-year-old Artaban fell 15 metres from a cliff, his parents were told he might not make it through the night. His injuries were so severe that one nurse described him as “the sickest child I have ever looked after from a traumatic injury point of view.”

That first night alone, Artaban underwent six surgeries, with multiple teams at SCH working side by side to save him. In the weeks that followed, specialists from across the hospital rallied. It was true wraparound care: each team bringing their unique expertise to give Artaban the best chance of survival.

For weeks, Artaban’s parents lived in the ICU, held up by the kindness of staff who cared for them as much as for their son. Then, on Christmas Eve, came what felt like a miracle - Artaban opened his eyes and spoke.

Little by little, Artaban recovered and his parents were thrilled to see their boy gradually come back to them. Less than three months later, he walked out of hospital.

Today, Artaban is back at school, swimming and smiling, a living reminder of the extraordinary care that saved him.

Learn more about the new critical care spaces at Sydney Children’s Hospital, Randwick and The Children’s Hospital at Westmead, where clinical excellence meets family-focused care (page 28).

A message from our CEO

Together, we are changing the future for sick kids.

As we reflect on FY25, I want to begin with heartfelt gratitude. Thank you to our incredible community of donors, supporters and volunteers for your unwavering commitment to improving the lives of sick kids and their families, not just today, but for generations to come.

Because of your generosity, SCHF proudly contributed more than $50 million to the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network (SCHN) this year. This extraordinary support is helping to deliver world-class care, accelerate research, and create better experiences for children and families across NSW and beyond.

FY25 marked a significant step forward in paediatric healthcare, with construction nearing completion on the two major redevelopments at the Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick (SCH) and The Children's Hospital at Westmead (CHW). These projects reflect what is possible when government, philanthropy and community come together to invest in the future of sick kids.

At Randwick, the new building has just opened to families, featuring expanded emergency and intensive care services, a neurosciences centre, and the Minderoo Children's Comprehensive Cancer Centre. At Westmead, the new Paediatric Services Building will bring together critical care, cancer services and inclusive spaces designed to support healing and connection. These hospitals are built to deliver the best care possible, foster collaboration across specialties and accelerate research that will change lives.

Importantly, we are reaching further than ever before. With your support, SCHF is helping ensure that sick kids in rural and regional communities receive the care they deserve — no matter where they live.

Your impact is transformational.

This year, your generosity has changed the trajectory of kids' health. Together, you contributed over $27 million to deliver world-class clinical care, funding the expertise of leading clinicians, state-of-the-art equipment, and purpose-built facilities that give every child the best chance to thrive.

Because of you, specialised care reaches further than ever before. Programs like the Joint Outreach Burns Service can now deliver expert burns treatment to children anywhere across NSW, ensuring distance is never a barrier to recovery.

And through your support, Mounties Care Cottage, NSW's second paediatric palliative care hospice, is becoming a reality, bringing compassion and comfort to families in Western Sydney and beyond.

Your $16+ million investment in research is shaping the future of medicine. Thanks to you, researchers across the SCHN are accelerating discoveries, improving access to proven therapies, and pioneering bold new treatments, including Australian-first innovations like the E2CAR T-cell therapy trial.

Finally, your $6+ million commitment to patient and family experience has touched every corner of the Network. You've supported child life therapists and SCHF's renowned Art Program, nurturing physical healing, emotional resilience, and moments of joy for more than 168,000 children this year.

Because of your leadership, children and families across NSW are receiving care that is not only world-class, but world changing.

Looking ahead, we remain focused on future readiness. Through the Sydney Sick Kids Fund, we are investing in new models of care, breakthrough research, and clinical excellence that will transform paediatric healthcare for generations to come.

Your support will deliver long-term impact by funding the best paediatric clinical care, transformative research, and positive patient and family experiences, ensuring every child has access to the care they need, when they need it.

To our community of donors, supporters and volunteers, thank you for being unstoppable changemakers. Your belief in our mission is helping countless families across NSW, Australia and beyond.

Every gift, every hour of support, and every act of generosity is building a brighter, healthier future for sick kids. Thank you for being part of this incredible journey.

Kristina Keneally

The Hon. Kristina Keneally

Chief Executive Officer
Sydney Children's Hospitals Foundation

A message from the Network

Advancing excellence in paediatric healthcare.

Sydney Children's Hospitals Network remains committed to excellence in children's health and doing better for patients, families and staff each and every day. This commitment is aligned with the Foundation's vision to ensure every sick child receives the best possible care, now and into the future.

This year marked the near completion of one of the most significant redevelopment programs in the Network's history, with two new purpose-built hospital buildings. These facilities represent a bold leap forward in the way care is delivered, co-locating research and clinical services to provide integrated and comprehensive care.

Each space has been thoughtfully designed to place patients and families at the heart of the experience—creating environments that bring comfort, normality, and connection to everyday life, even during the most challenging times. The redevelopment also reflects our investment in clinical excellence, ensuring our people have world-class facilities to support their extraordinary work.

Philanthropy has been an important part of this transformation. At Westmead, the new chronic and complex care centre is reimagining care for these children and families. It will enable integrated and coordinated care centred on the child and their family. At Randwick, the Minderoo Children's Comprehensive Cancer Centre will be the first such centre in Australia bringing new possibilities in childhood cancer care with advanced treatment, cutting-edge research, and holistic support under one roof. These are examples of what is possible through the generosity of donors alongside government, and what can be achieved when compassion meets innovation.

Continued philanthropic investment enables us to build on our achievements and elevate the care we deliver. **With the support of SCHF, we are preparing for the future — advancing new models of care, breakthrough research, and a culture of excellence that will shape the next generation of health for all children and young people**.

I extend my sincere thanks to the Foundation for supporting us in realising our purpose: to help children and young people live their healthiest lives.

Cathryn Cox

Cathryn Cox PSM

Chief Executive
Sydney Children's Hospitals Network

An artist's impression of the redevelopment at The Children's Hospital at Westmead.

An artist's impression of the new Bilima building at Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick.

Children's Centre for Transplantation and Research

More than

$2.8 million

to establish the Children's Centre for Transplantation and Research to improve the lives of children who need a transplant to survive, prevent organ rejection, and eventually make transplants unnecessary.

Critical care

More than

$3 million

for specialist critical care equipment, training, and staff for two hospitals and a statewide specialist emergency transport service.

Redevelopment

$13.2 million

to support new patient and family spaces, research facilities, and specialist centres for complex and integrated care.

Oncology

Almost

$8.5 million

to deliver the best care for kids at every stage of the cancer journey, and research and clinical trials to deliver better outcomes for kids with cancer.

Fellowships

More than

$4.2 million

to support the best minds in paediatric health to develop their clinical subspecialties and research skills, helping to develop a highly skilled paediatric workforce to drive transformation in kids' health.

Advanced Therapeutics

Almost

$1 million

to support world-leading scientists and clinicians to develop and deliver revolutionary treatments for children with rare and genetic conditions.

Clinical trials

More than

$4.3 million

to support essential technology and capability to conduct world-class clinical trials.

Imaging and radiology

More than

$2.2 million

to purchase and install a state-of-the-art MRI machine for faster, quieter, and clearer scans.

Neurology and neuroscience

Almost

$1 million

to support research and care to improve the future for children with neurological conditions, including rare conditions.

SCHF in review

FY25 Snapshot

Child life, music, and art therapy

Almost

$800,000

for staff, programs, and equipment to empower children receiving care to engage and connect through art, music and play.

Hospitals United for Sick Kids (HUSK)

More than

$1.1 million

for HUSK foundation partners, helping sick kids around Australia get back to the things they miss most.

Respiratory and sleep medicine

More than

$500,000

for research and specialist equipment to improve care for kids with respiratory conditions like cystic fibrosis.

Priority populations

More than

$800,000

for programs to meet the needs of patients and families from Aboriginal, refugee, and non-English speaking backgrounds.

Neonatology and newborn

More than

$750,000

for specialist neonatal equipment including ECGs and Babytherms, and research to ensure the best outcomes for the tiniest babies.

Palliative care

More than

$2.8 million

to support children and families receiving end-of-life care, and a commitment to support a hospice in Western Sydney.

Surgery and anaesthetics

More than

$750,000

for specialist surgical equipment and expertise to deliver better outcomes for kids.

Kids Research

More than

$1.7 million

for research collaborations.

Movement of Many

More than

$700,000

value of volunteer hours.

In **FY25**
Sydney Children's Hospitals Foundation contributed
more than

$50 million

to the frontline and future of kids' health.

Theory of Change

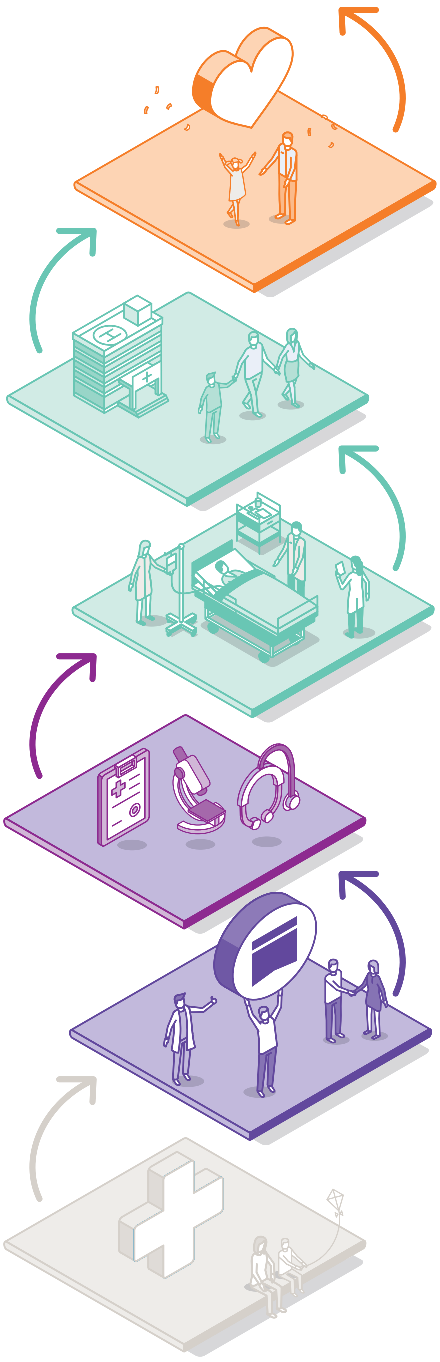
Powering transformative change in children's health

Our Theory of Change demonstrates how your generosity fuels bold, lasting improvements in paediatric healthcare. Your support helps elevate care from excellent to extraordinary — expanding its reach, deepening its impact, and ensuring more children benefit from the very best.

