

## Media release

**Strictly embargoed** until 11.30am AEDT, Tuesday, 14 December 2021

### **Victoria recognises sustained excellence and early-career potential among science and innovation leaders**

Established and early-career 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 2021 by the Minister for Innovation Jaala Pulford MP.

The prestigious Victoria Prize in the life sciences recognises the long-term partnership between **Professor Anne Voss and Associate Professor Tim Thomas** from the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research (WEHI) in delivering a new cancer treatment strategy, while the Victoria Prize in the physical sciences has been awarded to **Distinguished Professor Christopher Berndt** of Swinburne University of Technology, whose innovative work has focused on advancing ‘surface engineering’.

Jointly awarded the \$50,000 Victoria Prize in the life sciences, the partnership between Professor Anne Voss and Associate Professor Tim Thomas has resulted in a new chemical strategy to treat cancer. Their discoveries have uncovered key functions of the MYST family of proteins, which includes oncogenes; validated the proteins as novel targets for anti-cancer therapeutics; and led a collaborative team to discover a new type of anti-cancer compound that ‘puts cancer cells into a permanent sleep’. Professor Voss and Associate Professor Thomas’s Victorian-based research initiative has attracted worldwide attention, with the work progressing into clinical trials in late 2020.

Awarded the \$50,000 Victoria Prize in Physical Sciences, Distinguished Professor Christopher Berndt is a global leader in his field. Given that the estimated cost of wear and corrosion is 4-5 per cent of gross domestic product in nations such as Australia, surface engineering produces important economic and environmental impacts. Coatings formed by a manufacturing process known as ‘thermal spray’ have industrial applications that experience demanding operating environments, for example in mining, power generating equipment, and heavy industry – the global thermal spray coating market exceeds US\$10 billion. Outcomes of Professor Berndt’s achievements in building reliable surface engineering capabilities and technology boost Victoria’s international access to markets, and therefore Australia’s position in advanced manufacturing.

Victoria Fellowships, worth \$18,000 each, are awarded to 12 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 2021, who will benefit from the funding to re-establish international connections following the pandemic, are:

#### Life sciences

- **Dr Alexis Ceecee Britten-Jones, University of Melbourne**
- **Dr Xavier Hadoux, Centre for Eye Research Australia**
- **Dr Marios Koutsakos, Doherty Institute**
- **Dr Kallyanashis Paul, Hudson Institute of Medical Research**
- **Dr Roshan Selvaratnam, Monash University**
- **Dr Ye Tian, University of Melbourne**

#### Physical sciences

- **Dr Marzi Barghamadi, CSIRO**
- **Dr Yi (David) Ju, RMIT University**
- **Dr Raj Ladani, RMIT University**
- **Dr Anna Lintern, Monash University**
- **Dr Faezeh Marzbanrad, Monash University**
- **Dr Mohammad Saberian Boroujeni, RMIT University**

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 Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy Jaala Pulford.

"Congratulations to the 2021 Victoria Prize recipients for their outstanding contributions to research and innovation."

"Victoria is home to some of the world's leading researchers and brightest minds. The Victorian Government is committed to nurturing our homegrown talent by making record investments in innovation and supporting researchers to turn their ideas into breakthroughs and products that improve and save lives here and around the world."

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#### **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 2021, Professor Anne Voss, Associate Professor Tim Thomas and Professor Christopher Berndt, and interview opportunities please contact Sally Roberts via [fellowships@veski.org.au](mailto:fellowships@veski.org.au) or 0449 974 759.

**For further information please contact veski via [veski@veski.org.au](mailto:veski@veski.org.au) or call 03 9635 5700.**