

Media release

Victorian Excellence in Science and Innovation Awards Announced

Researchers whose sustained excellence and promising achievements have made significant contributions to Victoria through research and innovation have been awarded the Victoria Prize for Science and Innovation and Victoria Fellowships in 2022 by the Minister for Industry and Innovation Ben Carroll MP.

The prestigious Victoria Prize in the life sciences recognises the partnership between **Associate Professor Joshua Ooi and Professor Eric Morand** from Monash University for their research into targeted cell therapies to treat autoimmune diseases, in particular Lupus, while the Victoria Prize in the physical sciences has been awarded to **Professor Brian Abbey and Associate Professor Belinda Parker** from La Trobe University & the Peter MacCallum Cancer respectively, for their research and development of the NanoMslide – a nanofabricated microscope slide that detects cancer cells.

Jointly awarded the \$25,000 Victoria Prize in the Life Sciences, the partnership between Associate Professor Ooi and Professor Morand has seen the researchers devise a highly innovative therapy based on single cell sequencing and genetic engineering that could specifically switch off the ‘mis-directed’ immune response in patients with lupus. Lupus is a disease that occurs when the body's immune system attacks its own tissues and organs. Inflammation caused by lupus can affect many body systems including joints, skin, kidneys, blood cells, brain, heart and lungs. One of these researchers’ key discoveries is that naturally occurring cells which function to temper the activity of the immune system, known as regulatory T cells (Tregs), can be specific to individual proteins such as those that trigger lupus. If harnessed therapeutically this could result in highly targeted, effective, and safe control, or even a cure, of autoimmune disease.

Awarded the joint \$25,000 Victoria Prize in Physical Sciences, Professor Abbey, a physicist at La Trobe University and Associate Professor Parker, a cancer biologist at Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, have spent the past seven years working together to turn the ‘NanoMslide’, a simple microscope slide, into a new medical diagnostic tool for detecting cancer cells. The NanoMslide assists in the detection of cancer cells by using colour as a visual marker for disease. By modifying the surface of conventional microscope slides, biological structures and cells take on a striking colour contrast. Using the NanoMslide, causes a colour change to occur, for example, from yellow to blue when comparing healthy cells to cancerous cells under the microscope. The technology is currently being trialled as an adjunct diagnostic to aid in the detection of early breast cancer.

Victoria Fellowships, worth \$18,000 each, are awarded to 10 early-career researchers to support them in undertaking international study to advance their work in global settings, which will contribute to longer term growth of Victoria’s research and innovation capabilities. The Victoria Fellows in 2022, who will benefit from the funding to re-establish international connections following the pandemic, are:

Life sciences

- **Dr Dinh Bui** The University of Melbourne
- **Dr Sarah McColl-Gausden** The University of Melbourne
- **Dr Remika Mito** The Florey Institute
- **Dr Leona Pascoe** Monash University
- **Dr Zhuoting (Lisa) Zhu** Centre for Eye Research Australia

Physical sciences

- **Dr Wenyi Li** The University of Melbourne
- **Dr Tuan Nguyen** The University of Melbourne
- **Dr Sampa Sarkar** RMIT University
- **Dr Amin Soltani** Federation University Australia
- **Dr Wei Tong** The University of Melbourne

The Victorian Government has proudly supported Victoria's most prestigious awards for science and innovation since 1998, delivering them in partnership with **veski** since 2013.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Industry and Innovation, Ben Carroll.

"Victoria is home to some of the world's best researchers – these awards ensure they're able to turn promising work into potentially life-changing discoveries affecting millions of people worldwide."

"Backing our researchers keeps Melbourne among the best in the world, like Boston and London, for advancing scientific breakthroughs."

Quotes attributable to veski MD & chief executive Julia L Page.

"**veski** is again delighted to present these awards in partnership with the Victorian Government in 2022."

"The exciting work being done by these established and early-career researchers puts Victoria at the forefront of science and technology both nationally and internationally and ensures their ongoing discoveries will have global impacts well into the future. We congratulate all recipients in 2022 and look forward to following their work as they make a difference in our community."

About veski

Since 2004 **veski** has enhanced Victoria's intellectual capital through a program of fellowships, awards and international networks. 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.

Please note: For pre-launch embargoed images of Victoria Prize recipients in 2022, **Associate Professor Joshua Ooi, Professor Eric Morand, Professor Brian Abbey and Associate Professor Belinda Parker** and interview opportunities please contact Vaidehi Deosthali via admin@veski.org.au or 0447 362 345.

For further information please contact veski via veski@veski.org.au or call 03 9635 5700.