



# Best Research for Best Care

RESEARCH STRATEGIC PLAN  
2021-2026

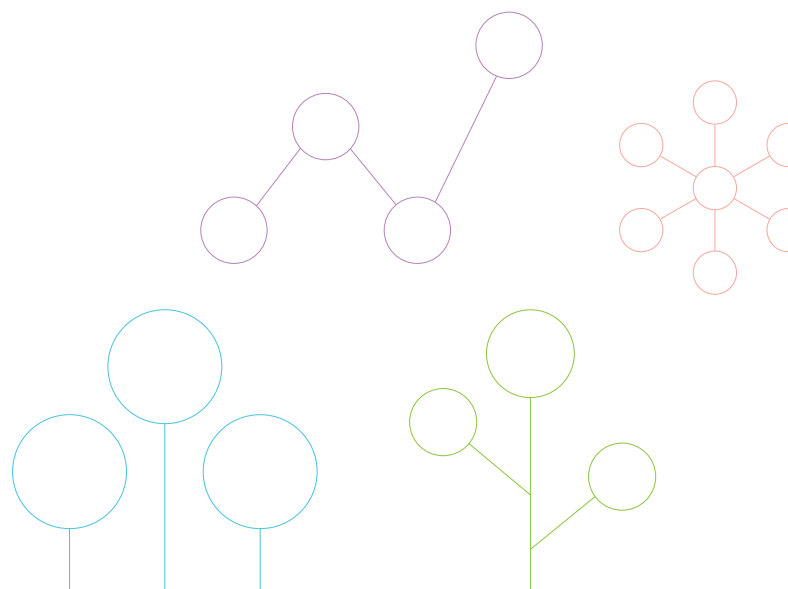






# Contents

<b>1. Executive Summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Background</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Vision for the Future</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1 Local innovation for global impact	5
3.2 Alignment with Strategic Direction 2021-2023	5
3.3 Delivering Western Health's Aspirations for Research	8
A. Our Partners	8
B. Our People	10
C. Our Data	12
D. Sustainable Healthcare	14
<b>4. Implementing this Strategy</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>5. Best Research for Best Care: Strategic Priorities (Summary Diagram)</b>	<b>18</b>



# Executive Summary

The *2021-2026 Western Health Research Strategic Plan* ('the Plan') aims to provide a pathway to consolidating our recent considerable research successes in order to ensure Western Health is firmly placed as an acknowledged sector-leading, future-focused healthcare provider, equipped to respond to the challenges and needs of local and global communities during a period of growth and change.

As Western Health is poised to become one of Victoria's largest healthcare services, we believe the time has now come for it also to establish a reputation as a national leader in translational healthcare research, building especially on strengths in chronic disease, complex care and innovative, sustainable healthcare solutions. This vision of *Best Research* will in turn develop the expertise and capability to inform and drive our world-class *Best Care* framework. This document provides a pathway to achieving this lofty ambition over the next 5 years.

This Strategic Plan in turn builds on the vision and direction of Western Health's *Strategic Direction 2021-2023*. This Strategy has provided us with the philosophical bedrock to guide our thinking as to how we prioritise and implement research that best addresses Western Health's overall organisational vision.

In order to realise this, we have developed a framework that addresses three critical areas that we see as fundamental for building translational research capacity and capability in a way that aligns best with the Strategy's stated objectives. These are ***Our Partners***, ***Our People***, and ***Our Data***.

In alignment with Strategic Direction 1 "***We partner with patients and families***" and Strategic Direction 4 "***We are better together***", ***Our Partners*** emphasises the importance of collaboration, not only with our academic partners, but most of all with our patients, their carers and the communities they come from. Reflecting a strong philosophy of equity and inclusivity, a particular need has been identified to engage more with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups that represent such an important part of the communities we serve.



In alignment with Strategic Direction 2, “**We care for our people**”. **Our People** acknowledges the central importance of attracting, retaining, training and developing the research-active staff essential to building a vibrant culture of continuous learning, innovation, discovery and evidence-based service improvement. This will be underpinned by an inclusive strategy targeting workforce development and efforts to maximise research-related career development opportunities in our nursing, allied health, medical and other clinical and non-clinical staff.

