SYDNEY ALUMNI MAGAZINE

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SAM

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

The truth behind ageing well

Is this the end of climbing the corporate ladder?



Can we eliminate cervical cancer for all women?



Orientation Week 1986,
University of Sydney
Archives, REF-00014399

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We recognise and pay respect to the Elders and communities – past, present and emerging – of the lands that the University of Sydney's campuses stand on.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY | *Sydney* Alumni Community

BUILDING COMMUNITY AND COLLABORATION

At the University of Sydney, we're focused on education that transforms lives and research that solves great global challenges – working closely with our communities to make the world a better place. In this issue of *SAM*, we're proud to celebrate some of the inspirational researchers, students and alumni doing just that.

Among them is Katherine Bennell-Pegg (BE (Aerospace)(Hons), BSc (Adv) '08), the 2026 Australian of the Year (who appeared in Issue 21 of *SAM*). As the Director of Space Technology at the Australian Space Agency, she has played a pivotal role in shaping Australia's space capability, driving innovation and strengthening international collaboration. Her achievements in space and, more broadly, in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) reflect the ambition we hope every student carries into the world on graduation. We are all incredibly proud of her achievements.

Katherine's recognition reinforces why supporting women in STEM is essential to Australia's future. In January, we welcomed the first of many cohorts of the Khuda Women in STEM Academy, introducing them to our community and showing what becomes possible when talent meets opportunity. We thank Robin Khuda for his support, commitment and vision.

Philanthropy continues to power our vision of leadership for good. A bequest from the late Dr Aola Mary Richards will establish the Sydney Insect Hub, advancing research in insect ecology, evolution and biodiversity. The Simon Marais Foundation and the Hooper Shaw Family Foundation have likewise strengthened blue-sky research through their support of the Sydney Mathematical Research Institute.

The stories in this issue celebrate that very same positive ambition.

You'll meet researchers striving for a cervical cancer-free future (page 4), explore how midlife choices shape ageing (page 11), and discover how new generations are transforming workplace leadership (page 16).

As we wrap up our 175th anniversary celebrations, we reflect on our history and recommit to creating a better future in partnership with our community. Wherever you are, and whenever you graduated, you are the heartbeat of this institution.

We look forward to welcoming you back to campus later this year for our Community Festival, an occasion to celebrate the people, partnerships and shared successes that shape our University – and a reminder that our connection continues long after graduation, and you are always welcome to visit and be part of University life.

Professor Mark Scott AO
(BA, DipEd '84, MA '93, HonDLitt '15)
Vice-Chancellor and President

David Thodey AO FTSE
Chancellor



Photo: Fiona Wolf

ARTS

Shaping a creative community

The Seymour Centre has helped to launch some of Australia's biggest names in acting, including Cate Blanchett, Nicole Kidman and Russell Crowe, as well as presenting incredible international and Australian musical talent such as Florence and the Machine, Missy Higgins and David Bridie. As it enters a new chapter, incoming Artistic Director Joanne Kee is reimagining contemporary culture, with the Seymour as a place for our times and our community – where bold thinking, diverse voices and artists, audiences and students connect.



Check out the Seymour Centre's website for upcoming shows

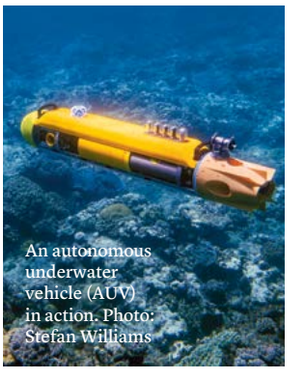


Sydney Conservatorium of Music students performing, while celebrating the future opening of its Parramatta hub, 2025. Photo: Fiona Wolf

ARTS

New cultural precinct

This spirit of creative momentum is reflected across the University, with a new cultural precinct emerging to support talent and broaden access to the arts in Western Sydney. The Sydney Conservatorium of Music's (SCM) new teaching and research hub is set to open in Parramatta later this year – the first expansion in its 110-year history. Backed by a $30 million University of Sydney investment and a $2 million Sound NSW grant, the site will deliver cutting-edge music production, recording and performance facilities. SCM Parramatta signals a future where world-class music education, industry collaboration and community creativity grow side by side. With new spaces for students, local artists and live performances, it's poised to become a vibrant cultural anchor for Western Sydney's next generation of musicians.



An autonomous underwater vehicle (AUV) in action. Photo: Stefan Williams

ENGINEERING

Deep-sea discovery

Underwater robots from the University of Sydney have joined an Australian Museum expedition to explore previously unmapped reefs around Norfolk Island. Equipped with high-resolution cameras and navigation sensors, the autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs) captured thousands of seafloor images to create detailed 3D models of the island's unique marine habitats. The AUVs were deployed by a team led by Professor Stefan Williams (PhD '02, GradCertEdStudies '05) from the Australian Centre for Robotics. The data will help local communities, marine parks and museums in Australia and New Zealand to better understand and protect the region's biodiversity. Acting as the eyes and ears of researchers, the robots can safely navigate depths beyond human reach – opening a new window into an underwater world.