Through the programs we fund across Sydney Children's Hospitals Network and beyond, your donations drive innovation, accelerate research, and expand access to world-class, patient- and family-centred care. Together, we're not just responding to urgent needs — we're transforming the future of children's health and wellbeing to ensure every child receives the best possible care, when and where they need it.

Thank you for everything you do to change the future for sick kids.

Our impact: Every child receives the best possible healthcare, when and where they need it.



To ensure children have

- The best possible care
- Improved healthcare equity
- Improved health outcomes
- A positive patient experience with their families
- Improved wellbeing with their families.

So that children and their families

- Have improved access to the best paediatric healthcare
- Have improved access to new and / or improved treatments
- Benefit from faster translation of research into practice
- Are more able to 'cope', feel supported and content.

Enabling

- State-of-the-art equipment, procedures, and technology
- Reduced barriers to care
- More opportunities for the best talent in child health
- Clinicians and researchers to pursue breakthrough research
- A caring environment where children are positively engaged
- Physical and emotional support for children and families.

We fund

- The best paediatric clinical care
- Transformative research
- Positive patient and family experiences.

Through the Movement of Many

- Our growing community of over 70,000 philanthropists, supporters, friends and partners collaborate to drive transformation in children's health.

The situation

- Existing funding doesn't cover the groundbreaking projects and research needed to transform children's healthcare
- Without SCHF and the generous changemakers we work with, some children will be left without the care that they deserve.

Children will continue to get sick with illnesses, injuries and conditions that require medical treatment, and hospital experiences can be traumatic. Paediatric medicine is rapidly evolving, offering a brighter future for many children. **Philanthropy is needed to make great healthcare excellent.**

Clinical care snapshot

$27+ million to improve access to the best paediatric healthcare

Photo: Zayn, three years old, organ transplants.

Two ambulances for NETS, fully fitted with a paediatric life support system.

Multidisciplinary and holistic care for children with gastrointestinal conditions.

Food services dietitian to design menus and approaches for delivering nutritious food kids actually want to eat at the time they want it.

Physiotherapists, occupational therapists, pharmacists, dietitians, social workers, clinical psychologists, genetic counsellors and other **allied health professionals supporting the holistic needs** of children and families in hospital.

Ventilators for use at home so children and infants with severe breathing difficulties can safely breathe through a mask while they sleep.

Specialist hand therapy program to deliver faster, expert care to kids with hand injuries and get them back to the things they love sooner.

Specialised equipment and training for the **critical care Simulation Program**, to upskill clinicians specialising in critical or urgent care.

Visual field machine to measure peripheral vision for children with brain tumours, glaucoma, optic nerve disease, vision loss and retinal dystrophies faster and more accurately, making testing easier for younger children and children with conditions such as autism and ADHD.

Specialist training for multidisciplinary burns care teams from around NSW.

Three Aboriginal population health trainee positions, to support culturally safe care for Aboriginal families and capacity building across SCHN.

Specialist equipment for the intensive care unit to **prevent injury to the brain and other organs** for kids undergoing lifesaving procedures.

Australia's first endoscopic orbital Base of Skull Service (BOSS) workshop, advancing surgical expertise by simulating real-life surgery required for tumours in difficult-to-access sites.

Ultrasonic bone scalpel to precisely cut bone while protecting surrounding soft tissues and nerves for less invasive surgical procedures.

Specialist oncology nurses to provide expert care for kids with specific needs including brain tumours, long-term side effects, and outreach in rural and regional areas.

Clinical fellowships in speciality areas including cardiology, epilepsy, emergency services, critical care, surgery, and nephrology **to develop the next generation of paediatric specialists.**

Specialised equipment and personnel to establish **Australia's first paediatric facility accredited to test for minimal residual disease** in Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia, meaning kids have access to fast and reliable testing to guide their treatment plans.

Bringing joy back to the table: powering fresh meals across the Network

Paediatric dietitian Sheridan Collins has a passion for making nutritious food a positive, joyful experience. With more than 20 years' experience at Sydney Children's Hospitals Network, Sheridan is now bringing her expertise and love of cooking to drive transformational change in the way hospital meals are experienced.

As a Network nutrition support dietitian, Sheridan's role – thanks to funding from generous donor support—is to make sure every child receives nutritionally balanced meals that are not only healthy, but food they actually want to eat.

To design a menu that truly meets the needs of kids in hospital, she consulted with hundreds of families and staff, listening closely to what they want from hospital foods. Based on their feedback, including taste tests, Sheridan worked collaboratively with HealthShare NSW and Network dietitians to create a menu that balances comforting, familiar favourites with nourishment like fresh fruit and vegetables. It's food that feels good and does good, especially when kids aren't feeling their best.

While many kids enjoy a choice of pizzas, burgers, cheese toasties and burrito bowls in hospital, others appreciate options such as congee, flatbreads and hummus.

"I want children in hospital to really look forward to mealtimes as a highlight of their day," says Sheridan.

With the opening of the first dedicated paediatric kitchen at Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick, parents and carers can order meals closer to the time they are prepared, on their phone or via the hospital's engagement device.

Each item can be ordered individually, hot plated for improved quality control, and crafted not only to match medical requirements but also to what, and how much, children actually feel like eating on the day.

More than 80 therapeutic diets are built into the system for children with complex needs such as epilepsy, allergies, metabolic conditions or cystic fibrosis. Age-appropriate textures support toddlers to develop feeding skills, while nutrient-dense options support the needs of growing adolescents.

The changes give children a sense of choice, allowing them to pick foods they enjoy, and making the hospital feel more comforting during long stays.

Small touches like serving meals on real crockery with child-sized cutlery also help make mealtimes feel more like home.

Sheridan has seen firsthand the difference this makes: "The joy on a child's face when their meal is exactly what they wanted—it might seem small, but it's powerful. Food is something every child can look forward to."

OUTCOMES

→ **A caring environment where children are positively engaged**

→ **Children and families experience fewer barriers to accessing care**

> "Children have different needs to adults, and we need to be providing food that helps children grow and develop their feeding skills, building healthy eating habits that can positively impact on their life in the future."
>
> - Sheridan Collins, Network nutrition support dietitian.

Sheridan's top tips for parents to keep the positivity during mealtimes:

- Create a happy environment around food.
- Offer a range of fresh healthy foods with a variety of colours and textures.
- Offer foods that children can pick up and eat themselves.
- Present food in an attractive way.
- Eat with your child and allow them to select what they like from what you offer.

The impact of NETS is both far reaching and deeply personal because while the service spans hundreds of hospitals and thousands of kilometres, for each family, it's about one child, one moment and the expert team that showed up for them with the support of our generous donors.

Photo: Brothers Cooper (L) and Koby (R) were both cared for by NETS.

Critical care on call: How NETS keeps NSW kids safe

In FY25, thanks to the incredible generosity of our donor community, two new Newborn and paediatric Emergency Transport Service (NETS) ambulances and paediatric life support systems were purchased, bringing life-saving care to critically ill babies and children across NSW.

These are no ordinary ambulances. Custom designed by the NETS team, each vehicle is a mobile intensive care unit, fitted with highly specialised equipment including ventilators, monitors, infusion pumps and compact defibrillators — everything needed to deliver and maintain critical care to the littlest patients on the move, on the road or in the air.

When a newborn or child in regional NSW needs urgent, specialist care, time is everything. That's where NETS comes in, working as a specialist service that brings an 'ICU with no walls' to wherever it's needed, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

NETS is the statewide emergency service for critically ill babies and children needing transfer to a tertiary paediatric centre. Serving more than 250 hospitals across NSW, ACT and beyond, NETS bridges the distance between a child in crisis and the life-saving care they need.

With only 10 hospitals in NSW providing neonatal intensive care, and just three providing paediatric intensive care, for many families, the fastest path to expert care is for that care to come to them. Clinicians call NETS directly and are instantly connected to a specialist nurse coordinator and critical care physician through statewide hospital cameras. With real-time audio-visual support, the NETS team can see the child and hear from the clinician on the ground about what the situation is, and guide urgent care on the spot, often beginning intensive care with the local team before the child even leaves their local hospital.

NETS receives around 23 calls a day, with 13 resulting in retrieval. On average, for every 10 calls, six require an emergency retrieval team (travelling by NETS ambulance or by aircraft for longer distances), two are managed locally with NETS support and moved by other services such as Ambulance NSW, and two are resolved without moving the patient.

A NETS ambulance travels an average of 25,000 kilometres a year, conducting around 270 emergency retrieval missions. Most patients are newborns and infants under 12 months, among the most vulnerable and fragile lives in our care. Retrievals also work in reverse, helping recovering babies receive care in hospitals close to home, meeting a growing need for more than 200 such transfers every month.

OUTCOMES

- → Children and families experience fewer barriers to accessing care
- → State-of-the-art equipment, procedures, and technology

Life-changing surgery for kids and a game-changing model of care

When plastic and reconstructive surgeon, Associate Professor Damian Marucci, anticipated a shortage of craniofacial surgeons in 2022, he looked for a solution that would not only meet an existing need but one that would also improve how care could be delivered for children in New South Wales.

Thanks to the generous support of SCHF donors, he was able to invite two of the world's most renowned craniofacial and reconstructive surgeons to Sydney, to support local capability building and introduce advanced surgical techniques.

Professor Chris Forrest, Medical Director of the Centre for Craniofacial Care and Research at the Hospital for Sick Children in Canada, and his former fellow Professor Jeff Marcus, now Chief of Plastic Surgery at Duke University in the USA, both eagerly accepted the opportunity to live in Sydney for 12 months to work alongside craniofacial teams at Sydney Children's Hospitals Network (SCHN) who rank among the world's best.