In alignment with both Strategic Direction 3 “**We deliver services for the future**” and Strategic Direction 5 “**We discover and learn**”, **Our Data** addresses the transformative potential of the digital healthcare revolution. It recognises that for Western Health to realise its objective of becoming a leader in health systems and other translational healthcare research, we must waste no time in seizing the opportunity to best utilise the massive amounts of health data generated by our new digital systems by leveraging them to drive research, learning and improvement.

Recognising that Western Health finds itself on the threshold of a period of unprecedented service expansion, our Strategic Plan also addresses the need for our research infrastructure to keep pace with this rapid growth and for us to support our stated ethical obligations to minimise our environmental impact. Therefore **Sustainable Healthcare** is an additional key theme addressed in our Strategic Plan.

To make all this happen, a separate detailed Implementation Plan builds further on this Strategy by going on to outline specific activities we will need to undertake and how we will measure success.



**Paul Eleftheriou**  
Chief Medical Officer



**Bill Karanatsios**  
Research Program Director



**Harin Karunajeewa**  
Director of Clinical Research

# Background

**Western Health is set to continue an unprecedented level of service expansion likely to see it become one of Victoria's largest health services and one that provides care to some of Australia's most culturally and socioeconomically diverse and vulnerable populations, afflicted with one of the highest rates of chronic disease in the country. This creates great research opportunities but also numerous challenges.**

Over the last 5 years, Western Health has realised significant research successes during a period of major growth and upheaval. Our researchers published in high impact journals, led game-changing innovations in new models of delivering healthcare and garnered significant national and international media publicity. Most especially, when Western Health found itself at the epicentre of Australia's COVID-19 epidemic, our researchers and innovators had a central role implementing a sector-leading response that was widely lauded, both at home and abroad.

As the most disruptive event in modern healthcare history, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, above all, the importance of health and medical research in guiding operational responses in highly dynamic conditions. It demonstrated how a culture of research and learning provides a strong foundation for quickly adapting to new and unexpected circumstances. Nowhere has this proved to be truer than here at Western Health, where clinician-researchers were able to introduce world-leading innovations and to show our peers the way by leading the development of state-of-the-art testing and cohorting strategies, hospital infection prevention approaches and vaccine roll-out.

That we found ourselves in the fortunate position to deal so effectively with the epidemic was not just some happy accident. Our staff recruitment policies that had emphasised the desirability of research credentials were a factor in us having world-leading expertise in pandemic preparedness and infection prevention. We therefore had the experts with both relevant content knowledge but who also had the skills to rapidly filter, synthesise and interpret the confusing and ever-changing storm of new information that descended on us. The extraordinarily rapid development and deployment of the 'McMonty iHood' was only possible because staff are encouraged and enabled to explore innovative technological healthcare solutions, in partnership with our key academic partners.

These examples all speak to the importance of continuing to support and develop the innovation culture at Western Health. They have demonstrated how, when pushed, we could develop and implement innovative healthcare solutions at lightning speed – leading us to ask whether we can continue to achieve this sort of pace of change on an ongoing basis even when we return to more usual circumstances. Furthermore, the resulting high-profile media attention generated a groundswell of enthusiasm and pride amongst our staff and the community we serve – demonstrating how further achievements, if effectively publicised, will continue to bolster our reputation and drive a vibrant, positive workplace culture. Our recent experience therefore gives us an insight as to how we can now go on to cement a position as healthcare leaders whilst also developing the resilience and capacity to adapt and thrive in future healthcare challenges.

# Vision for the Future

## 3.1 Local Innovation for global impact

We draw inspiration from our community to lead research that has global impact.

We strive to understand the healthcare challenges that our community is faced with and aim to provide solutions that deliver better health outcomes that are globally relevant, sustainable and inspire our people to further innovate.

Our vision for the future is for us to be leaders in translational and health services research in the chronic and complex disease space and to develop, deliver and evaluate models of care that address the needs of the community we serve in a sustainable, equitable and respectful manner. Innovation and invention remain a core goal of our current and future research pursuits.

