

SPRING 2019

Thanks
to you...

Saving the lives of
mothers and babies in
Papua New Guinea

DONATE TODAY



Burnet Institute
Medical Research. Practical Action.



Thanks to you

Your generosity is helping save lives in Australia and around the world.

Welcome to the Spring 2019 edition of the Burnet Donor Newsletter.

In this edition, I'm thrilled to share with you findings from our flagship program, Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies (HMHB) in Papua New Guinea. **Our staff there completed their first major study, which had 700 women and their babies followed up for 18 months from the mothers' first antenatal visit.**

I know that many generous supporters like you have been a crucial part of this project over a number of years and feel incredibly invested in the work to improve the health and well-being of mothers and young children. **And as HMHB is primarily funded by donor contributions, it's thanks only to you that we've been able to achieve this major milestone.**

Also in this issue, Professor Heidi Drummer conveys her gratitude for the recent support of her work. With Heidi and her team's passionate commitment over the last two decades, we are closer than ever to developing an urgently needed hepatitis C vaccine.

Thanks to you, we continue to be a research leader in HIV, tuberculosis, malaria and hepatitis C, with our national and international health programs breaking new ground.

Your generous support is critical to our success, enabling us to innovate, find solutions to challenging health issues, and improve the lives of the most vulnerable people. Your gifts continue to save lives here in Australia and around the world.

Best wishes.

Professor Brendan Crabb AC,
Director and CEO

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Cover: Your gifts are helping save the lives of mothers and babies in Papua New Guinea.



It means a lot to me that so many of our supporters not only understand the importance of developing a vaccine for hepatitis C, but also understand that it's a long-term commitment.

PROFESSOR HEIDI DRUMMER, PROGRAM DIRECTOR, DISEASE ELIMINATION

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Professor Heidi Drummer's personal *thank you* to Burnet donors

Earlier this year, I was lucky enough to meet a large number of donors and supporters over lunch at Burnet Institute.

It was a great opportunity for me to meet the people who have supported my work developing a vaccine for hepatitis C, to answer questions, and most importantly offer my sincere thanks and gratitude.

Developing a vaccine for hepatitis C is a long-term commitment. It has been my focus for 20 years.

I know that seems like a long time, but it is an incredibly challenging process, and the longer it goes on, the more determined I am, and more confident of achieving success.

I was touched by the level of support my research received after our mid-year appeal. It is largely thanks to your generous donations to the ELIMINATE HEP C APPEAL that my team and I are able to stay focused on the development of a hepatitis C vaccine to help save lives.

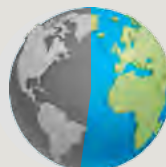
Every dollar received through your donations is precious and helps us to push the limits of what is possible, accelerating discovery and translation of that discovery into clinical application.

Thank you once again.

Statistics from Professor Heidi Drummer's research show two very different outcomes for elimination of hepatitis C by 2030.

WITH A VACCINE

It's realistic to eliminate hepatitis C in 86 out of 167 countries in the world by 2030.



WITHOUT A VACCINE

It's realistic to eliminate hepatitis C in only 8 countries in the world by 2030.



Saving the lives of mums and babies in Papua New Guinea – *thanks to you*



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I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has made a contribution to the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies program, and share with you the valuable headway we've made together so far.

DR MICHELLE SCOLLAR,
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR, HMHB

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The first major study completed

We are four years into our Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies (HMHB) research, and major progress is being made in understanding the causes of poor maternal and child health in Papua New Guinea (PNG), as well as identifying potential areas for improvement.

The first major HMHB study, monitoring 700 mothers and their babies, was completed in late 2018, and early results have already been provided back to local communities, health facilities and provincial government.



Above: The final mum and baby follow-up completed. From left to right: Ms Primrose Homiehombo, Dr Chris Morgan, Ms Rose Suruka and Ms Pele Melepia with HMHB study participant.



A snapshot of emerging findings

Data from the first study is currently being analysed, with major findings anticipated by this September. Below is a snapshot of some of the emerging findings:

- There are high rates of preventable illnesses in PNG, including: childhood stunting, anaemia, nutritional deficiencies and malaria.
- Sexually transmitted infections and bacterial vaginosis are common among pregnant women.
- We are recording the first ever estimates of the prevalence of maternal carriage of Group B *Streptococcus* and the sexually transmissible infection *Mycoplasma genitalium* in pregnant women in PNG.

Improving health capacity in PNG

As well as working to save lives and improve the health of mothers and babies, Burnet's work is improving health capacity in PNG.

Dozens of local research staff and health care workers have been trained in skills such as taking samples and performing tests, taking accurate baby measurements, carrying out laboratory techniques, first aid, computing skills, and presenting at scientific conferences.



