

Immunology and microbiology expertise leads to success in industry engagement

Over \$2.1 million in cash returns have resulted from a two-year industry engagement project funded by the Victorian Government and managed by the Victorian Infection and Immunity Network (VIIN). The project represents a low-cost, high-return model of strategic engagement between researchers and industry that has resulted in contract research agreements, exports, a licencing deal and job creation.

Australia excels at life science research, particularly infectious diseases and immunology research, and particularly in Victoria, where Melbourne is recognised as a global hub of immunology excellence and where scientists from the VIIN win over 50% of Australia's NHMRC funding for microbiology and immunology research.

This focus of scientific excellence and biotechnology was recognised by the Victorian Government, which supported the development of the VIIN Industry Alliance to facilitate strategic partnerships between Victorian infection and immunity researchers and businesses.

Over 70 Victorian SMEs and large businesses were engaged in the Industry Alliance project led by VIIN, a research network comprising 13 Victorian research institutes and universities and over 1,000 individual scientists.

One major initiative of the Industry Alliance was to support new collaborations between VIIN scientists and Victorian companies. Collaborative project applications were assessed competitively by a panel of industry, scientific and investment experts and funding was awarded to enable vital proof-of-principle testing to be conducted.

The six highly successful projects supported included collaborations investigating development of products to treat or prevent HIV, bacterial diseases, dengue, and infections important in the poultry industry. Already, the project teams have reported solid outcomes including a licencing deal, international exports, employment and the attraction of cash investments.



The VIIN and its Industry Alliance also hosted networking and training events, including the Lorne Infection and Immunity Conference, early-career researcher professional development events, and research showcases. Invited speakers at the VIIN annual careers evening pictured from left to right: Dave Gearing, Nexvet Biopharma; Chris Smith, Brandon Capital Partners; Sarah Henneby, Freehills Patent Attorneys; Katherine Kedziarska, the University of Melbourne; and Jan Tennent, Biomedical Research Victoria.

Australia needs effective models for systematic and bi-directional research and industry engagement. In the important and growing healthcare space of infectious and inflammatory diseases, the VIIN Industry Alliance project has generated both economic and health benefits in only two years of operation through innovative and effective industry engagement. There is significant scope to expand the VIIN Industry Alliance's activities nationally and globally. 📌

Companies seeking business opportunities in infection or inflammatory disease, and immunology or microbiology expertise or resources can now search an online database of licencing and contract research opportunities within the VIIN's member organisations (<http://www.viin.org.au/find-a-member/>).