## 3.2 Alignment with Strategic Direction 2021-2023

Our guiding light is the *Western Health Strategic Direction 2021-2023* which tells us we should “Develop a comprehensive research plan that harnesses an innovative culture, celebrates successes and drives improvement of patient outcomes, nationally and internationally” (Strategic Direction 5). It outlines an overall vision that “Together we deliver the healthcare of the future”: healthcare that should be “simple, connected, innovative and sustainable”. It is structured around the 5 key themes from the “Strategic Directions”. The relevance of each strategic direction to research is shown in the table below to demonstrate how each has informed this Research Strategic Plan:

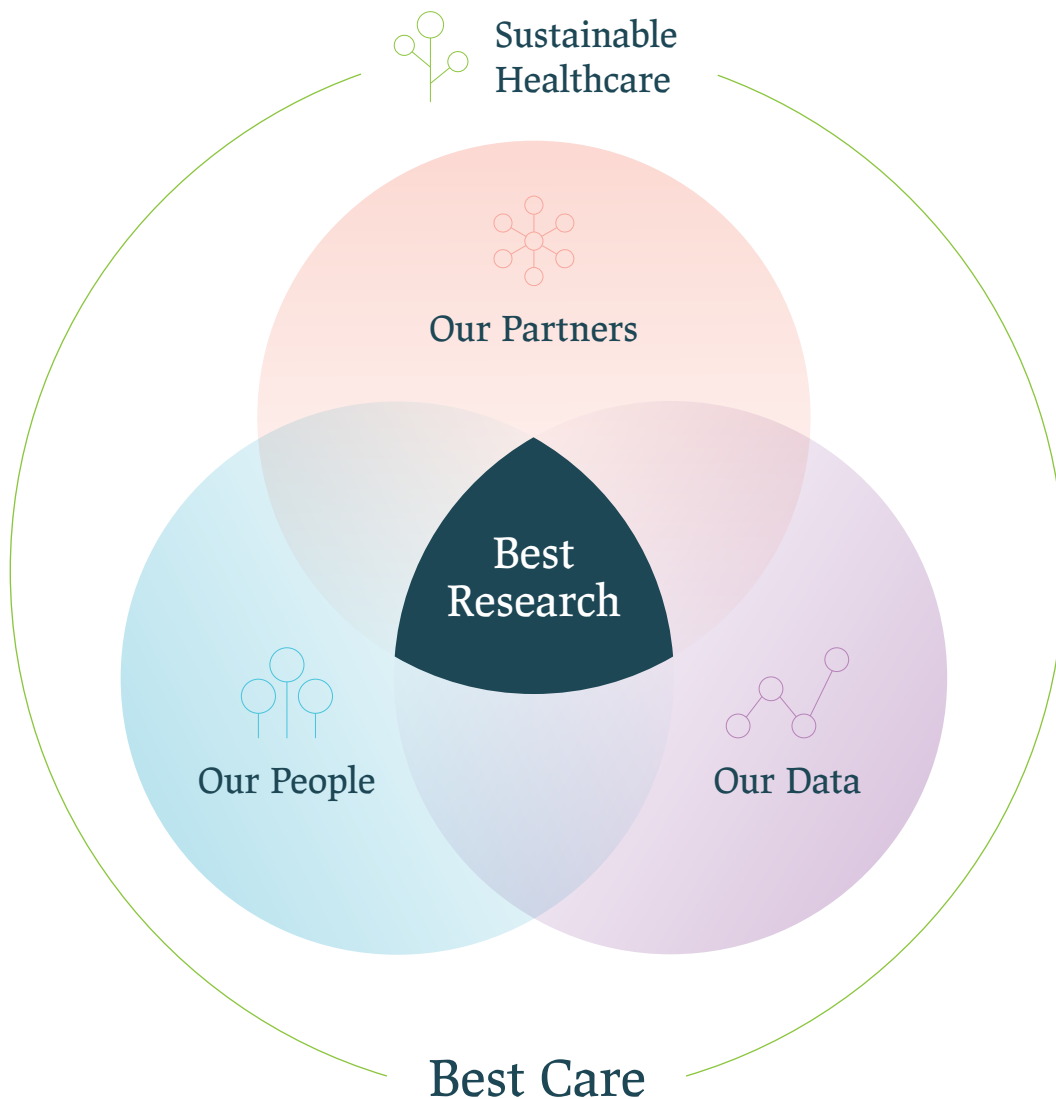
Strategic Direction	Relevance to research	Research Plan Alignment
<b>We partner with patients and families.</b>	Our research should be conducted in a way that puts consumers at the centre and engages in a meaningful and inclusive way with the community we serve.	<b>Our Partners</b> (see section 3.3A)
<b>We care for our people.</b>	Our research should exist in an inclusive, open, accessible and welcoming space that provides our staff with opportunities for career development and for pride and joy from their work. This should be an “organisation-wide” approach that applies equally to those from nursing, allied health, medical, other clinical and non-clinical backgrounds.	<b>Our People</b> (3.3B)
<b>We deliver services for the future.</b>	Emphasises the importance of fully realising the potential of the digital health revolution to ensure our new data systems are leveraged to drive the highest quality research, service improvements and data-driven decision-making.  Innovation, inventorship and the development and evaluation of new models of care are especially relevant here.	<b>Our Data</b> (3.3C)  <b>Our People</b> (3.3B)
<b>We are better together.</b>	Avoiding fragmentation and siloing, developing synergies and keep fostering multi-disciplinary collaboration both within Western Health and with our academic and other partners.	<b>Our Partners</b> (3.3A) and <b>Our People</b> (3.3B)
<b>We discover and learn.</b>	Embedding research as a fundamental to everything we do as a health service that is committed to continuous improvement and innovation.	All