How we're eliminating cervical cancer

Written by
Saman Shad

Photography by
Kate Geraghty and Rey Marques

As Australia edges closer to completely eliminating cervical cancer, the challenge is to ensure that the benefits are shared by all. This world-first milestone is the result of years of collaboration between University of Sydney researchers and their local and global partners. Now, the focus is on reaching every community – from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote areas to other under-served populations across the Indo-Pacific region.





Dr Moses Ataide spends time talking with patients. There are just 10 palliative care beds for the whole of Timor-Leste. Photo: Kate Geraghty/SMH

For many years, by the time women arrived at the hospital in Timor-Leste's capital, Dili, it was usually too late.

Cervical cancer has long been the second most common cancer among women in the small nation, just an hour's flight from Darwin. For years, obstetrician-gynaecologist Dr José António Gusmão Guterres – also known as Dr Zetó – saw the same pattern: advanced cancer, few treatment options, and families preparing for loss.

"There was no proper screening service," he explains. "All women presenting were at late stages, and those referred overseas had poor prognoses, with almost no-one surviving." Dr Zetó describes these times as "a very painful moment".

Now, at the Vera Cruz Community Health Centre clinic in Dili, the situation is starting to change.

Women can now collect their own screening samples in privacy, without having to undergo a pelvic examination. Tests are processed onsite, with results ready within two hours, and anyone who tests positive can be assessed for treatment the same day.

This new approach has been made possible through a partnership between the Timor-Leste Ministry of Health, local clinicians, and researchers from the University of Sydney's Cancer Elimination Collaboration, working with the Elimination Partnership in the Indo-Pacific for Cervical Cancer (EPICC) consortium and other regional partners.

EPICC's work, which began in 2021 and is supported by the Australian Government and the Minderoo Foundation, aims to adapt Australia's success to develop sustainable, locally owned programs in nine countries across the Indo-Pacific.

"For the first time," says Dr Zetó, "we can screen women early enough to prevent cancer."

The model is simple, but the science behind it was decades in the making – and much of it began in Australia, which is now on the verge of making history.

1. Practitioner sharing information on cervical screening at Vila Verde outreach centre in Timor-Leste's capital, Dili. Photo: Kate Geraghty/SMH
2. Professor Deborah Bateson attends an outreach event at Vila Verde, Dili. Photo: Kate Geraghty/SMH
3. Professor Karen Canfell with Phd student Julia da Costa whose research focuses on opioid access for patients in Timor-Leste, on campus at the University of Sydney. Photo: Kate Geraghty/SMH



If current efforts continue, Australia is poised to become the first country in the world to eliminate cervical cancer as a public health problem by 2035, a feat the World Health Organization (WHO) has now set as a global objective.

"Australia has become an exemplar of what's possible," says Professor Karen Canfell AC FAHMS (BE (Electrical) '91), who leads the Cancer Elimination Collaboration (CEC) at the University of Sydney's School of Public Health. "Elimination isn't one breakthrough. It's the result of decades of innovation involving vaccination, new screening technologies and approaches, equitable access to treatment, and empowering communities to take control of their own health."

AUSTRALIA'S ROADMAP TO ELIMINATION

The success story began in 1991, with the launch of the National Cervical Screening Program. Within just over a decade of the Pap-smear-based program being rolled out, both the incidence and mortality rates of cervical cancer in Australia had halved – representing one of the most dramatic reductions in cancer burden in the nation's history.

The introduction in 2007 of a first-generation vaccine for human papillomavirus (HPV) – the virus that causes almost all cervical cancers – then presented a new opportunity to protect younger populations and provided the impetus to reinvigorate the screening program.

In 2017, Australia replaced Pap smears with HPV testing, a highly sensitive

"Too often, women die at the peak of their lives, leaving behind young children and families, with profound intergenerational health and social consequences."

— Dr José António Gusmão Guterres, Timor-Leste obstetrician-gynaecologist and EPICC technical lead



1.



2.



3.

approach that detects the virus long before precancerous changes appear. This major development was made possible by years of research by the now-CEC team and its partners, working closely with governments to assess the international evidence and evaluate the potential impacts and cost-effectiveness of HPV screening in Australia.

"This transition greatly improved our ability to identify early changes that might increase future risk," Karen explains. "By changing to HPV-based screening in the National Cervical Screening Program, more lives are being saved every year."

Research continues through the CEC's Compass trial, run in collaboration with the Australian Centre for the Prevention of Cervical Cancer in Victoria. Involving more than 80,000 participants, it's providing world-first evidence to guide the future of Australia's cervical cancer screening program.

In 2022, Australia introduced universal access to self-collection of cervical cell samples for the Cervical Screening Test, again supported by the CEC team's work, enabling people to collect their own samples in private, with medical supervision. This change has been critical in improving access for those who might otherwise avoid screening for reasons of accessibility, privacy or past trauma.

Recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data show that more than 5.5 million people aged 25–74 underwent cervical screening for HPV between 2020 and mid-2025, reflecting strong participation in the renewed National Cervical Screening Program. The 2025 Cervical Cancer Elimination Progress Report also found that in 2021, for the first time, not a single case of cervical cancer was documented among those aged under 25 years nationwide, demonstrating the efficacy of Australia's HPV vaccination program in younger people.

As Karen explains, "Each of these steps builds upon the last. Together, they give us the tools not just to control cervical cancer but to eliminate it – and, critically, to do so equitably."