Over the past three years, these international experts have not only introduced new surgical techniques, they've also established strong collaborations with SCHN's multidisciplinary craniofacial program.

Professor Forrest and Professor Marcus have both since returned to North America but remain actively involved in virtual multidisciplinary meetings and research collaborations.

Their impact has been far-reaching. Craniofacial teams at SCHN are currently analysing outcomes across multiple projects and preparing to publish findings in international medical journals to highlight just how much they have achieved.

One major success is the uptake of minimally invasive endoscopic surgery for craniosynostosis, a common craniofacial disorder in children. Introduced by Professor Forrest to SCHN in 2023, this new technique significantly reduces the invasiveness of surgery.

What was once a five-hour operation requiring four nights in hospital is now a 90-minute procedure with most children discharged within one to two nights, and with fewer complications.

Less than two years on, Professor Marcus estimates that already more than half of the three to four craniosynostosis surgeries performed at SCHN each week now use the endoscopic approach. The benefits are clear: improved outcomes for children and families, faster recoveries, and substantial efficiencies for hospitals.

OUTCOMES

- → State-of-the-art equipment, procedures, and technology
- → Children have improved access to new and / or improved treatments

When Jackson, now three years old, was first diagnosed with sagittal craniosynostosis, his family was told he needed surgery. Thanks to SCHF supporters, instead of a full skull reconstruction that may have been required later in his life, Jackson could have a microscopic strip craniectomy before four months old. This meant tiny incisions, a shorter operation and a much quicker recovery.

Photo: Jackson, aged six months.

Importantly, because the procedure must be performed in the first several months of life, its success also reflects faster referrals to specialist care, so children are being identified, referred, diagnosed, and treated earlier than ever before.

More recently, Professor Marcus introduced the teams to 'reanimation' procedures for children with facial paralysis, a rare condition that, until now, had no dedicated paediatric service in NSW. These highly technical procedures aim to restore facial movement. For the 15-20 children and families who may benefit each year, the difference is truly life changing.

With two new surgeons now on board, the SCHN craniofacial service is stronger than ever, equipped with new skills, systems, and global connections that will benefit children for years to come.

For Professor Marcus, the experience has been deeply rewarding, not just for the impact on kids in NSW, but for the broader lesson in what can happen when systems think differently and share expertise.

"I think the health system and the care of kids is better for the long term, in very tangible ways," - Professor Jeffrey Marcus.

On a personal level, he says the experience has helped shape the way he works, particularly how he communicates with families and colleagues. He reflects that the more informal, first-name culture at SCHN helped to build stronger relationships and is something he's taken back with him to the USA.

What began as a creative response to a workforce gap has evolved into a stronger, more globally connected craniofacial service, and a brighter future for the children and families who depend on it.

From fellowships to leadership

With the support of our generous donors, fellowships across Sydney Children's Hospitals Network (SCHN) are building a stronger future for paediatric health, delivering expert care today and developing the leaders of tomorrow.

SCHN fellowships support early career paediatricians to undertake advanced training in a range of specialist areas while directly strengthening the care delivered.

For families and kids, this means shorter waitlists, better continuity of care and access to world-class treatment delivered by the next generation of leaders.

Fellowships bring fresh expertise to clinical teams, directly improving care for children now while building a sustainable pipeline of highly trained specialists equipped to teach world-class care to the next generation.

In their first year of practice, an SCHN fellow can be involved in the care of up to 5,000 children, treating more than 150,000 over their career.

Many of SCHN's current senior leaders trace their careers to their own fellowships.

In fact, SCHN's first-ever general medical fellow, Dr Joanne Ging, is now Executive Director of Clinical Operations.

Across SCHN, fellows are shaping the standards of care in real time and transforming the future of children's health.

We thank our donors for supporting this model, one that shapes the services that change children's lives today and builds the workforce that will deliver world-class care for children in the decades to come.

General medical fellows play a vital role in coordinating complex care, working across specialties and providing consistent support to families during a child's treatment journey.

Dr Joanne Ging, Executive Director of Clinical Operations was SCHN's first-ever general medical fellow.

OUTCOMES

- → More opportunities for the best talent in child health
- → Children have improved access to the best possible paediatric healthcare

"Working in partnership with families, we all share the same goal. For us, putting the children first is more than just a mantra, it rings true in every case. That collaboration is what makes this work so inspiring." - Emily Fitzpatrick, General Medical Fellow.

As a cardiac MRI fellow, Dr Adam Keighley is working towards his imaging specialty and has already completed hundreds of specialist imaging reports, training that in the past required doctors to go overseas.

"This fellowship lets me grow as both a clinician and a researcher. I want to help shape the future of care for kids with heart disease." - Dr Adam Keighley, Cardiac MRI Fellow.

In neurology at The Children's Hospital at Westmead (CHW), fellowship-trained doctors have helped establish internationally recognised services, including Australia's first public genetic epilepsy testing program and the introduction of life-changing laser brain surgery for children with epilepsy.

"Without fellows, this (surgery) program wouldn't exist." - Dr Deepak Gill, Paediatric Neurologist and Head of Epilepsy Unit, The Children's Hospital at Westmead.

Dr Gill has trained neurology fellows for more than 30 years and remains committed to mentoring the next generation:

"The goal is never personal glory. It's about equipping the next generation so they can be better doctors, ultimately even better than me. For me, it's about seeing them shine."

Dr Jagdev Singh, Paediatric Respiratory and Sleep Consultant at CHW is a former SCHF-funded fellow. Having identified key challenges treating persistent infection in children with cystic fibrosis, he is now leading a world-leading clinical trial using bacteriophage therapy with striking results.

Burn injuries can be life-changing. Together, JOBS and Kidsburns help ensure every child in NSW has access to high-quality burns care and improved long-term outcomes, no matter where they live.

Best care for kids with burns across NSW

Accidents are a fact of life for most of us growing up, but for kids who experience significant injuries from burns, they can be life-changing.

A burn injury is often a traumatic event that affects not just the child but the whole family unit. Receiving the right care, at the right time, from the right team makes a significant difference for a faster and more supported recovery, and reintegration into daily life.

The NSW Paediatric Burns Unit (Burns Unit) at The Children's Hospital at Westmead, is designated as Fire Station 002 by Fire and Rescue NSW. It is the state's only tertiary service for paediatric burns, providing specialist care to children with burn injuries, delivering expert treatment and support to families across NSW.

Through programs like the Joint Outreach Burns Service (JOBS) clinics and Kidsburns, the team extends their expertise beyond the hospital walls. These programs enable Burns Unit clinicians to train and support local healthcare teams in rural and regional areas, showing them how to care for burn injuries using the best technology and techniques so that more kids and families can receive top-quality care close to home, no matter their postcode.

Each year, Kidsburns supports more than 1,700 children, with over 65% able to receive supported care closer to home. For children who have been admitted to the Burns Unit from rural areas, these partnerships mean they can return home with confidence, and have access to trained local clinicians who can see them for follow up.

In FY25, Kidsburns hosted a two-day visit for JOBS clinicians, including nurses and child life therapists, to the Burns Unit. The visit gave them the opportunity to deepen their understanding of burns care and bring their knowledge back to their local services.

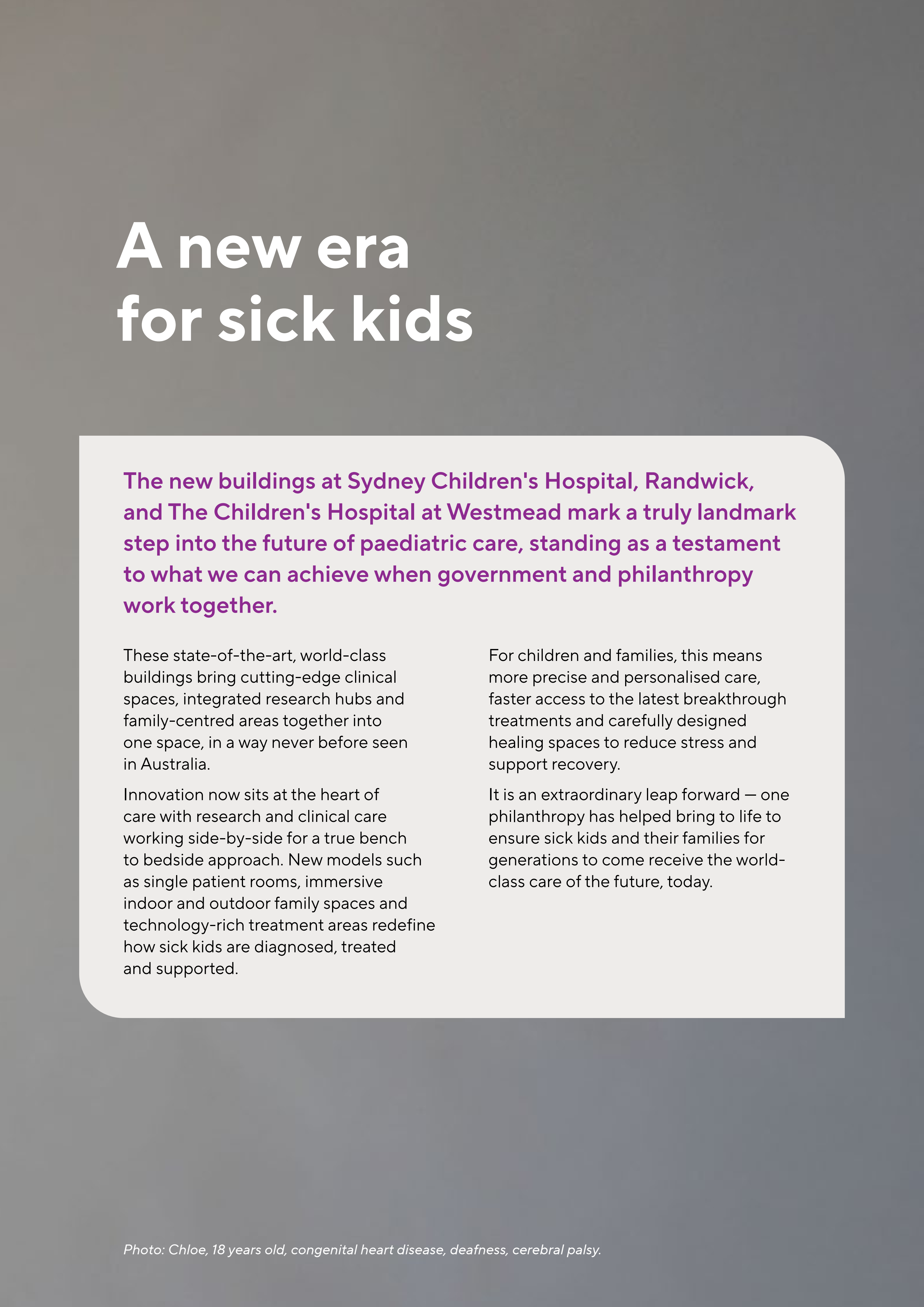
Highlights included learning to better identify risk factors that require escalation, improving engagement strategies for children and families, and refining clinical skills in graft and scar management. Participants also gained greater insight into the full care journey of a burns patient and the multidisciplinary teamwork involved, building confidence and capability they can bring back to their local settings.

