

## **BioMelbourne Network Women in Leadership Awards spotlight leadership that crosses boundaries to deliver global impact**

*Honouring women who drive innovation across Victoria's health technologies ecosystem*

**Melbourne. Now in their 11th year, the prestigious BioMelbourne Network Women in Leadership Awards recognise three exceptional leaders advancing health technologies for the benefit of people worldwide.**

BioMelbourne Network today announces the recipients of its 2026 Women in Leadership Awards, recognising three outstanding women whose leadership is accelerating innovation and creating tangible impact across Victoria's health technologies ecosystem and beyond - from discovery and translation to manufacturing and global collaboration.

Since 2015, the Awards have celebrated the achievements of women at different career stages, while reinforcing the importance of diversity and inclusion in strengthening innovation and sector performance.

The 2026 awardees demonstrate the power of leadership to shape outcomes locally and globally:

**Distinguished Leadership Award: Associated Professor Megan Robertson**, Group Chief Research Officer at St Vincent's Health Australia and Director of Research at St Vincent's Hospital

*"This award means an enormous amount to me, being recognised by my peers. I am humbled to be joining such an esteemed group of prior winners. The BioMelbourne Network Women in Leadership Awards have been vital in raising the profile of women leaders in our sector. Health and medical research has a strongly female workforce, but*

*this doesn't always translate to leadership positions. It is essential that we recognise the contribution of women in leadership and provide role models for future leaders across all areas of diversity.”*

**Inspiring Leadership Award: Associated 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

*“I am honoured to be recognised by BioMelbourne Network. I see this award as a celebration of the life sciences ecosystem – acknowledging the leadership and courage required to translate discovery into impact across academia and industry. By highlighting those who bridge sectors, awards like this reinforce the critical importance of diversity, collaboration and partnership in advancing global health outcomes.”*

**Emerging Leadership Award: 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

*“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.*

*The BioMelbourne Network Women in Leadership Awards are important because they actively build a more inclusive and visible leadership pipeline in health and medtech. They stand out by recognising impact and innovation across career stages, elevating diverse role models and creating sector-wide momentum for meaningful cultural and structural change.”*

Vicky Jones, Acting CEO of BioMelbourne Network stated: *“In the 11th year of the Women in Leadership Awards, the message is clear: leadership that crosses boundaries is driving global impact. Our prestigious Awards recognise exceptional women building partnerships across academia, industry, healthcare and investment, and translating expertise into tangible outcomes that benefit patients and communities in Victoria and worldwide.”*

*“BioMelbourne Network is proud to recognise not only the achievements of exceptional women, but also the importance of fostering a sector culture where diverse perspectives are valued - and where everyone has the opportunity to contribute and thrive,”* Jones said.

The calibre of nominations continues to rise, Jones said, noting that each year the awardee selection becomes more challenging because so many leaders are advancing the sector in different ways.

Prof Vera Ignjatovic, Deputy Board Chair, BioMelbourne Network stated: *“The BioMelbourne Network Women in Leadership Awards celebrate exactly the calibre of Victoria’s health technologies sector needs to remain globally competitive - leaders who connect disciplines, translate ideas into impact, and build bridges between research, industry and healthcare. These awardees are advancing innovation, shaping the future of our ecosystem by driving collaboration, commercial outcomes, and are, just as importantly, sending a strong signal to emerging talent: there is a place - and a pathway - for women to lead across research, industry, healthcare and investment.”*

The Awards ceremony, held at the Investment Centre Victoria on International Women and Girls in Science Day, brought together 130+ attendees in person and online, including health technologies leaders, researchers, founders, investors and government representatives.

Supported by the Victorian State Government (Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions), the event highlighted Victoria’s commitment to building an inclusive, globally connected health technologies ecosystem and strengthening the pipeline of future leaders.

### **Recognising global and local excellence**

Victoria is one of the world’s leading health technology hubs, including the medical equipment (medtech), biotechnology (biotech) and pharmaceutical industry segments, which is supported by 9 universities and 22 globally renowned research institutes.

The commercial sector employs over 51,785 staff plus 20,000 research sector jobs, is made up of more than 4,644 firm. In addition, Victoria’s healthcare workforce expanded

in 2024 to a total of more than 122,000 full-time equivalent public healthcare workers. 40% of all health technology ASX-listed companies are based in Melbourne with a combined market capitalisation of \$177 billion.

Melbourne is one of the few cities in the world to have two universities in the global top 40 biomedical rankings, and Monash University is currently ranked #4 in the world for pharmacy and pharmacology and has consistently placed in the global top 10 universities for over a decade. Victoria is ranked in the top 10% of global life science startups with one fifth of startups in the state related to health.

With women still underrepresented in senior roles across STEM, the Women in Leadership Awards spotlight leaders pioneering pathways into leadership and strengthening the innovation capacity benefitting health care in Victoria and globally.

- END -

**Media Contact:**

Pritika Sinha | Communications Coordinator

Email: [psinha@biomelbourne.org](mailto:psinha@biomelbourne.org) | Mob 0434 399 018

**About BioMelbourne Network**

*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.*

**Awardees are available for interviews as is Vicky Jones, Acting CEO BioMelbourne Network**

**About the BioMelbourne Network Women in Leadership Awards**

Now in their 11<sup>th</sup> year, the BioMelbourne Network Women in Leadership Awards celebrate the outstanding contributions of women and everyone identifying as a woman at different career stages, driving process and shaping the future of Victoria's health technologies sector and beyond. 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 and innovation within our ecosystem.

By recognising and amplifying these exceptional achievements, BioMelbourne Network reinforce the critical importance of diversity and inclusion in advancing the sector - today and into the future. BioMelbourne Network proudly champions an inclusive, representative sector. This program aims to inspire future leaders, break down barriers, and strengthen or sector's impact for everyone's benefit.