Cervical cancer incidence in Australia

INDIGENOUS WOMEN

11.7

per 100,000 women in 2017–21

NON-INDIGENOUS WOMEN

5.8

per 100,000 women in 2017–21

Compared to the WHO elimination target, rates were three times as high for Indigenous women and twice as high in remote and very remote areas.

Source: 2025 Cervical Cancer Elimination Progress Report







4. A student receiving an HPV vaccination at a school in Dili, as part of Timor's highly successful national HPV vaccination campaign Photo: Rey Marques
5. Women attending an HPV screening outreach event in Vila Verde, in Dili. Photo: Kate Geraghty/SMH
6. 'Dr Zetó', gynaecologist Jose Antonio Gusmao Guterres at the Guido Valadares National Hospital in Dili. Photo: Kate Geraghty/SMH

EQUITY THE TRUE TEST

Elimination is not simply about driving national averages down; the real measure lies in how evenly these gains are distributed.

"It is not enough to reduce incidence in the population overall," says Professor Deborah Bateson AM, who also works with the CEC and leads the EPICC program in Timor-Leste. "We must ensure elimination across all communities, including First Nations peoples, those living rurally, people with disability, and others historically under-served by health systems."

With almost half of all screening tests now self-collected, the greatest uptake has been among groups who previously were least likely to screen – including those from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups and those living in very remote areas. Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations are also leading culturally safe, community-designed screening initiatives to overcome longstanding inequities.

However, the 2025 Cervical Cancer Progress Report warns that in recent years there has been a drop-off in vaccination coverage. Screening rates have also slipped slightly, with more than one in four women overdue for their screening test and 15 percent of 25–39-year-olds never having had one.

A renewed focus on both vaccination and screening access and uptake – including services better targeted to marginalised communities – is critical for Australia to achieve elimination by 2035.

A PARTNERSHIP WITH GLOBAL POTENTIAL

As effective as Australia's public health programs have been in positioning the country towards achieving elimination, cervical cancer remains a devastating reality for communities in many neighbouring countries. Globally, it is the fourth most common cancer in women, but the vast majority of cases (more than 90 percent) occur in low- and middle-income countries, due to a historical lack of access to screening in such nations.

This stark reality is what drove a range of global research projects led by Karen's team, now at the University of Sydney's CEC, to work closely with WHO and other partners to develop the evidence base to support its global strategy for the elimination of cervical cancer, launched in 2020. The team's modelling showed that vaccination, screening and treatment could save 62 million lives over the long term, and its ongoing work continues to support WHO in its development of global cervical screening guidelines.

The situation in low- and middle-income countries also motivated the formation of the EPICC partnership. Timor-Leste is just one of the many countries being supported, with critical work ongoing in Indonesia, Malaysia, Vanuatu, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Tuvalu, Nauru and the Solomon Islands. In Timor-Leste, EPICC is working with local leaders to drive change. And in February this year, the University of Sydney formalised its relationship



with the Timor-Leste Ministry of Health, through the signing of a memorandum of understanding.

So far, through both clinic-based screening and outreach events across the nation's capital of Dili, more than 1500 women have been screened and more than 140 treated with thermal ablation, a simple treatment performed using a lightweight and easily portable device, typically without the need for general anaesthesia.

For Dr Zetó, this represents a profound turning point. "This is a huge step in terms of service provision," he says. "It offers a bright and promising future in terms of prevention, reduction of cervical cancer incidence, and even elimination in 50 or 60 years to come. I am hopeful and confident that success can be achieved, one step at a time. We are just at the beginning."

As an Australia Awards Fellow and EPICC's technical lead, Dr Zetó visited the University of Sydney to gain hands-on experience in women's health and cancer care in the Australian context, returning home to put this learning into practice.

For him, the impact is measured not just in statistics but in lives. Each diagnosis made earlier means a family kept intact and a community protected. After years of witnessing loss, the change is as emotional as it is clinical.

"I remember the women who came too late," he says. "That memory drives me. Now, with the help of our Australian partners, we can give women the chance to live."

Deborah sees the same transformation through the eyes of the women and communities she works with. "Every person in Timor-Leste knows someone affected by cervical cancer," she says. "Too often, women die at the peak of their lives, leaving behind young children and families, with profound intergenerational health and social consequences. To work with our colleagues in Timor-Leste towards eliminating this terrible disease – to offer women hope instead of fear – is extraordinarily meaningful."

For CEC lead Karen, that sentiment captures the heart of elimination. "This is about equity and sustainability," she says. "It's about ensuring that where a person is born no longer determines whether they experience – or survive – cervical cancer."

If Australia reaches its goal of elimination by 2035, it is expected to be a world first – but certainly not, the researchers hope, the last. With programs like EPICC forging new regional pathways, the University of Sydney and its international partners are working with communities to ensure that the benefits of prevention and control reach far beyond Australia's shores.

And if that happens, the story of cervical cancer will ultimately become proof that with evidence-based research, strong partnerships and a shared sense of humanity, a once major cancer can be consigned to history.

The EPICC consortium is led by the CEC at the University of Sydney and includes the Australian Centre for the Prevention of Cervical Cancer, the Kirby Institute at UNSW Sydney, Family Planning Australia, the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance, Unitaid, the International Union for Cancer Control and the International Gynecological Cancer Society.