"I learnt about different resources to use with children to keep them engaged for longer. I learnt how to position toys and different ways to comfort families. I learnt how distraction resources can be used around the room – all which I thought were brilliant ideas." - Training participant.

"I have gained a lot more knowledge about grafts and scar management and contractures, and I have gained more awareness about the role of physiotherapists for burns patients." - Training participant.

OUTCOMES

- → **Children and families experience fewer barriers to accessing care**
- → **More opportunities for the best talent in child health**



A new era for sick kids

The new buildings at Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick, and The Children's Hospital at Westmead mark a truly landmark step into the future of paediatric care, standing as a testament to what we can achieve when government and philanthropy work together.

These state-of-the-art, world-class buildings bring cutting-edge clinical spaces, integrated research hubs and family-centred areas together into one space, in a way never before seen in Australia.

Innovation now sits at the heart of care with research and clinical care working side-by-side for a true bench to bedside approach. New models such as single patient rooms, immersive indoor and outdoor family spaces and technology-rich treatment areas redefine how sick kids are diagnosed, treated and supported.

For children and families, this means more precise and personalised care, faster access to the latest breakthrough treatments and carefully designed healing spaces to reduce stress and support recovery.

It is an extraordinary leap forward — one philanthropy has helped bring to life to ensure sick kids and their families for generations to come receive the world-class care of the future, today.

Photo: Chloe, 18 years old, congenital heart disease, deafness, cerebral palsy.

Family-focused intensive care

This year has brought exciting progress in creating new critical care units at both Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick (SCH), and The Children's Hospital at Westmead (CHW), as part of the hospital redevelopments supported by Sydney Children's Hospitals Foundation's $100 million commitment.

At SCH, medical design innovations include new single patient rooms within the Children's Intensive Care Unit (CICU), enabling seamless transitions in care and ensuring the highest level of monitoring and support. Each bed has been purpose-designed for use across multiple clinical spaces. Virtual care capability will also allow more children to receive treatment closer to home, while the new infrastructure will strengthen partnerships with neighbouring adult hospitals and international research programs.

At CHW, the new Paediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) on Level 7 has been trialling innovative ceiling-mounted medical pendants, that house essential equipment, medical gas, and power supply above each patient bed. This creates a more efficient and responsive working environment for staff, reducing floor clutter and improving patient safety, while keeping children and their families close.

Family-centred design has been a core focus across both projects. At SCH, the CICU includes dedicated family areas, outdoor spaces and overnight lounges. At CHW, every PICU bed has an in-room parent bed to support overnight stays. This careful design respects family presence, comfort and dignity, not as an add-on but as an essential part of care. In intensive care, close family involvement has been proven to measurably improve outcomes. These family-focused spaces will help reduce trauma, strengthen communication with care teams, and support recovery.

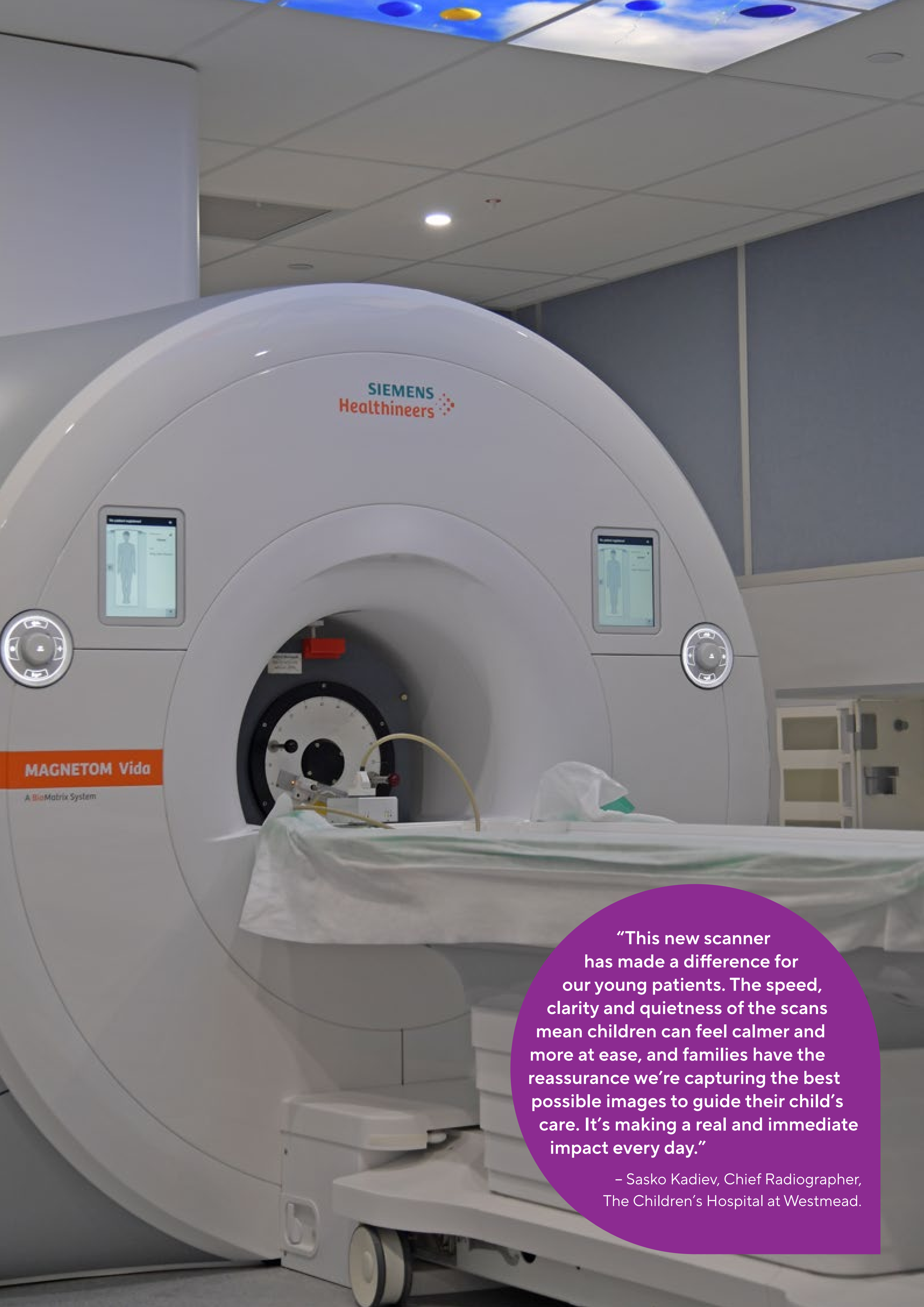
Together, the new CICU and PICU are more than high-tech clinical spaces. These cutting-edge facilities mark a new era in critical care; one where clinical excellence is matched with care that puts the child and their family firmly at the centre.

OUTCOMES

- → **State-of-the-art equipment, procedures, and technology**
- → **Children and families are more able to 'cope,' feel supported, and content**

Photo: New medical pendants enable rooms to be quickly and flexibly adapted to meet each child's unique needs.


Dräger



> “This new scanner has made a difference for our young patients. The speed, clarity and quietness of the scans mean children can feel calmer and more at ease, and families have the reassurance we’re capturing the best possible images to guide their child’s care. It’s making a real and immediate impact every day.”
>
> – Sasko Kadiev, Chief Radiographer,
> The Children’s Hospital at Westmead.

A state-of-the-art new scanner for Westmead

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) is one of the most advanced and important diagnostic tools in healthcare. It produces highly detailed images of organs and tissues to support doctors in diagnosing conditions, planning treatments, and monitoring progress without using harmful ionising radiation, which is highly advantageous in protecting children who are naturally more susceptible to radiation.

This year—thanks to SCHF supporters—a new MRI scanner was purchased and installed at The Children's Hospital at Westmead (CHW), a major upgrade that's already enhancing diagnosis and better outcomes for kids with a range of medical conditions.

The new machine offers faster, clearer and more comfortable scans. In some cases, it can complete imaging in half the time of its predecessor, increasing capacity, all while giving doctors sharper detail and children a quieter, less intimidating experience. Over its 10-year lifespan, it's expected to support up to 50,000 children and young people.

Installing the MRI machine was no mean feat. The 7,350-kg machine had to be delivered via crane and rolled into a purpose-built space with a strong cement floor. Because MRI machines are highly sensitive to radio frequencies, the room was constructed with a Faraday cage lined with copper to shield all electromagnetic interference and ensure images are accurate.

From the initial cement pour, the installation process itself took more than four months. Once in place, the machine was then carefully installed and calibrated, followed by extensive testing and quality assurance procedures.

This upgrade marks a significant step forward in paediatric imaging at CHW. The new MRI suite is delivering faster, more accurate diagnoses, offering children both safety from radiation and a more comfortable experience of imaging.

The new MRI suite is supported by the MRI child life therapy team, who provide a child-friendly preparation experience that helps children prepare for the scan so they know what to expect before they go in.

OUTCOMES

- → **State-of-the-art equipment, procedures, and technology**
- → **Children have improved access to the best possible paediatric healthcare**

A new future for kids with cancer

Cancer remains the leading cause of disease-related death in Australian children. But behind every child's treatment is a powerful network of specialists—oncologists, surgeons, nurses, researchers, allied health and support staff—all working together to deliver the best possible care and tirelessly pursue better outcomes.

Now, with the support of generous donors through SCHF, that network is about to grow stronger.

The redevelopment of Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick, brings all this expertise together under one roof, uniting care, research, and family support in a single, purpose-built environment designed entirely around children: Minderoo Children's Comprehensive Cancer Centre (MCCCC).

The first facility of its kind in the southern hemisphere, MCCCC represents a strong collaborative model for paediatric cancer care, one that breaks down silos and accelerates discovery. By integrating research and clinical care in real time, it will allow children to benefit from new treatments faster and improve both survival and quality of life.

It also builds on a proud legacy. For decades, Sydney Children's Hospitals Network oncology teams have been at the forefront of innovation—training future specialists, pioneering new therapies and contributing to Australia's world-leading survival rates.

MCCCC will expand on this foundation, increasing capacity and aligning every stage of the cancer journey, from diagnosis through to survivorship and family wellbeing.

MCCCC is more than a building, it's a shared vision for a future where no child faces cancer alone, and where cutting-edge science, compassionate care and community support come together to give every child the best possible chance — a future SCHF donors are helping to make real.

Photo: Minderoo Children's Comprehensive Cancer Centre is the first facility of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere.

OUTCOMES

- → **State-of-the-art equipment, procedures, and technology**
- → **Children have improved access to the best possible paediatric healthcare**

> **"Minderoo Children's Comprehensive Cancer Centre will change the face of paediatric cancer care in Australia, and will have a positive, lasting impact on the lives of sick children and their families."**
>
> - Kristina Keneally, SCHF Chief Executive Officer.

Photo: Ashton, five years old, congenital acute myeloid leukaemia.

Whale tails and water pebbles: a new playground for all

Thanks to the generosity of our donor community, the new Bilima building at Randwick features outdoor spaces for families to connect, recharge and have fun with their children. At the heart of these spaces is a transformative new play area, the DeeDee playground, where children can play, explore and simply be kids.

Informed by patients and families, the playground's design has every child in mind. A striking whale-tail tower integrates climbing frames and slides, while hammocks and netted play zones offer inclusive fun for children with mobility needs. Toddler-friendly spaces, a pebble water feature, shaded seating and vibrant Aboriginal artwork bring colour, culture and meaning to the forecourt plaza.

Play is essential to a child's wellbeing. It supports emotional regulation, encourages movement and helps children process experiences, all vital elements of healing. This new space offers more than just fun: it gives families a welcoming space for joy, connection and recovery.

OUTCOMES

- → A caring environment where children are positively engaged
- → Children and families are more able to ‘cope’, feel supported and content

Photos: The DeeDee Playground at Sydney Children's Hospital Randwick.

Research snapshot

$16+ million to drive transformational research

Photo: Abigail, four years old, hypoptuitarism.

Award-winning neonatal research at the Grace Centre for Newborn Intensive Care.

Renal research program to drive better care for kids with genetic and other kidney conditions.

Continued support for **four innovative projects kickstarted by SCHF's Greenlight Program** in 2022.

Clinical trials research and **surveillance of immunisation** and serious childhood infectious diseases, including HIV.

Cardiology research program to inform better care for kids with heart conditions, including projects examining congenital heart disease.

Oncology clinical trials expertise and facilities to deliver better treatments faster to kids with cancer, including CAR T-cell therapies.

Supporting the Australian Paediatric Surveillance Unit (APSU), which gathers population-wide clinical data to **inform public health policy on conditions affecting children**.

The Children's Centre for Transplantation and Research that **brings surgeons and researchers together to transform care for children requiring organ transplantation.**

Hearing, Ear Health and Language Services (HEALS) project with **Aboriginal medical service partners to improve ear health and childhood outcomes for Aboriginal children.**

Clinician Researcher Fellowship Scheme supporting **four exceptional PhD-qualified staff** across medical, nursing, and allied health, to have two protected days for research each week, for a 2-year period.

Membership of key research collaboration initiatives including Luminesce Alliance, Sphere, and Sydney Health Partners, bringing together **world-leading paediatric medicine researchers and clinicians.**

Critical care research to harness big data, biobanking, innovative trial design and long-term neurodevelopmental outcome data to **improve care for children following critical illness and admission to intensive care**.

From data to insights: navigating a season of respiratory infections

Lower respiratory tract infections (LRTIs) account for a large number of hospital attendances across Sydney Children's Hospitals Network (SCHN) every winter, with illnesses like bronchiolitis, pneumonia and viral-induced wheeze driving high admission rates and placing pressure on clinical teams.

Even though rich data is collected routinely from every patient interaction, until recently, staff at The Children's Hospital at Westmead (CHW) and Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick (SCH), had limited access to the insights such data could provide about how these infections are being managed, and where improvements could be made.

Thanks to your support, the Learning Health Initiative (LHI) project is changing this. Over the past few years, Professor Tom Snelling and his team have been developing a learning health system to capture, organise and action patient data to ensure SCHN and its people can learn from every patient encounter.

This year, the team partnered with clinicians across both hospitals to develop a user-friendly dashboard that turns existing complex data from the hospital electronic medical records systems into fortnightly insights.

By tracking key indicators like respiratory support, antibiotics and length of stay, the tool is helping teams identify trends, prepare for surges and deliver more effective treatment.

The dashboard is supporting evidence-based decisions at the frontline and opening doors for long-term research and quality improvement. This helps hospital teams idenitify. where care can be improved and deliver smarter and more effective treatment decisions for children with an LRTI.

As the dashboard continues to evolve, so will the potential benefits for children and clinicians, for years to come.

"We have made significant progress in creating a workable dashboard. It has been helpful to start using real and trustworthy data to create a robust decision-making process for LRTI management." - Dr Michael Plaister, General Paediatrics Head of Department, SCH

The LHI team's work is particularly valuable in the winter season, during which hospitals see a significant rise in viral respiratory illnesses like bronchiolitis. Using predictive analytics, the team has supported SCHN to forecast admissions up to four weeks in advance.

Using patient data to identify trends early, the model supports smarter planning, including when to open winter wards or deploy more staff—ensuring care stays timely, safe and sustainable during peak demand.

- → **Children have improved access to the best possible paediatric healthcare**
- → **Children benefit from faster translation of research into practice**

OUTCOMES

"The solutions we're coming up with are designed to inform the better management of children today. We're aiming to redesign how we do research and how we implement our findings into clinical practice."

- Professor Tom Snelling, Director of Health and Clinical Analytics, The University of Sydney, and Consultant in Infectious Diseases, CHW.

Infection is one of the **most common** presentations to SCHN's Emergency Departments

In 2024, SCHN cared for more than **9,000 children** admitted with respiratory infections

The new **Lower Respiratory Tract Infections** dashboard has assembled over 15 million data points to support clinicians in driving decisions

"We couldn't have achieved these results without philanthropy, donors and the community getting behind us. They've helped us get the best equipment, they've helped fund the research we do to get better outcomes, and they've invested in cutting-edge technology."

- Professor Nadia Badawi AM.

Professor Nadia Badawi AM was nominated for 2026 NSW Australian of the Year for her pioneering work to improve outcomes for critically ill newborns.

Recognising research excellence at the Grace Centre

At the Grace Centre for Newborn Intensive Care, clinical excellence and groundbreaking research go hand in hand. This year, that powerful combination was recognised at the highest level.

In FY25, the Grace Centre's research team received the University of Sydney Vice-Chancellor's Award for Research Excellence, a prestigious honour that acknowledges their outstanding contributions to improving outcomes for critically ill newborns.

We proudly congratulate Professor Nadia Badawi AM, Dr Himanshu Popat, Cathryn Crowle, Natalie Fairbairn, Dr Priya Govindaswamy, Dr Amit Trivedi, Dr Robert Halliday, Stephanie Boyd, Dr Bhavesh Mehta and Dr Hannah Dalrymple for their leadership and commitment to pushing the boundaries of neonatal research.

From developing a dedicated pain assessment tool for newborns undergoing surgery, to leading the world's first study on predicting cerebral palsy in infants post-surgery, the Grace team are transforming how the most vulnerable patients are cared for, not just in Australia, but globally. Their work is changing what's possible for newborns and giving more babies the best possible start to life.

"Despite the conditions we are able to treat having become much more complicated, our survival rates are over 97% — outcomes that rank among the best in the world. Every bit as important is that disability among babies leaving the unit has dropped by over 40%, despite the more complex care we are offering."
says Professor Nadia Badawi AM.

Thanks to your support, the Grace Centre team can access the tools they need to push the boundaries of care and research to ensure every newborn has the best chance from their very first day.

The Grace Centre is also the only certified facility in the southern hemisphere accredited to deliver Newborn Individualised Developmental Care and Assessment Program (NIDCAP) training. This globally recognised, evidence-based approach helps nurses tailor care to each baby's unique cues—such as movements and expressions—to reduce stress, conserve energy and support healthy brain development in close partnership with families.

Since 2017, the Centre has trained nearly 2,000 nurses from across Australia and overseas in advanced neurodevelopmental care. These nurses become leaders who transform neonatal practice and improve outcomes for at-risk babies, extending the Centre's impact far beyond its walls and giving vulnerable newborns the best possible start in life.

→ **Clinicians and researchers can pursue breakthrough research**

→ **Children benefit from faster translation of research into practice**

OUTCOMES

Giving the green light to research

In 2022, through the Greenlight pilot, SCHF put a spotlight on promising unfunded research, as a new way to highlight the depth of talent across Sydney Children's Hospitals Network.

Drawing inspiration from the film industry, we gave SCHN clinician researchers training in how to pitch their ideas to philanthropists, created a digital platform to showcase their work, and gave our donors an opportunity to be more directly connected to the people behind the projects.

As well as securing vital funds to accelerate breakthrough projects, this gave us unique insights into the power of philanthropy to change lives and shape the future of paediatric care.

SCHN is uniquely positioned to deliver research that translates directly to the frontline delivery of better health outcomes for kids, and we can already see how many of the bold ideas uncovered in the Greenlight pilot are driving a real-world impact today, thanks to the vision of our generous supporters.

STOP2: A brighter future for children born with a rare genetic disease

The STOP2 trial is helping change the outlook for babies born with Tuberous Sclerosis Complex (TSC), a rare condition that causes tumours to grow in the brain and other vital organs.

Early treatment can reduce the risk of seizures and long-term complications, yet promising therapies like oral mTOR inhibitors remain largely unavailable for children under the age of two.

Thanks to this donor-backed trial, families in NSW gained early access to these potentially life-changing medications. The trial aimed to restore critical brain activity in infants with TSC and several children have since continued treatment after their trial through extended drug access programs.

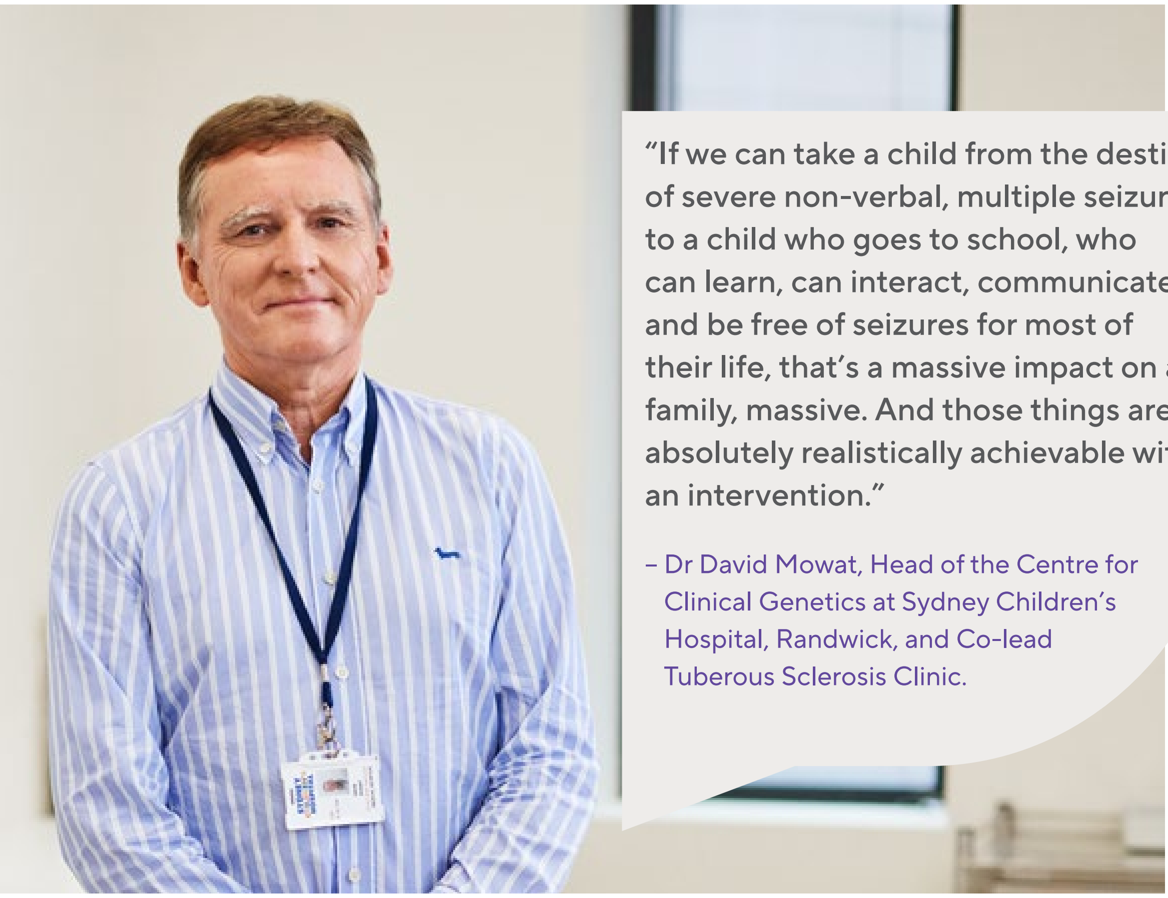
Beyond individual outcomes, STOP2 is driving broader impact. The STOP2 trial has shared results internationally, developed a new diagnostic test for TSC, and is helping establish Victoria's first multidisciplinary TSC clinic.

And with the new Neurosciences Comprehensive Care and Research Centre at Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick, children with complex neurological conditions like TSC will benefit from even closer integration of research and clinical care, all under one innovative roof.

OUTCOMES

→ Clinicians and researchers can pursue breakthrough research

→ More opportunities for the best talent in child health



> "If we can take a child from the destiny of severe non-verbal, multiple seizures to a child who goes to school, who can learn, can interact, communicate and be free of seizures for most of their life, that's a massive impact on a family, massive. And those things are absolutely realistically achievable with an intervention."
>
> – Dr David Mowat, Head of the Centre for Clinical Genetics at Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick, and Co-lead Tuberous Sclerosis Clinic.

The future for kids like Otis

Otis lives with Tuberous Sclerosis Complex (TSC), a rare genetic condition that causes tumours to grow in his brain and other organs. He has daily seizures and requires a feeding tube, but his strength and resilience always shine through.

For parents Katya and Brenton, the early days in neonatal intensive care were filled with uncertainty.

"The joy of meeting Otis was mixed with the grief of his diagnosis," Katya says. "But we've never felt alone."

Now, after countless visits, treatments and hospital stays, the family has reframed how they see hospital life.

"It's where Otis gets the help he needs, and where we keep taking steps forward," Brenton said.

Thanks to donor-supported research like the STOP2 trial, which is exploring new treatments for infants with TSC, families are facing the future with more hope than ever before.

Giving the green light to research continued

GENEie® in action – A clinically validated AI tool for faster, more accurate diagnosis of genetic conditions

Professor Sandra Cooper and her team are developing an innovation that could change the way genetic conditions are diagnosed around the world.

Inherited disorders caused by errors in RNA splicing variants affect around one in every 50 babies and are often difficult to diagnose. To help solve this, Professor Sandra Cooper led the development of GENEie®, a machine learning meta-analytical software that takes the guesswork from interpreting splicing variants, supporting genetic clinicians to diagnose genetic conditions.

Now clinically validated with 100% diagnostic precision and patented in Australia, GENEie® is already being used by 200 people across 32 pathology laboratories in Australia, New Zealand, Europe, UK and the USA, generating around 5,000 diagnostic reports to date—on track to achieve widespread clinical adoption with the ultimate goal of improving diagnostic outcomes for thousands of families.

Work is also underway on GENEie2.0 that will be able to assess a much larger variety of genetic variants.

Pioneering gene therapy for brittle bone disease

Backed by early-stage funding through Greenlight and philanthropy, Associate Professor Aaron Schindeler and his team are working toward a potential gene therapy for osteogenesis imperfecta (OI), or brittle bone disease. This rare genetic condition causes extreme bone fragility and lifelong challenges for affected children and families.

The team have developed the first disease-specific mouse model and successfully edited the faulty gene in human cells, and they are now testing ways to deliver treatment directly to bone. While more research is needed, these early breakthroughs are laying the foundation for a future where children with OI can be treated at the genetic level—not just managed but truly, meaningfully helped.

Gene therapy for OI is not yet ready for clinical translation, but thanks to philanthropy, this research is reducing uncertainty and moving us closer to a durable, disease-modifying treatment that will permanently change the outlook for children and families affected by this debilitating condition.

This transformation will not be achieved through one breakthrough alone, but through a sustained, long-term strategy that invests in the right people, platforms, and tools to accelerate translation from lab to clinic.

We've already seen what's possible when significant investment meets long-term vision. Gene therapy has changed the trajectory of diseases like spinal muscular atrophy, haemophilia, and inherited retinal disorders—powerful proof of what can happen when science and philanthropy align behind a clear goal.

Photo: Professor Sandra Cooper, Co-Head and Scientific Director, Kids Neuroscience Centre (Kids Research).

> "I'm very grateful to SCHF and their generous donors, without whom this research, the benefits to our patients, and my PhD, would not be possible."
>
> - Kiera Batten, senior metabolic dietitian and PhD candidate.

Photo: Senior metabolic dietitian and PhD candidate Kiera Batten.

Giving the green light to research continued

How innovative research is changing the lives of children with metabolic disorders

Around one in every 6,500 children in Australia is born with a rare metabolic disorder, a group of conditions that affect the body's ability to convert fat, carbohydrates, or protein into energy. For these children, everyday 'healthy' foods such as salmon, avocado, and even breastmilk, can be toxic. Simple activities like walking to class or climbing stairs can lead to intense, debilitating pain and injury.

With no known cures, treatment is focused on managing symptoms and improving quality of life, and that's where research is critical.

Thanks to philanthropic seed funding, senior metabolic dietitian and PhD candidate Kiera Batten is helping to reshape what care looks like for children with conditions like McArdle syndrome, a rare metabolic condition that impairs the body's ability to use energy during muscle activity. For many of these children, sport and exercise can feel out of reach, and even dangerous.

Kiera's research is changing that. By investigating the characteristics of McArdle syndrome and the evidence base that guides its treatment, Kiera is helping children and families better understand how to exercise safely and confidently. She has also demonstrated the feasibility and safety of exercise intervention in children and young adults, with the aim of improving physical function and reduce the risk of future hospital admissions.

As one child shared:

"I found out more about my body, how to exercise and get fit and strong."

Beyond its clinical impact, the seed funding has helped Kiera strengthen her skills as a clinician and opened further career opportunities, including two more grants to further her research. Her innovative work is now attracting attention from national and international research groups. Working with Sydney Children's Hospitals Network's expert metabolic team, Kiera is now also assessing exercise and quality of life in children with long-chain fatty acid disorders, another rare and complex group of conditions.

Ultimately, Kiera hopes her research will inform new clinical practice guidelines for metabolic disorders to improve care and outcomes for children in Australia and beyond.

Photo: Dr Kavitha Gowrishankar, Scientific Lead, Advanced Cellular Therapeutics, Children's Cancer Research Unit (CCRU), at The Children's Hospital at Westmead.

Using advanced therapeutics to unlock treatments for kids with incurable cancers

For kids with cancer, traditional treatments can be long, toxic, and invasive on their little bodies. And for some children, even after enduring chemotherapy, radiation, and surgeries, the treatments don't work.