### 2021—2026 Research Strategy Framework

In order to align our Research Strategic Plan with The Strategic Directions 2021-23 we have identified three major areas in which to direct our efforts in the research sphere: *Our Partners*, *Our People* and *Our Data* as outlined in this diagram.

At Western Health, we also continue to prioritise research that is focussed on translation, thereby ensuring that the evidence generated is also being applied effectively in practice. We therefore introduce the concept of *Best Research* (see page 7) as a critical antecedent to *Best Care*.

This framework builds on an understanding that *Best Care* requires that current care practices are underpinned by the best available evidence. Generating this evidence is in turn fundamentally dependent on the nature and quality of research we do and apply.







Head of the ICU Department at Western Health, A/Prof Craig French.

## Best Research at Western Health

Our core interest is in *translation*: Research that directly improves clinical outcomes at both an individual and population. Research that addresses emerging issues in delivering healthcare to a growing, diverse population in Melbourne's West. This enables us to deliver *Best Care*, every day, everywhere.

Using our expertise, past success and strategic aspirations, Western Health will continue to focus on the following key priority areas:

### Health services research

Especially with a focus on:

- Patients with complex care requirements
- Integration with primary healthcare and communities
- Evaluation of novel models of care
- Cost-effectiveness in healthcare
- Staff well-being and recovery
- Environmental sustainability.



### Chronic disease management and prevention



### Inventorship, innovation and commercialisation



### Community engagement

Especially with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities.



### Data-driven and digital healthcare



### 3.3 Delivering Western Health's Aspirations for Research

Based on the above, the initiatives to deliver the Western Health aspiration for research for each of the areas of *Our Partners*, *Our People*, *Our Data* and *Sustainable Healthcare* will be as follows:

## A. Our Partners





**Western Health's Strategic Direction encourages us to:**

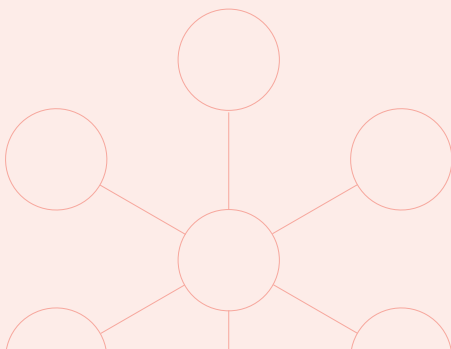
- A.1 Leverage our relationships to grow consumer and community engagement in research design and delivery and increase inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.**
- A.2 Increase research grants, philanthropic funding and collaboration.**

**We will achieve this by:**

1. Working with Consumer Engagement, the Consumer Advisory Committee, Language Services and the Aboriginal Health Liaison service to develop relationships with consumers and communities (especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other CALD groups) to enable culturally appropriately patient-centred research design, conduct and dissemination. (A.1).
2. Consolidating partnerships with primary care providers and academic partners (see 'Key Academic Partnerships', below), especially where these aim to develop healthcare interventions that integrate a seamless continuum of care between hospital, primary care and home (A.1, A.2).
3. Adopting a strategic, aspirational approach for attracting research funding that is proactive, rather than reactive and is tailored to specific strengths and capabilities within various parts of the organisation (A.2)
4. Continuing to support our own centres of research excellence and further leverage flagship collaborations and strategic partnerships (see 'Key Academic Partnerships', below) (A.2)
5. Consolidating clinical trial infrastructure and capability to attract more sponsored trials and support collaborative investigator-initiated trials (A.2).