Make a gift to medical research and help drive medical innovation by being part of the next generation of treatments, technologies and cures

Towards elimination

HPV VACCINATION

WHO TARGET FOR 2030



90%

of girls vaccinated by age 15

STATUS IN AUSTRALIA (2024)



81%

of girls vaccinated by age 15 (down by 3.1% from 2023)

HPV SCREENING

WHO TARGET FOR 2030



70%

of women screened by age 35 and again by age 45

STATUS IN AUSTRALIA (2024)



85%

of women aged 35–39 screened at least once, and progress started towards women aged 45–49 having been screened twice

Source: 2025 Cervical Cancer Elimination Progress Report

5 MINS WITH

SAM CRAWFORD

BSc(Arch) ’93, BArch ’97

Director,
Sam Crawford Architects



Sam Crawford on the sculptural staircase that draws light deep into his renovation of a Paddington terrace house. Photo: Supplied

What sparked your interest in architecture?

I’ve always been interested in how things work. When I was seven years old, my parents took me and my six siblings travelling in a bright orange VW Kombi van across Europe and North Africa for a year. Visiting countless hill towns, castles, museums and art galleries exposed us to other worlds, and changed the course of our lives.

How did your time at university shape your career?

I received a design education with a strong emphasis on social impact and respect for people, purpose and place – with wonderfully inspirational lecturers. I loved university and I hated it. We worked extremely hard – long nights and weekends at the drawing board; endless models – it felt it would never end. But it did, and led to a challenging, rewarding career.

What confirmed you were on the right path?

In my second last year of study, I was given the opportunity to design a real project – a house for my sister’s family. Two years out of university and the house was built, with fellow student Emili Fox. It was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*’s Domain lift-out.

What’s the most valuable lesson you’ve learned?

Architecture done well is an act of love. We’ve seen how well-designed spaces transform lives – creating sustainable, connected spaces that enrich daily life and bring people together. As architects, our responsibility extends beyond our clients to the land, community and, through an Indigenous lens, to Country.

How do you think we should deal with Sydney’s housing crisis?

Architects should lead in creating high-quality, denser cities. And that doesn’t have to mean tall residential towers that feel disconnected from the street or nature. It can be achieved with mixed-use buildings – five or six storeys high – that sit within the tree line and near employment, amenity and transport, contributing to the public life of the city. My practice was chosen to design a terrace housing model for the NSW Housing Pattern Book, a collection of low-rise, adaptable, sustainable and affordable pre-approved homes, which is part of this.

What advice would you give to students?

There are plenty of occasions when it all seems too hard, when the odds of achieving a quality design, paying your staff and making a decent living seem stacked against you – but stay on it, it’s a rewarding path to follow.

University of Sydney researchers and clinicians are rewriting the playbook on healthy ageing. By uncovering how sleep quality and oral health across our lifespan shape cognitive resilience in later life, their work is prompting a renewed focus on midlife — and redefining what good aged care looks like.

Written by Alana Wulff
Illustrations by Josh Patterson



Living better for longer

The surprising new science of ageing well



THE LINKS BETWEEN SLEEP AND COGNITIVE HEALTH

Understanding how everyday choices can shape cognitive health across our lifespan and influence our dementia risk is a theme of emerging sleep science. Professor Sharon Naismith AM, who heads the Healthy Brain Ageing Program at the University's Brain and Mind Centre, explains how sleep research is playing an increasingly important role in our understanding of cognitive decline and dementia.

"We know that about 45 percent of dementias are due to things that are modifiable – such as depression, cardiovascular disease, alcohol consumption, hearing loss, and how much education you've had," she says. "Evidence also links restorative sleep to alertness and laying down new memories, while poor sleep duration is linked to a higher risk of dementia – and we know that pathology leading to dementia begins to build up from midlife."

Sharon's pioneering research explores whether sleep disturbances play a causative role in dementia, or whether they're a by-product of age-related degeneration of the circuits that support sleep.

"We're looking at the mechanisms by which different forms of sleep disturbance may trigger or exacerbate the build-up of beta-amyloid [a protein involved in cognitive decline] and other pathologies in the brain that lead to dementia generally and Alzheimer's disease specifically," she explains. "We believe that sleep flushes proteins like this from our brains, and that process is diminished in ageing, as well as in some medical conditions and sleep disorders.

"With sleep apnoea, for example, there is a dip in blood oxygen levels and sleep becomes quite fragmented, which can impact the deep stages of sleep. In turn, this can disrupt the important restorative role of sleep, the consolidation of memories, and can potentially impact the drainage of waste products from the brain. So many people in our memory clinic setting have undiagnosed sleep apnoea and other forms of sleep disturbance."

Sharon is currently scaling this important work using advanced technologies to test participants and develop interventions that improve sleep and memory. In addition to other techniques, her research uses affordable monitoring that can be done at home, such as with a simple oximeter to study sleep apnoea in older adults.

"Given the high prevalence of these disorders and that some effective therapies already exist, we need to develop more cost-effective and scalable ways to screen people presenting to memory clinics with cognitive concerns," she says. "With effective screening and treatment, we can potentially slow dementia and improve quality of life for older people."