Sydney Children's Hospitals Foundation (SCHF) is supporting innovative research into what is hoped will be a game-changing breakthrough in treating childhood cancers.

Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-Cell (CAR T-cell) therapy is an advanced therapy where the patient's own T cells (a type of white blood cell) are modified to recognise and destroy cancer cells—essentially weaponising the child's own immune system. This approach offers a lifeline for children when standard treatments fail. It's far less invasive on young bodies with fewer toxic side effects than chemotherapy and typically requires shorter hospital stays and less recovery time.

Now researchers are focused on the next frontier: applying CAR T-cell therapy to solid tumours, some of the most aggressive and deadly cancers affecting children. While this research is happening globally, progress is slow, complex and uncertain. For every breakthrough, there are many more disappointments and wrong turns.

And for children with cancer, the 17 years it typically takes to turn experimental discoveries into treatments, is far too long to wait.

That's why cutting-edge research is being embedded directly within Sydney Children's Hospitals Network (SCHN). At the Children's Cancer Research Unit at The Children's Hospital at Westmead (CHW), scientists are customising patient cells and fast-tracking clinical trials.

Led by Professor Geraldine O'Neill, the team are now preparing to launch a world-class Phase I clinical trial—the E2CAR trial. The trial is an Australian-first treatment, which will target two of the toughest childhood cancers—osteosarcoma and Ewing sarcoma (bone cancers).

Made possible by the cutting-edge facilities and expert teams at CHW, the E2CAR trial will manufacture and deliver these highly complex immune cell therapies onsite, reducing delays and bringing treatment closer to home.

The trial is paving the way for future immune cell therapies and could radically change the way rare disease trials are run, not just at SCHN but across the country.

After years of painstaking behind-the-scenes work, much of it made possible by donor-funded systems and support to get trials off the ground, the E2CAR team plan to recruit their first patients in 2026.

OUTCOMES

- → **Children have improved access to new and / or improved treatments**
- → **Children benefit from faster translation of research into practice**

KAT: The infrastructure at the heart of readiness

The E2CAR trial (pg 49) represents a new frontier in childhood cancer treatment. But this kind of innovation doesn't happen in isolation. It's only possible because of the foundation laid by the Kids Advanced Therapeutics (KAT) program, a specialist team focused on getting complex, cutting-edge therapies out of the lab and into the clinic safely and ethically.

With support from SCHF, KAT provides the essential systems, staffing and support that trials like E2CAR rely on to get off the ground. It's the behind-the-scenes work that keeps the research moving forward. From ethics and governance to staffing and education, KAT ensures the systems are in place to deliver innovation.

For Dr Michelle Lorentzos, who leads the KAT team, that 'centre readiness' is about more than protocols.

"Now, more than ever, I think 'centre readiness' is about taking care of our people," says Dr Lorentzos. "It's the clinical trial coordinator who chases a toddler down the hallway so I can speak with the parents. The nurse who quietly closes the door to give me space after we deliver hard news. The nurse who reschedules a visit for a fifth time because I want the child to get their infusion but also want them to go on their school excursion. These are the brilliant minds and big hearts that make this work possible, and we hold on to them with both hands."

KAT is the engine behind innovation, and thanks to donor support, it continues to power the people and solutions that help turn the promise of research into real hope for sick kids and their families.

OUTCOMES

→ Children have improved access to new and / or improved treatments

→ Children benefit from faster translation of research into practice

Photo: Dr Michelle Lorentzos, Paediatric Neurologist and the Advanced Therapeutics Medical Lead at The Sydney Children's Hospitals Network.

In 2025, the KAT program

- supported 10 new advanced therapeutic trials.
- delivered education programs across the Network.
- developed a suite of multilingual patient resources, including new video materials.
- established an overarching licence for adeno-associated virus (AAV) gene therapies, allowing faster access to clinical trials and strengthening the Network's position as a leader in the Australian Network of Paediatric Trial Centres.

Patient experience snapshot

$6+ million for positive patient and family experiences

Photo: Rebecca, seven years old, Crohn's disease.

Magic Carpet mobile interactive projector to **encourage mobilisation and interaction** that meets the needs of patients of varying ability.

Translated fact sheets and videos to **support families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**.

MRI Practice Program to support children to undergo an MRI **scan without anaesthetic**.

Social workers **providing wraparound care** for patients and families and helping them manage practical and psychosocial elements of their healthcare journey.

Maintaining connection to school for children undergoing long hospital stays due to cancer, via the Back on Track education program.

Child life, art and music therapists working across multiple departments at SCHN, **supporting children and families to connect, engage with their care, and express themselves.**

Two child life therapy technology specialists leveraging technology, **including virtual reality platforms, gaming, simulation, and communication platforms,** to support and engage children in hospital.

Support items for **paediatric palliative care patients and families** including Comfort Care Cases, books and resources for bereavement support.

Ngala Nanga Mai pARenT Program, **supporting mental health and parenting confidence** by helping young Aboriginal families engage earlier and more effectively with health, education, and community services.

A place for pets, a gift for kids

A newly opened and first-of-its-kind pet park at The Children's Hospital at Westmead, gives sick kids the chance to reconnect with their pets in a safe, dedicated outdoor space. The park provides families with a private, secure area to enjoy time together, and create meaningful moments surrounded by all of the family — including beloved family pets who previously couldn't visit.

For children in hospital, time with their pets can ease anxiety, reduce loneliness and bring a sense of home into the hospital environment. Whether it's a cuddle, a game of fetch or just being near their furry friend, these moments offer powerful emotional support.

Thanks to donor support, this dedicated park ensures that getting medical care doesn't mean being denied the healing comfort and joy that only a pet can bring. A second pet park at Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick, will open in the future.

Photo: Pet Park at Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick.

OUTCOMES

- → Children and families are more able to 'cope,' feel supported, and content
- → Physical and emotional support for children and families

Photo: Pet Park at The Children's Hospital at Westmead.

Bringing dignity, comfort and connection to more families

For families of children with life-limiting conditions, specialist paediatric palliative care brings much-needed support and expert care during a profoundly important time.

For many years, SCHF has supported Bear Cottage, NSW's first dedicated children's hospice, providing specialised paediatric palliative care for up to eight children and their families at a time. Located in Manly, Bear Cottage offers a range of clinical and psychosocial supports—from child life therapy, art and music therapy to physiotherapy, social work, and pet therapy with wonderful companion dog, Beau.

All care is thoughtfully tailored to meet the complex individual needs of children with life-limiting conditions. Creative therapies allow them to express their feelings, and give families the opportunity to create lasting memories, with therapeutic imagery often used to celebrate and honour each child's life and experience.

Importantly, Bear Cottage's support extends beyond the child. Families are embraced with compassion, with dedicated programs supporting mums, dads, siblings and grandparents. And when end of life comes, the bereavement program helps guide families through their grief with compassion and ongoing support for as long as they need.

OUTCOMES

- → A caring environment where children are positively engaged
- → Children and families are more able to 'cope,' feel supported, and content

Photo: Bear Cottage.

In FY26, SCHF will extend this support to Mounties Care Cottage, soon to become NSW's second dedicated paediatric palliative care hospice, and the first of its kind in Western Sydney.

Located on the grounds of The Children's Hospital at Westmead (CHW), Mounties Care Cottage will join Bear Cottage as a cornerstone of SCHN's palliative care services, providing families from Western Sydney and beyond with access to specialised care closer to home, addressing a long-standing service gap.

The new facility is being designed to feel like a home away from home. It will offer flexible, individualised support from a multidisciplinary team, in a warm, friendly environment—a place where clinical excellence meets compassion, and where support, presence and shared moments are prioritised at every step of a family's journey.

Mounties Care Cottage supports our shared vision for a more compassionate health system—one that meets families where they are, especially in their hardest moments.

The Comfort Care Cases bringing calm and connection at end of life

When a child is approaching end of life, even the smallest comforts can make a profound difference. At SCH, Senior Child Life Therapist Kirsty-Leah Goymour, who specialises in palliative care, has co-developed Comfort Care Cases to support both families and health professionals who care for these children during this incredibly challenging time.

Funded by SCHF donors, each Comfort Care Case contains thoughtfully chosen items to help bring a sense of calm and connection, like soft toys, mood lights, scent atomisers, cosy blankets, art materials, body wash and nail polish. These resources are used to make rooms feel more personal, allow moments of creativity and self-expression, and give families the opportunity to create meaningful memories together.

More than just care packages, Comfort Care Cases support the physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of children and their families, helping to make end of life more peaceful, personal and filled with love.

"As a bedside nurse, I've had the privilege of using the Comfort Care Cases several times when caring for children at the end of life. These cases not only help create lasting memories, and document a child's life, they also provide resources to give additional support to families during these times. The cases make such a difference to the environment for patients and their families and are an amazing resource." – Bella, ICU Nurse, Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick.

Wrapping care around children and families

Behind every child in hospital are impacts that reach far beyond the bedside. Illness can upend every part of family life with parents under enormous pressure, siblings feeling fearful or unsure and familiar routines replaced by new language, decisions, and unknowns.

Families can find themselves far from the comforts of home emotionally and, for regional and rural families, geographically, as they adjust to unfamiliar surroundings and a new 'normal'.

Across Sydney Children's Hospitals Network, social workers—some funded by SCHF—are a vital part of a child's care team. They deliver family-centred, research-driven psychosocial support to children and their families to help them manage the many emotional, practical, and social challenges that come with illness, hospital stays and medical treatment.

Whether they're counselling a parent during moments of distress, organising family accommodation and financial support, preparing referrals or providing psychoeducation to help a child understand what to expect, social workers provide critical, targeted, consistent and compassionate care to make the whole family's journey run as smoothly as possible.

"Seeing children continue to develop and shine throughout their time within the hospital is wonderful and witnessing the moments of laughter, fun, pride, joy and resilience, despite the arduous times being experienced, makes me love my job." – Carly Jeffery, Senior Social Worker.

Small acts, big impact

Thanks to SCHF support, social workers have also been able to respond to a smaller but immediate need, providing emergency toiletry kits to parents and carers who arrive at hospital unexpectedly, easing some of the stress of the first night.