**Key Academic Partnerships**

1. The Western Health Chronic Disease Alliance (WHCDA) is Western Health's flagship body for addressing the burden of diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, stroke, kidney disease and other chronic conditions especially prevalent in Melbourne's West. It is consolidating strong partnerships with Primary Healthcare Networks (that has included work on Future Health Today and Chronic Disease Impact projects) and key academic partnerships with the University of Melbourne and the George Institute.
2. The Centre for Quality and Patient Safety is an academic partnership with Deakin University, through its Institute of Health Transformation, whose core mission is ideally suited both to informing Western Health's Best Care framework and to further developing our capacity in the health services research space.
3. The Australian Institute of Musculoskeletal Science (AIMSS), based at Sunshine Hospital, is a national leader in the study of muscle, bone and joint health (especially as relevant to elderly and frail populations).
4. The landmark Gen V project was piloted at Western Health and can be seen as a flagship program of the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's at Sunshine Hospital.
5. The Melbourne Academic Centre for Health Research (MACH) provides Western Health with a strong collaborative network of University of Melbourne affiliated health services and world-leading research institutes that can be leveraged to support Western Health's strategic objectives, especially in the digital health, health services and data linkage fields.
6. Victoria University is a major contributor to education and training of Western Health staff, with co-located infrastructure and research collaborations with Western Health in health systems research and through AIMSS.
7. The Joseph Epstein Centre for Emergency Medicine Research (JECMER) continues to foster research in





# B. Our People



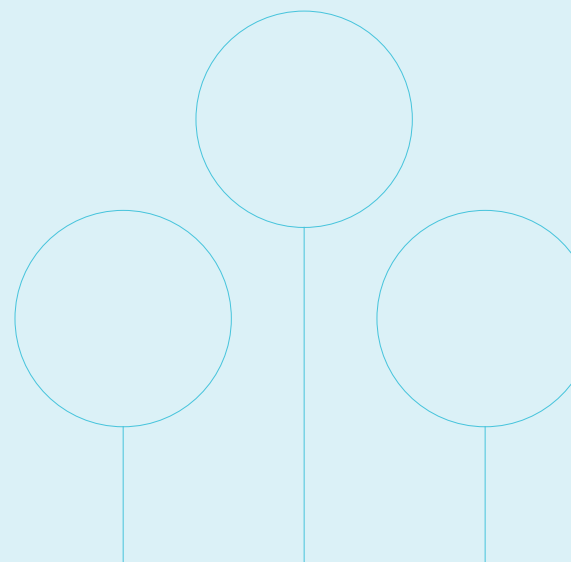


**Western Health's Strategic Direction encourages us to support and enable our people in the following ways:**

- B.1 Strengthen organisation-wide research and educator capability through targeted workforce planning.**
- B.2 Enhance active participation, facilitation, and collaboration in research, education and quality improvement initiatives.**
- B.3 Establish an organisation-wide, evidence-based methodology for collaborative quality improvement and implementing translational research across the organisation.**

**We will achieve this by:**

1. Helping our research-interested staff (including from nursing, midwifery, allied health, medical and non-clinical areas) to make cross-disciplinary connections with one another and publicising their achievements within Western Health so that their work is appreciated, and research valued as a key organisational output (B.2).
2. Actively seeking to attract, retain, develop and deploy research champions throughout all disciplines, in such a way that research-active staff will eventually become embedded throughout all areas of the organisation (B.1, B.2).
3. Identifying, nurturing and supporting innovators, including through the Innovation Acceleration Program (IAP) and provision of appropriate training relating to commercialisation of innovation (B.2).
4. Increasing opportunities for Western Health clinical (including nursing, midwifery, medical, allied health) and non-clinical staff for research-related career development with dedicated education and training, expanded access to scholarships, fellowships, higher degrees and dedicated research time for our research champions and emerging talent (B.2).
5. Enabling and encouraging staff to perform high-quality collaborative quality improvement and health service research (B.3)
6. Establishing the Western Health Research Strategic Steering Committee (RSSC), that will provide high level oversight of the implementation of this Research Strategic Plan (B.1, B.2, B.3).





# C. Our Data

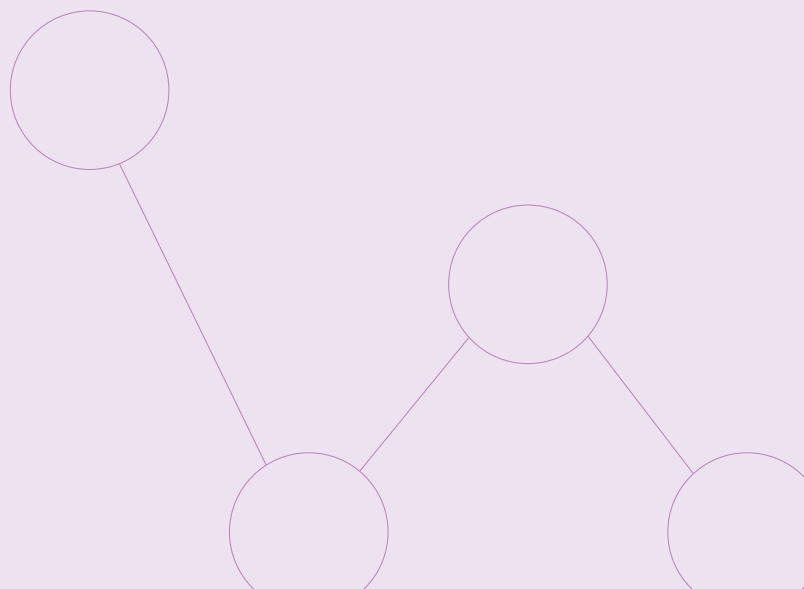


**Western Health's Strategic Direction encourages us to:**

- C.1 Support the organisation to enable connections between systems that ensure reliable and centralised data sources to boost data collection, analysis and reporting.**
  - C.2 Implement world-leading frameworks to equip our leadership in making data-driven decisions...**
- 

**We will achieve this by:**

- 1. Helping strengthen research data collection, management and linkage to ensure that Western Health has access to a state-of-the-art trustworthy "Digital Research Environment" that delivers "end-to-end" collection and curation of confidential research data (C.1).
- 2. Supporting the development of digital health capacity for clinical trials, registries, real-time quality auditing and other health services research. (C.1)
- 3. Providing academic input into the operational deployment of Patient Reported Outcomes (PROMS) and Patient Reported Experience Measures (PREMS) within our operating structures so that these can be used to drive quality improvement (C.2).
- 4. Providing researchers with timely, expert statistical advice and support (C.1, C.2).







# D. Sustainable Healthcare





The unprecedented service expansion that is earmarked for Western Health over the next five years, including major capital works, will provide unparalleled potential to implement and evaluate new healthcare infrastructure and alternative models of care. We have the opportunity to provide an example of world's best practice in

sustainable and cost-effective healthcare development (including meeting targets for carbon neutrality). It will also create additional challenges for ensuring that research remains embedded throughout all areas of the organisation including new hospitals planned for Footscray, Melton, Sunbury and Point Cook.

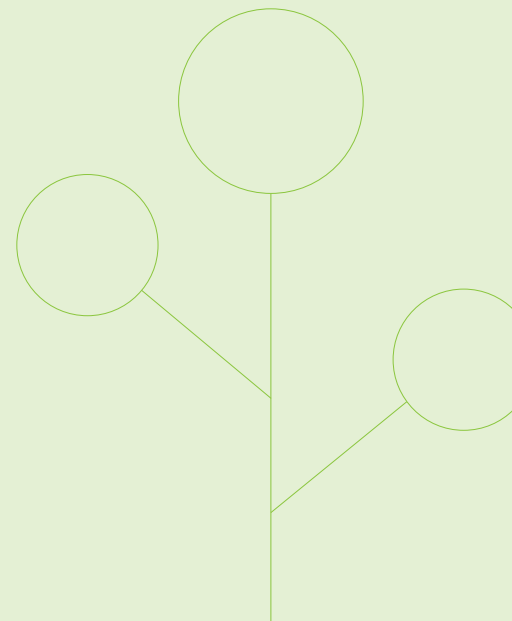
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**Western Health's Strategic Direction encourages us to:**

- D.1 Plan and develop an implementation pathway to embed sustainability as a core aspect of our operations.**
  - D.2 ...set priorities and monitor our impact towards becoming more sustainable.**
- 

**We will achieve this by:**

1. Contributing to the body of knowledge from our experiences in the construction of new health facilities.
2. Exploring how current and planned service delivery operations impact on the environment and how best to organise ourselves to minimise this impact, in line with Western Health's ambitions of achieving carbon neutrality (D.1, D.2).
3. Supporting research that aims to reduce the cost and impact of healthcare delivery by introducing new and innovative models of care. (D.1)
4. Forward planning to ensure that research infrastructure and human resources are incorporated in all new planned capital works and future operations.