The team at the Brain and Mind Centre, in partnership with the Australian Dementia Network and the Department of Health, have also recently launched a virtual memory clinic model for people in regional and rural Australia, to address inequities in access to specialist care.

Sharon emphasises that good sleep hygiene needs to be prioritised throughout the ageing process, not just in our later years. "Be mindful of healthy brain ageing from midlife – which is typically your 40s and 50s," she advises. "From that time, you really have to keep your brain and body active – sleep will naturally follow."

She offers some more specific tips below.

HOW TO ESTABLISH GOOD SLEEP HABITS

- Wake up at the same time every day, including weekends, to support your natural circadian rhythm.
- Keep your body and brain active during the day, to promote sleep quality at night.
- Keep daytime naps short (under 20 minutes) and before 2 pm.
- Avoid caffeine from late afternoon onwards.
- Avoid using your smartphone in the evening, as bright light keeps your brain alert.
- Keep your bedroom cool, as lower temperatures support better-quality sleep.
- If you snore, gasp for air during sleep, or feel excessively sleepy during the day, speak to your doctor.

ORAL HEALTH AND DEMENTIA RISK

Good oral health is also critical to our quality of life as we age, affecting our ability to comfortably eat, talk and socialise. But despite its close links to overall wellbeing, it remains one of the most overlooked areas of health care, according to Associate Professor Ankur Singh, the University of Sydney's Chair of Lifespan Oral Health.

"One in ten Australian adults does not have the minimum number of teeth needed for daily functions,"[1] explains Ankur, whose work is supported by the generosity of Sue and Alex Abrahams through The Rosebrook Foundation. And this figure is significantly higher among those who have low education or who are members of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities.

Thousands of Australians currently have poor oral health and struggle to access dental care, something Ankur describes as "a social and economic issue that hasn't yet reached the policy table". Within the context of ageing, he adds, "We want people to be able to live independently and lead a life with dignity as they age. But if you're embarrassed about your teeth, or can't engage with people due to impediments caused by poor oral health, how is healthy ageing possible?"

Perhaps even more concerning is that oral health issues are also associated with increased cognitive decline. "There is a bi-directional relationship between dementia and poor oral health," Ankur explains. "When you have poor oral health, it can impact your capacity to go out, both from a speech and nutrition perspective," and poor social engagement is known to be associated with increased dementia risk. Conversely, those with dementia tend to have worse oral health outcomes, often due to isolation and poor social participation.

Ankur believes that change is needed within the oral health space throughout the ageing process – not purely in early life and then again in old age. "We look at people early in life, and towards the end, but what about the main Australian population in the middle of their lives?" he says. "If you leave people to themselves throughout large chunks of their adulthood, when they're also prioritising children and ageing parents and having financial hardships, that's the bit that really worries me. If your stress levels are high, you usually feel less control in your life, and that can impact everything from your time structure to trying to improve your nutrition – and that's what's currently lacking in the oral health literature."

Ankur offers some simple practices we can all adopt to support our oral health and therefore our overall wellbeing.

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR ORAL HEALTH

- Cut back on inflammatory triggers. Maintaining a healthy diet, cutting down on sugar, and avoiding alcohol and tobacco can all help to lower systemic inflammation.
- Manage stress early. We all know that regular brushing and dental check-ups matter. But high stress often erodes our oral health by making it tougher to prioritise these healthy routines along with our nutrition, hygiene and self-care, all of which can undermine immunity and therefore oral health.
- Focus on realistic changes. Small, manageable habits are more sustainable than overly ambitious goals – especially when we feel short of time or control.



1. Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, National Study of Adult Oral Health 2017–18.

REDEFINING AGED CARE

As research continues to reveal how modifiable lifestyle factors shape ageing, attention is also turning to how care systems respond – particularly for people already living with cognitive decline.

Professor Yun-Hee Jeon, the University of Sydney's Susan and Isaac Wakil Professor of Healthy Ageing, is exploring innovative ways of redefining what it means to age well, with the ultimate aim of improving aged care.

"I'm trying to make sure we offer the care people deserve," explains Yun-Hee, who has developed evidence-based rehabilitation and reablement tools for those living with dementia, as well as delivering workforce training to strengthen preventive health care and improve older people's wellbeing.

Along with collaborators at the US-based Johns Hopkins University, Yun-Hee has developed reablement programs to support people with dementia, who are often excluded from more general rehabilitation programs.

"They may get rehab if they actually have a fall or have problems with their knees," she explains, "but the major gap is often to do with practitioners who aren't necessarily trained to deliver care that focuses on improving the independence of people living with dementia and engaging them in a way that is meaningful to them. There's sometimes a misconception that nothing can be done."

Yun-Hee's program is designed to bring nurses and other multidisciplinary team members together to provide a comprehensive rehabilitation offering appropriate for people with dementia. "There are many interventions that people with dementia can benefit from, but too often they're never referred to them," she says. "Support from speech pathologists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists can make a real difference. I think we often just hasten the process, rather than trying to support someone to have that sense of independence and purpose."



Reablement supports people living with dementia to maintain or rebuild skills, from preparing meals and getting around to communicating and engaging in activities. Importantly, it operates on the principle of collaboration rather than simply providing care – doing things *with* people rather than doing things *for* them.

"I've learned so much from people with lived experience," Yun-Hee reflects, acknowledging in particular John Quinn, who lives with younger-onset dementia and actively participates in dementia research.

Yun-Hee's commitment to improving dementia care is further reflected in an initiative called StepUp for Research (Dementia and Ageing),

REFRAMING DEMENTIA IN CHINESE-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES

When University of Sydney PhD candidate Zihan He began exploring how members of Chinese-speaking communities talk about dementia, he realised that the word itself was part of the problem.

The traditional Chinese term for dementia translates as 'dummy disease' or 'idiocy', a label obviously steeped in shame and stigma. Another term used, 'brain degeneration syndrome', is medically inaccurate and refers more properly to a wider range of health conditions.

"For many Chinese families, the old term was so insulting they avoided seeking help," explains Zihan, an international student from China who has since been awarded his PhD.

Zihan consulted dementia experts across mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore, exploring how terminology affects stigma and understanding. His research, supervised by Professor Christine Ji and Professor Lee-Fay Low, led to a new, culturally sensitive term that translates as 'cognitive impairment syndrome'.

This preferred term, first used in Hong Kong, has now been endorsed by Dementia Australia and is expected to be adopted internationally. It also

HOW TO CARE FOR YOURSELF OR A FAMILY MEMBER WITH DEMENTIA

- Remember that a dementia diagnosis does not automatically mean a life of dependence. Having confidence that independence is still possible – both for the person with dementia and for their family – can make a real difference.
- Reach out as early as possible to support services that promote independence.
- Set goals based on what the person actually values, and build practical strategies to achieve them. This approach can make a significant difference to the person's quality of life.
- Create opportunities for meaningful activities, whether big or small. This helps to nurture a sense of purpose.
- Remember that we are all are interdependent. Rehabilitation and reablement are about collaborating and maintaining independence, in whatever form it may take.

which links participants both with and without dementia to researchers studying prevention, care and treatment, helping to accelerate research outcomes.

Ultimately, Yun-Hee believes there is still much to be done to raise awareness of the inequities that exist in this space. "Health is not just about physical health," she says. "Our sense of purpose and independence is shaped by the interplay of physical, mental and social health. If you can do something on your own and feel independent, it's just so important." ●

World Alzheimer Report 2025
A user-friendly report packed with information and practical strategies promoting the power of dementia rehabilitation

underpins the University-led Facing Dementia Together awareness campaign, which targets Chinese, Vietnamese and Arabic-speaking communities in Southwestern Sydney, supporting families to start conversations and seek GP assessments.

Zihan's Culturally Appropriate and Linguistically Understandable (CALU) translation model has been embraced by Chinese Australians participating in community education sessions.

For Zihan, this research was also personal, inspired by a family member in China who was affected by dementia but never sought help due to stigma. "I want to help people feel seen, respected and supported – no matter the language they speak," he says. "By changing the language, we can change attitudes and lives."

SAM RECOMMENDS



Casey Green
BA '15

Favourite music?

My favourite music changes constantly. Currently, it's 'Miffed it' by Melbourne-based Way Dynamic, a delightfully catchy indie tonic that's on repeat in our house at the moment.

How does music bring people together?

Working at the Sydney Opera House, I had the opportunity to see how live music resonated with different communities. From rusted-on opera and symphony orchestra subscribers, to screaming teenagers desperate to glimpse Ethel Cain or Alex G, to Gen Xers who would travel across the country to see bucket-list concerts, it was clear that seeing artists live, among like-minded people, was an affirming experience.

What does 'community' mean to you?

At the ABC, I've gained a deeper appreciation of the power of music broadcasting, and how it brings people together across cities and regions. It truly is a community service, connecting people when access to concert halls or budget for tickets just isn't a reality. Seeing my peers at Triple J or Double J serve their listeners also reminds me that connection to community through music is powerful at all life stages, and broadcasting is an essential platform enabling these connections.

Podcast that changed you?

I recently listened to *The Rest Is History*'s episode of 'The Complete History of The Beatles' with Conan O'Brien. It was so charming to listen to two people completely obsessed with their subject matter – and the way they captured The Beatles' spirit and talent, and the historical and geopolitical context was so compelling.

Casey Green is a classical and contemporary music executive producer at ABC Radio.



Emily Bobis is forging her own path in business, as the co-founder of start-up company Compas IoT.

GENERATION NEXT

How Gen Z is redefining the future of business



AS A NEW GENERATION OF BUSINESS LEADERS RETHINK WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE, MANY ARE PRIORITISING STRATEGIC SKILL BUILDING AND HAVING A MEANINGFUL IMPACT OVER CLIMBING THE CORPORATE LADDER. OTHERS ARE FAST-TRACKING THEIR OWN CAREER PATHS – RAISING QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT LEADERSHIP OF THE FUTURE MIGHT LOOK LIKE.

Written by Harriet Smith
Photography by Stefanie Zingsheim

When Emily Bobis (BA ’16, MCom ’19, DipLangStud ’21) reflects on the moment she realised she didn’t want a traditional corporate career, it comes back to a single internship. “I had imagined a fairly standard career path. I didn’t ever plan to start a technology company,” she says. “But I was interning at a large corporation, and I remember thinking, there’s no way I can do this now, let alone forever.”