Above: The HMHB team in PNG on the day of the final mum and baby follow-up. From Left to Right: Ms Primrose Homiehombo, Ms Rose Suruka, Ms Kerryanne Tokmun, Ms Pele Melepia, Ms Priscah Hezeri, Mr Teddy Wanahau.

Exploring quality of care

There is a major issue in PNG around the quality of care provided to women. There are often not enough midwives to provide quality care, and many facilities lack basic amenities which we all take for granted.

In PNG, if women don't access health care during pregnancy, it literally means they are at a greater risk of dying.



Professor Caroline Homer AO has joined the HMHB team with a focus on exploring the quality of care available in PNG.

Caroline is a leading midwifery researcher in Australia with an international reputation as a scholar and leader in maternal and newborn health care and service delivery.

Caroline and the HMHB team will work together with local participating facilities and staff to explore existing 'quality of care' and define the changes needed to improve health services, especially antenatal, labour and birth, in East New Britain province. Local solutions to these challenges are vital.



I am thrilled to have joined a team working so hard in PNG to save mums and babies, and especially thankful to you for supporting our work.

PROFESSOR CAROLINE HOMER AO,
CO-PROGRAM DIRECTOR, MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH



Running to save lives

Burnet's Professor Robert Power gave himself an unusual present for his 65th birthday – he ran a gruelling marathon in New Zealand to raise money for what he is passionate about, life-saving health research.

“I've been a keen runner for many years, but my last marathon was in 2012,” Robert said. “For some time I'd been thinking: ‘one more before I'm 65’, and I was 65 in March this year! I found a marathon in New Zealand that was actually on my birthday. It felt like destiny had tapped me on the shoulder.”

Robert completed *The DUAL* marathon in New Zealand, a 42.2 kilometre run across two islands just off Auckland. He successfully raised \$4,470 which went directly to Burnet's international programs.

As Head of International Operations at Burnet Institute, Robert visits our activities overseas, notably in our priority countries, Papua New Guinea and Myanmar.

There he witnesses first-hand the need in those countries – life-threatening risks to mothers and babies in childbirth, communities affected by HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria.

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Knowing that I was helping the communities that we serve gave me that extra bit of motivation I needed to complete the run – and every little bit helps.

PROFESSOR ROBERT POWER,
HEAD OF INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS

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If you would like to fundraise for Burnet Institute via a marathon, an event or any other fundraising activity, please contact us on: 03 9282 2111.

Sandra sees *first-hand* the challenges faced by mothers and babies in Papua New Guinea



During an extensive visit with friends living and working in Papua New Guinea (PNG), Sandra Kirby saw first-hand the challenges faced by mothers and babies.

On her trip into rural PNG, she saw villages built on stilts over rivers, with swamps on both sides and no access, other than over water, for birthing mothers facing difficulties.

“How do they have their babies?” she wondered. “How do they get their medical supplies?”

She was also shocked to see the unsanitary conditions, and the lack of infection control.

“After seeing all of this, I wasn’t surprised to hear of the high mortality rate among newborns

and young babies. It focused my mind on finding ways to help, and support improvements in medical care.”

Sandra supports a wide range of the work done by Burnet Institute, but after seeing the specific challenges faced by mothers and babies in PNG, as well as the challenges faced by medical staff supporting them, she is especially interested in supporting the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies (HMHB) program.

“I want to congratulate Burnet on the amazing work and research they are doing through the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies program. I am semi-retired, but I am committed to doing what I can.”

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My visit to PNG was a great life lesson. The happiness of the people in PNG, accepting what they go through, when many of the conditions they face are so poor, contradicts our perception of what constitutes happiness. But they deserve the same standard of care that we have here. Children all over the world should get the same chance at life.

SANDRA KIRBY, HMHB DONOR

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Each edition we will feature a story from one of our supporters, like you. If you have a story you would like to share, please email: ashley.siewwright@burnet.edu.au.

International Women's Day event raises funds for *young women most-at-risk*

Burnet's 2019 International Women's Day (IWD) event celebrated the outstanding contributions of women in science and raised funds to support Burnet's Young People's Health research program.

The keynote speaker was Victoria's Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People, Ms Liana Buchanan. We also heard from Burnet's Professor Margaret Hellard AM and Dr Megan Lim about our current research into Young People's Health.

This research program is tackling the many challenges facing young women in Australia with the aim of improving health, empowerment and opportunity.

"Our research is mainly aimed at 15-29 year olds," Dr Lim said. "And that 14-year span is really important because that's the timeframe when they transition from young girls to adult women. It's also the time they are most at-risk of poor sexual and mental health, more likely to initiate drug use, consume more alcohol, and be subjected to bullying."

Special thanks to all the women who came along and gave so generously to our IWD campaign to help women most-at-risk. You were successful in raising \$50,665.



Lady Anna Cowen AM, a strong supporter of Burnet's work.