

Two Hunter researchers backed with \$200,000 to turn breakthrough ideas into better health

Two Hunter researchers have secured the 2026 Newcastle Permanent Innovator Fellowships, receiving \$100,000 each to help turn their medical research ideas into life-saving solutions.

Dr Geshani Jayasuriya, HMRI Breathing and Lung Health Research Program and Paediatric Respiratory Physician, Hunter New England Local Health District was recognised for developing safer, radiation-free lung scans designed to better monitor airway disease in children and adults across all stages of life.

Dr Heather Murray, HMRI Precision Medicine and Health Research Program and Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Newcastle was recognised for researching more precise cancer treatments to help doctors better match therapies to individual patients and improve outcomes.

The winners were selected after impressing the judges with their research findings at today's Pitch Showcase, which marked the culmination of the 2026 Newcastle Permanent Innovators Program.

Delivered by Hunter Medical Research Institute (HMRI) in partnership with [Newcastle Permanent](#), the six week program supports six early and mid career researchers from the University of Newcastle, the Hunter New England Local Health District, and HMRI to understand healthcare challenges, work with communities and stakeholders, develop practical solutions, and build the skills to turn those ideas into action.

This year's cohort focused on some of the Hunter New England region's biggest health challenges, including infant respiratory risk, childhood cancer, chronic lung disease, precision cancer treatment, wound care and genomics analysis.

Alongside the two Innovator Fellowships, the remaining four finalists each received \$20,000 seed grants to continue progressing their research.

HMRI CEO and Institute Director [Professor Frances Kay](#) said this year's program showcased the emerging research talent in the region, and the value of investing in ideas with the potential to improve lives.

"Congratulations to our two Fellowship recipients and to all six finalists for the passion, dedication and innovation they have shown throughout the program," Professor Kay said.

"Every breakthrough starts with an idea, but the journey from discovery to impact requires much more than a good idea alone," Professor Kay said.

Newcastle Permanent spokesperson Paul Juergens said the organisation is honoured to support HMRI's researchers for a second year.

"We are really proud to support HMRI and its talented researchers through this program because we truly believe in the power of investing in local talent and ideas to achieve better health outcomes for our community," Mr Juergens said.

“Congratulations to [first winner first name] and [second winner first name], and this year’s four finalists who are all doing such meaningful research that will make a real, lasting difference for the Hunter region and beyond.”

-ENDS-

For further information and interview requests please contact:

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Notes to Editors:

2026 Newcastle Permanent Innovators Program finalists

Dr Gabriela Martins Costa Gomes

Postdoctoral Research Associate, University of Newcastle

Paediatric Sleep and Respiratory Scientist, Hunter New England Local Health District

HMRI Breathing and Lung Health Research Program

Gabriela is working on new ways to detect breathing risks in babies earlier, helping vulnerable infants get care sooner and improving long-term health outcomes.

Dr Geshani Jayasuriya

Paediatric Respiratory Physician, Hunter New England Local Health District

HMRI Breathing and Lung Health Research Program

Geshani is developing safer, radiation-free lung scans designed to better monitor airway disease in children and adults across all stages of life.

Dr Meg Lim

HMRI Health Economist

Meg is creating a digital support platform to help families of children with cancer quickly find financial assistance and support during treatment.

Dr Heather Murray

Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Newcastle

HMRI Precision Medicine and Health Research Program

Heather is researching more precise cancer treatments to help doctors better match therapies to individual patients and improve outcomes.

Dr Stuart Szwec

HMRI Senior Data Scientist

Conjoint Lecturer, University of Newcastle

Stuart is developing artificial intelligence technology to help clinicians choose the right wound dressings faster and improve patient recovery.

Dr Alexandre Xavier

Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Newcastle
HMRI Precision Medicine and Health Research Program

Alexandre is building an online platform to help researchers and healthcare teams better analyse complex genetic data and support faster, more personalised treatment decisions.

About HMRI

Hunter Medical Research Institute (HMRI) turns ideas into action to make our community healthier.

Our partnership between the University of Newcastle, Hunter New England Local Health District and the community help us shape our research priorities so we can anticipate emerging health trends, issues and challenges impacting the million people who live here.

We ask what health problems matter to real people and direct the research there.

Anything that works here can be scaled up to work anywhere.

Our specialist expertise, funding, labs, equipment and clinical trials turn breakthroughs into better health efficiently and quickly by connecting the right minds with the right resources.

Our scope is wide, from fertility, nutrition and exercise to mental health, cancer, dementia and more.

Our 1,500 researchers and staff collaborate with one goal: to help our community be healthier and live their best lives no matter where they are or what life stage they're at.

Every day, we're taking healthy further.

About Newcastle Permanent

Newcastle Permanent is one of Australia's most trusted customer-owned banks, committed to serving its customers and community. Established in 1903, Newcastle Permanent provides banking products including home loans, deposits, everyday accounts, business solutions, and financial planning plus has a strong branch presence, and a broad ATM network.

Proudly customer-owned, Newcastle Permanent is part of NGM Group which gives more than \$4.5 million to local communities every year. NGM Group is also home to brands including Greater Bank, Greater Charitable Foundation, and Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation.