

# 2026

BIOMELBOURNE  
NETWORK

## Women in Leadership AWARDS CEREMONY

WEDNESDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2026

CEREMONY SPONSORED BY



BIOMELBOURNE NETWORK



BioMelbourne Network

# ABOUT THE AWARDS

**Now in their 11th year, the BioMelbourne Network Women in Leadership Awards** recognise and champion women – including trans women and gender diverse people – who are making outstanding contributions to the health technologies industry. Spanning pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, medical technology, digital health, academia and research, healthcare, R&D and industry services, the awards showcase the breadth and depth of talent in our ecosystem.

By recognising and amplifying these exceptional achievements, we reinforce the critical importance of diversity and inclusion in advancing our sector – today and into the future. BioMelbourne Network proudly champions an inclusive, representative sector. These awards aim to inspire future leaders, break down barriers, and strengthen our sector's impact for everyone's benefit.

*BioMelbourne Network is Victoria's peak body for the health technologies sector, driving engagement and growth in innovation, commercialisation and manufacturing through local networks and beyond.*

*Since 2001, BioMelbourne Network has been actively fostering and growing an innovative, globally competitive sector and transforming its Network as well as the broader Victorian ecosystem.*

*Our members represent the full "bench to bedside" continuum in biotherapeutics, medical technologies, and other health technology innovations.*

“*These awards celebrate the remarkable women whose contributions to health technology are driving innovation, unlocking new potential and saving lives. By shining a light on their achievements, we can foster a culture of inclusivity and inspire more women to pursue leadership roles across the sector.*”

– Kat Theophanus MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health, Parliament of Victoria

## WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP HONOUR ROLL

### DISTINGUISHED LEADERSHIP AWARD

2025 – Dr Jane Oppenheim  
2024 – Prof Mimi Tang  
2023 – Prof Sharon Lewin AO  
2022 – Dr Emma Ball  
2021 – Dr Jenny Petering  
2020 – Dr Andrea Douglas  
2019 – Dr Anna Lavelle AM  
2018 – Kathy Connell  
2017 – Sue MacLeman  
2016 – Dr Jackie Fairley  
2015 – Dr Elaine Saunders

### INSPIRING LEADERSHIP AWARD

2025 – Sally Kinrade  
2024 – Prof Michelle McIntosh  
2023 – Prof Susie Nilsson  
2022 – George Kenley  
2021 – Jennifer Herz  
2020 – Bronwyn Le Grice  
2019 – Dr Clara Gaff  
2018 – Dr Amanda Caples  
2017 – Dr Kerry Hegarty  
2016 – Prof Sally McArthur

### EMERGING LEADERSHIP AWARD

2025 – Dr Anne-Laure Puaux  
2024 – Dr Amanda Vrselja  
2023 – Rima Darwiche  
2022 – Prof Lauren Ayton AM  
2021 – Dr Hannah Kirk  
2020 – Dr Ewa Douroux  
2019 – Dr Evelyn Chan  
2018 – Grace Lethlean  
2017 – Associate Prof Elizabeth Williams  
2016 – Jacqueline Savage  
2015 – Dr Megan Baldwin

2021 LEADERSHIP AND IMPACT during the pandemic  
– Prof Margie Danchin



“*Together, we can ensure progress is equitable and shared.*”

## CELEBRATING LEADERSHIP CROSSING BOUNDARIES AND DRIVING CHANGE

**Our sector is accelerating, and the opportunity is immense. We are seeing faster pathways from discovery to translation, a renewed focus on sovereign capability and advanced manufacturing, and sharper attention to digital resilience and responsible innovation.** At the same time, Victoria's reputation and global connections continue to deepen, linking our researchers, founders and clinicians with partners, investors and collaborators around the world.

That is why the BioMelbourne Network Women in Leadership Awards continue to matter, they highlight women whose influence is felt across laboratories, start-ups, hospitals, manufacturing floors, boardrooms and beyond. They also send a message to the next generation: impact is built through collaboration, integrity and the confidence to cross boundaries to drive change for the benefit of people worldwide.

As every year, the judging process was incredibly challenging. The quality of nominations was exceptional, and the panel was asked to make fine distinctions between leaders who are all making a meaningful difference. That difficulty reflects the calibre of leadership in our community and the momentum building across the sector.

In 2026, we recognise three remarkable awardees - a Distinguished Leader, an Inspiring Leader, and an Emerging Leader. Each demonstrates what modern leadership looks like: connecting people and ideas, building inclusive teams, and turning expertise into progress and worldwide impact.

These Awards remind us that transformation thrives when different perspectives are welcomed, and pathways into leadership are widened. Progress on equity is real, however it requires continued intention from all of us – across industry, academia, healthcare and government.

Thank you to every nominator and nominee, and to our pre-screening and judging committees for their rigour and respect. I also acknowledge the Victorian State Government for its support of these awards and our shared ambition for a vibrant health technologies sector.

May these stories spark new partnerships and a renewed commitment to creating opportunities for women to thrive. Together, we can ensure progress is equitable and shared.

**Vicky Jones**

*Acting CEO, BioMelbourne Network*

## IMPACT FOR INDUSTRY

**Our 2026 recipient is Associate Professor Megan Robertson**



**Group Chief Research Officer,  
St Vincent's Health Australia  
Director of Research, St Vincent's  
Hospital Melbourne**

Associate Professor Megan Robertson is an alumna of the University of Melbourne where she completed a Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS). She is the current Group Chief Research Officer

at St Vincent's Health Australia and Director of Research at St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne. She also works as a Senior Intensive Care Consultant at Epworth HealthCare Richmond. She is on the board of the Digital Health CRC (Deputy Chair) and she is President of Queen's College (University of Melbourne).

She is deeply embedded in the health and medical research sector, particularly clinical research, clinical trials, ethics and governance. She is currently Chair of the Victorian Hospital Research Directors Forum, having been a founding member in 2008, and Chair of the AusBioTech Clinical Trials Advisory Group.

Megan has advocated strongly for the importance of clinical trials to improve healthcare options for patients and enrich careers for clinicians across disciplines. Under her leadership, SVHM research has developed the unique Research Valet Service, the Priority Pre-review Package and a proactive global business development model that has yielded widespread benefit across the sector.

*"This award means an enormous amount to me, I am humbled to be joining such an esteemed group of prior winners. Not only was I boosted personally by the recognition from my peers, but the award also recognised my team and their important contribution. These moments of celebration reinforce the importance of work we all do daily in health and medical research."*

- Associate Professor  
Megan Robertson



**ST VINCENT'S  
HOSPITAL**  
MELBOURNE

A FACILITY OF ST VINCENT'S HEALTH AUSTRALIA

*This Award celebrates an inspiring leader who has held a senior position of leadership in the healthtech sector and a career history of contributions over approximately 10-15+ years.*

## CATALYSING COLLABORATION AND POWERING PROGRESS

**Our 2026 recipient is Associate Professor Jess Nithianantharajah**



**Co-Founder and Vice President, Translational Biology, Phrenix Therapeutics**

**Head, Florey Department of Neuroscience and Mental Health, The University of Melbourne**

**Head, Mental Health Research and Group Leader, Synapse Biology and Cognition Laboratory, Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health**

Associate Professor Jess Nithianantharajah's work examines how changes in brain connectivity shape behaviour and cognition, with a clear purpose: translating discovery neuroscience into outcomes that improve the lives of people living with mental health conditions.

With more than 25 years of experience spanning behavioural neuroscience, Jess has built an international career grounded in academic excellence across the UK and Australia, including the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute and the Universities of Cambridge and Edinburgh.

Jess has made an impact on translating discovery neuroscience into clinical application, pioneering the development and global adoption of cognitive touchscreen testing approaches, enabling complex mental processes to be measured in preclinical models and reshaping how behavioural symptoms in brain disorders are understood and treated.

In 2022, Jess co-founded Phrenix Therapeutics to reimagine neuroscience drug discovery through targeted, mechanism-driven therapies for cognitive, psychiatric and neurological disorders. She developed scalable drug discovery programs to evaluate novel medicines, and secured seed investment in 2024 from national and international venture capital firms.

A visionary and values-driven leader, Jess is committed to breaking down traditional career silos through multidisciplinary team science to drive innovation. She advocates for inclusive research cultures and advances equity for women in STEM. Highly regarded for her integrity, scientific rigour, passion and generosity, she exemplifies purpose-led leadership that delivers lasting impact across science, industry and society.

*"Receiving this award at this stage of my career journey is deeply validating – a moment where I feel seen. It is also an acknowledgement of collaboration and team science. Working at the nexus of academia and industry is challenging, often feeling as though you must choose one path. Yet real impact happens at the boundaries. This recognition fuels my commitment to continue pushing those boundaries, translating research into real-world benefit through leadership that breaks down silos and navigates uncharted paths to connect different worlds."*

– Associate Professor  
Jess Nithianantharajah



*This Award recognises an inspiring leader who has played a pivotal leadership role in delivering an industry project, partnership, or collaborative initiative approximately within the last 5 to 10 years.*

## MOVER AND SHAKER

**Our 2026 recipient is Professor Gemma Sharp**



**Professor of Research and Clinical Psychologist, Adelaide University**  
**Founding Director, Consortium for Research in Eating Disorders**  
**Founder and Owner, Sharp AI Psychology**

Professor Gemma Sharp is a clinician researcher and entrepreneur, recognised nationally and internationally for her leadership in digital mental health innovation.

Over recent years, she has undertaken a bold shift from traditional academic pathways into a uniquely integrated role spanning research leadership, clinical practice, global charity governance, commercial entrepreneurship and policy influence.

Through Sharp AI Psychology, Professor Sharp is the founder of world-first, evidence-based artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots for eating disorders and mental health, including JEM® and ED ESSI®. Developed during a period of global scepticism toward AI in mental health, these tools now operate at commercial scale, supporting hundreds of thousands of people internationally and improving access for underserved populations.

In 2024, she became the Founding Director of the Consortium for Research in Eating Disorders (CoRe-ED), a global charity uniting nearly 1,000 registrants across over 35 countries. CoRe-ED accelerates collaboration, capacity-building and data-driven innovation in a field historically under-resourced.

She is highly valued for her courage, resilience and integrity, and for creating opportunities for others, particularly women and early-career researchers, to thrive in male-dominated and risk-averse spaces. She is known for her empathy, inclusivity and commitment to evidence-based care, and for translating complex science into practical, meaningful solutions that truly improve people's lives.

Professor Sharp's leadership demonstrates that vision, innovation and collaboration, grounded in compassion and ethical practice, can transform health care. She stands for accessible, scalable solutions, empowering communities and inspiring the next generation of leaders in eating disorder research and digital mental health innovation.

*"I am deeply honoured by this award. It recognises the risks I took outside of a traditional academic pathway to develop world-first AI chatbot commercial services and establish an international charity, Consortium for Research in Eating Disorders, which have already supported hundreds of thousands globally.*

*It is particularly meaningful to see eating disorders and related issues, often overlooked areas of health, acknowledged as critical. This recognition reinforces my commitment to creating scalable, evidence-based solutions that improve access, empower communities and drive meaningful change in mental health worldwide."*

**- Professor Gemma Sharp**



CONSORTIUM  
FOR RESEARCH  
IN EATING DISORDERS

*This Award celebrates an inspiring early-mid career leader who has taken on a career challenge or opportunity within the last 2-4 years, and has high potential for industry impact.*

# BioMelbourne Network

## Membership that grows your impact.

Become part of Victoria's thriving health technologies sector – from discovery to delivery – with a membership that covers your whole organisation and connects you into a powerful, collaborative ecosystem.

Since 2001, BMN has actively supported and transformed the Victorian health technology ecosystem by driving a culture of innovation and global competition, and fostering meaningful collaboration and connection to strengthen and grow the broader network.

200+

Member  
Organisations

5,480+

Members  
within  
organisations

### Membership benefits:

- Exclusive connections across the ecosystem
- Members-only tickets to our curated events
- Multi-platform media amplification across the sector
- Contribution to strong and impactful advocacy
- Build capability and keep your teams ahead through discounted access to our constantly growing BioResource Hub digital library
- Attract, develop and retain sector-ready talent through member-only offers on our Jobs Board



[Find out more.](#)

## Find out more and stay connected

Explore our platforms, events and resources designed to support  
Victoria's health technologies sector.



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# Supporting Women = Supporting Health Innovators

Women are building innovative solutions and technologies that shape the future of the world.

Through the BioMelbourne Network Women in Leadership Awards, the Victorian Government celebrates women and future leaders across the health technology sector – including those delivering innovative solutions and converting Victoria's best ideas into products used around the world.

We are committed to supporting our local talent, because supporting them means keeping Victoria at the forefront of health innovation.

[djsir.vic.gov.au/health-tech](https://djsir.vic.gov.au/health-tech)



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