



media release

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New grants help women in STEM rebuild vital research impacted by COVID-19

Seven leading STEM researchers – working on research ranging from using soil to tackle climate change to making stronger 3D printed materials to fighting obesity with addiction science – have been awarded **veski** inspiring women career recovery grants in recognition of the importance of their research, their contributions as STEM role models and leaders, and the profound disruption to their work caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Designed to support female mid-career leaders or emerging leaders in STEM across Victoria, the **veski** inspiring women career recovery grants provide vital, timely support via short-term flexible funding, worth up to \$50,000 each, to boost research and restore pre-COVID-19 pandemic competitiveness. The funding is further boosted with 50 per cent matched funding from their host organisation, which also provides added confidence and support for the women.

The seven grant recipients are:

- **Dr Robyn Brown** from the University of Melbourne using addiction neuroscience to understand drivers of overeating
- **Dr Kirsten Ellis** from Monash University creating new opportunities for people with disability to become 'makers'
- **Dr Samantha Grover** from RMIT University working to use soil to fight climate change and feed the world
- **Dr Jessica Holien** from RMIT University using computers to design new medicines
- **Dr Sarah Jones** from Monash University finding a replacement for dangerous steroids
- **Dr Lisa Mielke** from the Olivia Newton-John Cancer Research Institute improving outcomes for the second leading cause of cancer death in Australia
- **Dr Louise Olsen-Kettle** from Swinburne University of Technology making 3D printed materials stronger

Announcing the grants, **veski** MD & chief executive Julia L Page said: '**veski** supports research and innovation capacity in Victoria that has national and international impact. We have created these grants as part of our strategy to support female researchers and our future leaders, in the science and innovation community – with the profound disruption created by COVID-19 there has never been a more important time to undertake this work.'

International research shows that COVID-19 has compounded pre-existing gender inequality, threatening to wind back hard-earned progress. Its effect has been to reduce available work hours and to disrupt workloads and work practices – with increased home and caring responsibilities disproportionately affecting women.

Ms Page emphasised that the grant applications provided compelling evidence of this inequality. 'The applications highlight three major challenges facing women in research: the demands of care giving, the lost research opportunities including forgone fellowships and conference attendance, and the widening gap between genders in terms of submitting grants and publishing papers,' she said.

'Ultimately, such inequality serves to demoralise and disincentivise our research community, which can only have a harmful effect on innovation and productivity. **veski** will continue to raise awareness about these important issues.'

The pandemic has also had a major impact on higher education and the research sectors more broadly, with limited access to international students and researchers, reduced capacity to conduct research due to increased teaching loads linked to online teaching, and significant financial pressures on institutions and limited access to facilities.

In addition to the recipients, a further eight researchers were shortlisted. **veski** is working to secure further funding from industry, government, investors and philanthropists to support to this group of deserving researchers to recover from COVID-19 setbacks.

Dr Leonie Walsh, the Chair of the Selection Panel for the inspiring women career recovery grants and the Deputy Chair of **veski** says this support is vital not only for supporting these leading female researchers but also supporting Victorians by ensuring this research is realised. "Supporting scientists and researchers is about supporting the community, and we all have a role to play ensuring that important research isn't delayed anymore and that these inspiring women can get their research back on track,' Dr Walsh said.

About veski

veski was established in 2004 to enhance Victoria's intellectual capital through a program of fellowships, awards and international networks. **veski** is at the forefront of Australia's innovation economy. **veski** plays a critical role in attracting talent to Victoria. **veski's** fellowship programs develop solutions to address modern challenges facing health and medicine, the environment, technology and society more broadly and are underpinned by the **veski** innovation, inspiring women and sustainable agriculture fellowships. veski.org.au

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To arrange an interview with one of the recipients or the **veski** MD & chief executive, contact jack@thecword.com.au or 0428 300 090