

# A Brief History

## The Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research

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The Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research, located in Parkville just north of Melbourne's CBD, is one of Australia's foremost medical research establishments. The work of the Institute is centred on cancer, the immune system, autoimmune diseases – such as diabetes, multiple sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis – malaria, neural development, genetics and drug discovery. Over many decades, advances and discoveries in these areas have led to significant benefits for patients throughout the world.

The Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research would not exist today without the coaches, herds and mines from which the Hall family made their fortune around the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1915, the institute we know today was founded using funds from a trust established by the Hall family. It was Australia's first medical research institute and adopted a crest bearing the Latin inscription, *Fiat Lux – Let there be light*. Those simple words symbolized the institute's mission: to illuminate the search for medical knowledge and to apply discoveries for the benefit of humanity.

Sir Macfarlane Burnet, institute Director 1944–1965, brought the institute to international prominence for virological research, especially influenza, and then for immunology. Such was the nature of Sir Macfarlane's achievement that he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1960.

Under Sir Gustav Nossal, Director 1965–1996, the institute grew significantly in size and research scope. Scientists at the Institute, led and inspired by Sir Gustav and Professor Jacques Miller, investigated and revealed the basic mechanisms controlling immune responses and new approaches to autoimmune diseases such as diabetes were explored. Professor Don Metcalf and his team discovered key regulators of cell production – the CSFs – which led to great benefits for cancer patients. With the introduction of molecular biology came exciting new insights about antibody production and the onset of leukemia. Molecular biology also catalysed significant progress in understanding and combating malaria.

Led from 1996 by Professor Suzanne Cory, the Institute – or WEHI, as it is sometimes called – remains committed to biomedical research and the pursuit of new therapies. Today's scientists are applying the groundbreaking discoveries of the human genome project, collaborating in many projects worldwide. The Institute is in the front line of the biotechnology revolution, which will bring enormous benefits to health and medicine. Together with The University of Melbourne and The Royal Melbourne Hospital, and with the support of the Victorian government, WEHI is a founding partner of the Bio21 project. This will see the Parkville strip develop into the national centre for world-class biomedical research and biotechnology development.

With its distinguished international reputation, the Institute attracts the best and brightest of Australian and overseas scientists, who thrive in what Sir Gustav Nossal memorably described as “a bubbling cauldron of ideas.” Today, the Institute hosts over five hundred scientists, post-doctoral fellows, technologists, post-graduate and support staff working towards our mission of **mastery of disease through discovery**.