While much of this work happens quietly, its impact is felt in every part of a family's experience, helping them steady themselves during the unpredictability of a child's illness and giving attention to the small details that can otherwise be overlooked, but that make a hard time a little more bearable.

Photo: SCHF volunteers pack emergency toiletry kits for parents who arrive at hospital unexpectedly.

OUTCOMES

- → Children and families are more able to 'cope,' feel supported, and content
- → Physical and emotional support for children and families

50 years of bringing light to the toughest days

This year marks the 50th anniversary of child life and music therapy at Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick.

For five decades, generous donor support has helped ensure children not only receive world-class medical care but also the emotional support that makes treatment less daunting and recovery more hopeful. At a time when everything feels unfamiliar, child life and music therapy creates space for confidence, comfort, and even joy.

Child life and music therapists (CLMT) work alongside children and their families, providing personalised support through some of the hardest days of their lives. Powered by philanthropy, these specialist roles transform the hospital journey, offering children tools to cope, play, and thrive in a clinical environment.

A new innovation this year is the Magic Carpet projector—a portable interactive tool that transforms any floor or wall into a playful space. Children can kick a virtual soccer ball, uncover hidden animations, or simply play alongside siblings from their hospital room. For children who are unable to move freely through the hospital, therapists describe the Magic Carpet as a powerful instrument to build trust, spark imagination and bring moments of normalcy into even the hardest days.

Across Sydney Children's Hospitals Network, CLMTs help children understand their treatment through age-appropriate language, offering distraction during painful procedures and using play and music to help them process fear. These simple but powerful interventions reduce anxiety and restore a sense of choice and control for young patients, so they're not just being treated, they're also being seen and heard.

Thanks to philanthropy, some CLMTs specialise in using technology to engage young people in their own care. "The resources the children at our hospital now have access to is phenomenal. The consoles, virtual reality games and new accessories we now have for our PlayStations instantly engage the patients and marked improvements have been observed by a wide range of clinicians in the realm of patient motivation, both generally and in relation to their treatment goals." Dayna, Child Life Therapy Technology Specialist.

Photo: The new Magic Carpet project - transforms any floor or wall into a playful space.

- → A caring environment where children are positively engaged
- → Physical and emotional support for children and families

OUTCOMES

Photo: Young patients at SCH and CHW designed this lift in the new Bilima building with support from the SCHF Art Program in collaboration with artist Nadia Odlum.

Using creative play to empower kids in hospital

As children and young people move through the hospital, from waiting rooms to wards, corridors to clinics, they are also journeying through life in deeply personal and emotional ways.

Every young person's hospital experience is unique, yet it is also something quietly shared: with those around them, those who came before and those still to come. These moments are woven into the fabric of the hospital—etched into the walls, echoed in footsteps, and carried in hearts.

When the SCHF Art Program was invited to deliver a patient-led artwork for lifts as part of the redevelopment's broader Arts, Play and Discovery initiative, we set out to make these shared experiences visible, and reflect them through art.

To ensure it was patient-led, our artist educators consulted directly with children and young people in hospital. Their feedback shaped the creative direction, highlighting a strong preference for bright colours, text, and an element of gamification.

This inspired a collaboration with Sydney-based artist Nadia Odlum, whose artistic practice uses play, games, and familiar visual symbols to explore how we move through and experience our everyday environments.

We invited Nadia to work alongside young patients at both Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick, and The Children's Hospital at Westmead to explore playful ways of moving through space.

Working with SCHF artist educators, Nadia led creative workshops where children and their families wrote down different ways of moving on index cards, verbs like 'sliding', 'jumping' and 'cartwheeling'. These words were then shuffled and recombined into surprising and delightful pairings, like 'floating-flop' or 'dancing-somersault'.

A total of 20 workshops were delivered across hospital schools, within the Adolescent Medicine Unit, the Saunders Unit, and at bedsides with 63 children working to bring this concept to life.

The result is a vibrant interactive artwork: a visual maze of directional arrows, bright colours and the joyful movement words created by patients and families. As children, families, and staff ride the lifts, they're invited to follow the path and share in the words created by those who have journeyed before them, transforming an everyday lift ride into a space of creativity, imagination and play.

The work also reflects the art program's broader commitment—to centre the voice of children and young people with a lived experience and to amplify these voices through creative platforms for observing, engaging, making, and sharing.

"It was incredibly meaningful for me to have the chance to meet and play with children in the hospital, and to work alongside the amazing SCHF artist educators. As we played the word game, I enjoyed seeing the children's faces light up, as they imagined the strange movements the words evoked, or watching their grown-ups act out the silly phrases. I hope the lift design brings continued joy to the hospital community." – Nadia Odlum.

OUTCOMES

→ **A caring environment where children are positively engaged**

→ **Physical and emotional support for children and families**

A movement of purpose: turning compassion into action

At Sydney Children's Hospitals Foundation, volunteers are the beating heart of our mission – a dynamic movement of quiet heroes united by one goal: to help all sick kids live their best lives.

Few embody this spirit more than Tracy Cross, who in just 18 months has given more than 800 hours of his time across 150 events. From the glamour of Gold Dinner and Emerald Ball to our hospital-based initiatives and community appeals, Tracy's warmth, reliability and never-ending enthusiasm have made him a familiar face and quiet powerhouse behind so many of our biggest moments.

Having worked alongside more than 2,500 different volunteers, Tracy has seen first-hand that everyone brings their own reason for volunteering. For him, it's about purpose.

That sense of purpose shines through in everything he does. Whether it's setting up early, staying late to pack down or mentoring new volunteers, Tracy leads with heart, encouraging others to see that the more you give, the more you get back.

"With the Foundation and being a team leader with the volunteers, I think I've actually been able to reach more people – in teaching them as a role model," he reflects.

Through his positivity and warmth Tracy has built a true sense of belonging across our volunteer community, one built on friendship, confidence and shared purpose.

This year, Tracy's incredible contribution was recognised nationally when he was named a finalist for Volunteer of the Year at the Third Sector Awards, the largest and most prestigious awards recognising excellence within Australia's not-for-profit sector. True to form, Tracy says the honour isn't just for him, it's about shining a light on the Foundation and every volunteer who shows up to make a difference.

Tracy's story is a powerful reminder that every hour given, every role filled, and every smile shared moves us closer to SCHF's vision. Because while it takes many to make a movement, it only takes one person, like Tracy, to inspire it.

> "If I can help the Foundation, I know I've helped lots of other people, especially kids. That's what keeps me going - knowing that all of this helps make a difference for them."

- Tracy Cross, SCHF Volunteer team leader.

Our FY25 impact ambassadors

Meet Remy

11-year-old Remy was rushed to SCH fighting a rare and life-threatening infection that had spread to his brain. He endured excruciating pain, terrifying seizures, and two major brain surgeries. At his lowest point, he asked his mum, "Am I going to die?"

That's when SCHN child life therapists, Michelle and Nicola, became his lifeline. As the medical team worked to support his physical recovery, they helped Remy cope with the fear and uncertainty – bringing Star Wars DVDs, LEGO® and toys to distract him in ICU, explaining scary procedures in ways he could understand, and sitting by his side through painful injections. They gave him the courage to face each day and the confidence to believe he could recover.

"Child life therapy changes lives," says Nicole, Remy's Mum. "And it changes outcomes. Remy now has such a positive attitude and without Michelle and Nicola, I truly believe he wouldn't have recovered the way he has. He has superseded all expectations!"

Learn more about the impact of child life and music therapy, (page 59).

Meet Jackson

Three-year-old Jackson is full of energy – obsessed with cars, trucks, and anything that moves. You'd never guess he was born with a condition that threatened his developing brain.

Soon after birth, scans revealed sagittal craniosynostosis which is a premature fusion of the skull that can restrict brain growth. Jackson's parents were referred to CHW, facing the possibility of complex skull reconstruction.

"They rang at 4pm and said his sagittal suture had fused... he could have brain damage... he's going to need surgery. I was a mess," Jackson's mum, Kayla, remembers.

Thanks to philanthropy, there was another option. Donor support helped bring a world-leading surgeon, Dr Chris Forrest to Sydney to train local teams in a less invasive procedure. Instead of a major operation later in life, Jackson had a microscopic surgery before four months old, spent just two nights in hospital, and wore a custom helmet to guide his skull shape as he grew.

"You wouldn't even know anything was wrong with him now," says his mum, Kayla.

Philanthropy didn't just change Jackson's operation, it changed his future.

Learn more about advanced paediatric craniofacial surgery at SCHN (page 20).

A Gift in Will: A Legacy of Lifelong Impact

One of the most powerful forms of giving, and a cornerstone of our Sydney Sick Kids Fund, is a gift in Will. Donors who choose to leave a legacy gift make a lasting impact on the areas of greatest need, helping to safeguard the future of children's healthcare.

We are grateful for the generosity of those supporters whose gifts in their Wills were received during FY25. These gifts have helped ensure that sick children received the best hospital care delivered with compassion, where every treatment, every procedure, and every moment is shaped by the highest standards of paediatric expertise.

Their legacy also contributed to the pioneering research that could lead to new discoveries, better treatments, and improved outcomes for children everywhere. It drives the innovation that helps sick kids recover faster, live healthier lives, and, in many cases, survive conditions that once had no answers.

When families are facing the hardest journey of all, their kindness supported specialised children's palliative care - offering comfort, dignity, and treasured moments together. This care embraces the entire family, helping them create meaningful memories and ensuring they never feel alone.

By choosing a gift in their Will, these donors have empowered SCHF to respond to whatever challenges the future brings. They have provided the flexibility to meet urgent needs, invest in emerging opportunities, and direct support where it will have the greatest and most lasting impact. Their legacy is a source of strength and hope, one that continues to change young lives today and long into the future.

Contact us

Connect

Visit **www.schf.org.au** for more information about how you can get involved.

Connect with us on social media **@schf.kids** to be inspired every day by stories and news.

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SCHF is an independent Health Promotion Charity and registered as an Item 1 **Deductible Gift Recipient by the Australian Tax Office.**

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Make a donation

With your help we can go all in to change the future of sick kids. Please use this QR code if you would like to make an online donation today.

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