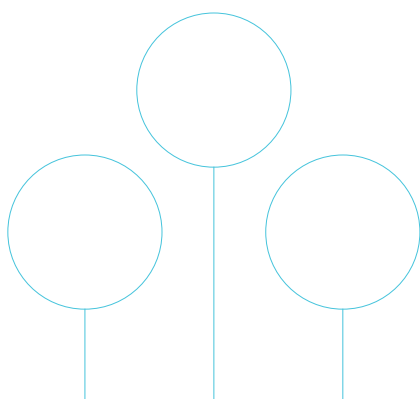
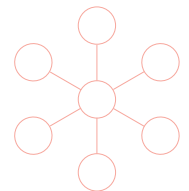
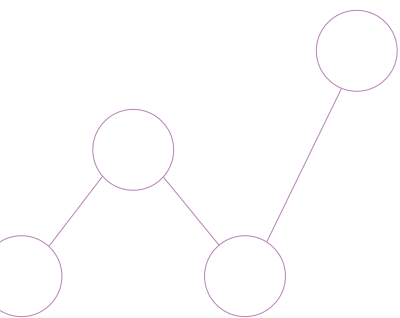
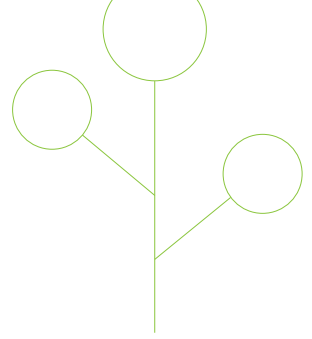
# Implementing this Strategy

This Research Strategy has outlined a total of 19 initiatives within the *Our Partners, Our People, Our Data* and *Sustainable Healthcare* domains. Each of these initiatives will in turn require a set of defined actions to ensure they are addressed within the next five years.

Therefore, a separate more detailed implementation plan has also been prepared to outline a 5-year work plan that includes more specific activities, timelines and key performance indicators that provide a framework for assessing progress on meeting the broader aspirations outlined here.

We also see the proposed Research Strategic Steering Committee (RSSC) as a crucial instrument, vital to the successful implementation of this strategy. We envisage that this will report directly to the Board Quality and Safety sub-committee on an annual basis.

The RSSC will advocate and promote the importance of research within Western Health, identify and leverage resource opportunities and effectively act as a steering committee to further develop, prioritise, assess progress and oversee the implementation of this ambitious plan. Perhaps, most importantly, it will provide an inclusive space for a broad, representative range of stakeholders to contribute to building our vision of *Best Research*.





# Best Research for Best Care: Strategic Priorities

## SUMMARY DIAGRAM













# Together, we deliver the healthcare of the future.

[westernhealth.org.au](http://westernhealth.org.au)

**Footscray Hospital**

Gordon Street  
Footscray VIC 3011  
Locked Bag 2  
Footscray VIC 3011  
03 8345 6666

**Sunshine Hospital**

Furlong Road  
St Albans VIC 3021  
PO Box 294  
St Albans VIC 3021  
03 8345 1333

**Sunshine Hospital  
Radiation Therapy Centre**

176 Furlong Road  
St Albans VIC 3021  
03 8395 9999

**Western Centre for Health  
Research and Education**

Sunshine Hospital  
Furlong Road  
St Albans VIC 3021  
03 8345 1333

**Sunbury Day Hospital**

7 Macedon Road  
Sunbury VIC 3429  
03 9732 8600

**Williamstown Hospital**

Railway Crescent  
Williamstown VIC 3016  
03 9393 0100

**Drug Health Services**

3-7 Eleanor Street  
Footscray VIC 3011  
03 8345 6682

**Hazeldean**

211-215 Osborne Street  
Williamstown VIC 3016  
03 9397 3167

**Bacchus Marsh and Melton  
Regional Hospital**

29-35 Grant Street  
PO Box 330  
Bacchus Marsh VIC 3340  
03 5367 2000

**Melton Health**

195-209 Barries Road  
Melton West VIC 3337  
03 9747 7600

**Caroline Springs**

228-232 Caroline Springs Boulevard  
Caroline Springs VIC 3023  
03 9361 9300



Western Health