That clarity galvanised her move into the start-up world. She had already helped to establish and sell bike-sharing platform Airbike, with fellow student Angus McDonald (BA ’21), while at university – and they were already in discussions about their next venture. When she finished the internship, she decided to take the plunge and launch Compass IoT, a data intelligence company that uses data from cars to solve complex transport problems related to congestion, safety and city planning. “That was in 2018,” Emily says. “Now we employ 27 people and have mapped over 20 million freight trips, reduced crashes, informed government policy and major infrastructure investment, and supported flood disaster recovery efforts.”

Her experience reflects a broader shift underway among Gen Z (generally considered to have been born between 1995 and 2012). For decades, leadership followed a familiar script, but for today’s emerging workforce, that script no longer works. Many young professionals are stepping away from traditional management pathways – not out of apathy, but intention.

THE END OF THE OLD LADDER

There was a time when the career ladder made perfect sense – you took a step, then another, steadily climbing toward seniority, a bigger pay cheque and perhaps even a corner office. But the workplace has shifted a long way from that tidy paradigm. Few of us



> “WHEN PEOPLE ASK FOR MY JOB TITLE, I HESITATE. MODERN WORK CULTURE ISN’T AS TIED TO TITLES, ESPECIALLY IN THE START-UP SPACE.”
>
> — Emily Bobis

still reach for the traditional ‘next rung’, as careers increasingly move sideways, diagonally, or even down in strategic plays to learn and grow before rising again. And now, yet another shift may be on the horizon.

Insights from recent studies, including Deloitte’s 2025 Gen Z and Millennial Survey, point to a generational rethink of leadership. In Australia, 94 percent of Australian Gen Zs say that meaningful work is a priority, often choosing roles aligned with personal values and sustainability, while just 7 percent aspire to senior leadership, favouring work-life balance instead.

Sometimes described as ‘conscious unbossing’, this trend raises questions about future management styles and the emergence of more collaborative forms of leadership.

LEADERSHIP WITHOUT THE LABELS

For Emily, leadership has always been about working independently and making a real impact, rather than power or status.

“When people ask for my job title, I hesitate,” she says. “Modern work culture isn’t as tied to titles, especially in the start-up space. It’s about what you deliver. And my generation is probably more accepting of accelerating staff.”

She has seen how quickly early-career employees can grow when given responsibility and the right support. “Young people come out of uni, and sometimes if they’re sucked into a corporate machine, they can feel as if they have no ability to make an impact,” she says. “My experience is that graduates really want the opportunity to make a difference. For example, we hired a student in her final year of university who was helping with copywriting tasks. Eighteen months later, she runs marketing in the UK,” Emily says. “It wasn’t overnight, but it was definitely a shorter lead time than she’d have at a bigger organisation.”

With a team spanning staff in their 20s to 60s, Emily believes that mindset matters more than age. “We look for adaptability and openness,” she says. “Empathy matters – it’s not revolutionary, but it’s meaningful. Our culture helps us retain people, and that builds knowledge over time. It’s carrots rather than sticks – that’s the way I would like to be led, so that’s the way I lead.”

AUTHENTICITY OVER AUTHORITY

Dr Nate Zettna (BA(Hons) ’17, PhD ’21), a lecturer in Leadership and Organisational Behaviour at the University’s Business School, believes that Gen Z’s leadership mindset has been shaped by timing as much as temperament. “They lived through COVID at a significant moment in their lives,” he explains. “They’re entering the workforce with a very different perspective as a result.”

“The idea of ‘conscious unbossing’ is interesting because this generation, I’ve found, prioritises values. For many, the traditional trade-offs of management – long hours, emotional labour and blurred boundaries – no longer align with their values or capabilities. I’ve heard young people say, ‘If you become management, you don’t get paid overtime.’ Taking on extra responsibility isn’t the lure it once was.”

Instead, Gen Z is reframing leadership expectations. “They want authenticity,” Nate says. “They want leaders who admit mistakes and show that they have overcome adversity. It’s not about being inspirational; it’s about being your ‘authentic self’.

“There are actually a lot of misconceptions about generational differences at work, and something I’m keen for people to know is that, in fact, recent research shows there is no strong evidence supporting systematic differences between different ‘generations’. There are, however, often perceptions of differences. You feel there is a difference, you make your own assumptions – and in an organisation, that’s where we see issues stemming from.”



Ricky Rangra has his eye on senior leadership.



“WE’RE PROACTIVE ABOUT OUR CAREERS AND TRY TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN FOR OURSELVES INSTEAD OF LETTING THEM HAPPEN TO US.”

— Ricky Rangra

He points to bi-directional mentoring as a powerful opportunity. “We often think of mentoring as a one-way street – older workers training younger team members,” Nate says. “But younger workers are tapped into trends, they’re AI literate and native to new technologies, while senior staff offer institutional knowledge and context. If that diversity is well managed, it can be incredibly productive. It’s a real chance for organisations to advance collectively.”

AMBITION ON NEW TERMS

Not all Gen Z professionals are stepping away from senior leadership. Ricky Rangra (BCom/BAdvStudies ’24), an associate with a multinational consulting firm, represents a cohort that is ambitious – but on its own terms.

Ricky sees a shift away from more conventional ways of navigating the corporate hierarchy, with young people creating their own pathways. “As a generation, I’d say we’re high-agency and outcomes-driven,” he says. “We’re proactive about our careers and try to make things happen for ourselves instead of letting them happen to us.”

That mindset emerged early for Ricky. Straight out of high school, he worked full time at Westpac and later AMP, while studying at university. At 18, he emailed the then-CEO of Westpac asking for a chat over coffee. The following week, the CEO’s chief of staff invited him in for a meeting. “My biggest takeaway early in my career was the importance of being active in your own career development and seeking out the right people to learn from.”

Ricky chose consulting with a clear strategic goal – to build a strong leadership toolkit. “Consulting requires you to develop an informed point of view grounded in data, then convey it clearly – often at critical moments for a client,” he says. For Ricky, who hopes to work in senior leadership in government, these foundations matter. “My future success will be built on the skills I’m developing now. People my age definitely want to get to senior levels earlier, though.”

Among Ricky’s peers, ambition often means moving sideways rather than up. He sees his peers embracing flexibility – moving between start-ups, sustainability ventures and established firms, often across borders – to gain broader, global experience.

“Getting ahead doesn’t always mean moving up in your current role,” he says. “Sometimes it means moving sideways for new experiences.”

For Ricky, management today is not necessarily about traditional hierarchy, it’s about influencing organisational change and the ways you can serve and lead. “It’s about developing institutional knowledge, and using that to build a narrative to inspire diligence, work and change. That, to me, is really exciting.”

REDEFINING WHAT COMES NEXT

Taken together, these perspectives point to a generation not so much opting out of leadership but rather expanding its definition, and questioning inherited assumptions about power and success.

“It used to be work, work, work, retire,” says Nate. “That’s changing. It’s not about being anti-work or anti-management, but we have to admit this generation has grown up in an anxious time and they have a different mindset of life and how they want to work.

“This generation is showing that there’s a different way to approach life and career, and even in big organisations, individual needs matter,” he adds. “Managers need to understand their own leadership style, but also pay attention to what their employees need. It might sound trite, but it’s true – everyone brings something different to the table.

“That said, you can’t perfectly adapt to every employee or every generation. But leaders who are open to listening, learning, and meeting their teams halfway will make the workplace stronger for everyone.” ●

Explore lifelong learning and leadership upskilling with Sydney Executive Plus

WHAT CAN DIFFERENT GENERATIONS LEARN FROM EACH OTHER?

Up to five generations are currently working side by side in the workplace – each influenced by different values, expectations, experiences and ways of working. So what can we learn from each other?

MANAGING A MULTI-GENERATIONAL WORKFORCE



LEAD WITH FLEXIBILITY



CHALLENGE AGE-BASED STEREOTYPES
Generational trends can offer clues, but they're just assumptions that shouldn't replace understanding people as individuals.



SHARE DECISION MAKING
Move away from rigid hierarchies to more collaborative leadership so that decisions are guided by expertise, rather than job titles.



ADAP HOW PEOPLE WORK
Be open to different working hours, communication styles and ways of getting things done. Ask team members what motivates them and how they like to work – and adjust where possible.

ENCOURAGE CROSS-GENERATIONAL LEARNING



CREATE SHARED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
Bring people of different ages together to exchange ideas and experiences.



SUPPORT TWO-WAY MENTORING
Encourage mentoring and reverse mentoring across generations, so that knowledge flows in all directions.

Source: Dr Nate Zettna, lecturer in Leadership and Organisational Behaviour, University of Sydney Business School

EMBRACING STRATEGIC CURIOSITY

THREE WAYS OF WORKING IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Written by Alana Wulff

As the Belonging, Wellbeing and Talent Brand Lead at Canva – the all-in-one platform for visual communication and collaboration – Manon Pietra (MHRM&IR '11) drives programs that strengthen inclusion and belonging across the company. She works to shape systems, culture, and everyday employee experiences around the world. Originally from France, Manon moved to Australia at 21 to complete a master's degree at the University of Sydney. Her passion for people and purpose has helped her to introduce new ways of working in remote and digital workplaces.



Manon Pietra strives to build inclusion and belonging across Canva's global teams. Photo: Supplied

Be more than just interested

Manon believes that curiosity is valuable – but being intentional with your curiosity is what will truly help you to grow. She calls it 'strategic curiosity'. "Loads of people are naturally curious, but to really thrive these days, you have to be laser focused on being intentional with your time and interests," she says. She believes that strategic curiosity is an inherent personality trait that can be built upon and shaped into a highly useful professional skill.

"If you're letting yourself be bobbed around by the tide in an organisational context, especially with AI and how fast it's developing, you're going to be left on the backbench – no question about it," she explains. By embracing the idea of continuous education and strategic curiosity, you can transform daily moments into powerful learning opportunities.

When you come across a new idea, she encourages you to pause and consider whether it can be applied to your work. "Even something small like a LinkedIn post can be a learning moment if you approach it with purpose," Manon says. "The intentional and strategic curiosity part is about recognising an opportunity in that moment, pausing, and thinking about how you can apply what you've just read to your role."

Manon encourages people to write about these insights to solidify each new learning. "There's a ton of research that says thinking about something and then writing about it involves two different pathways of the mind – especially when you're writing by hand," she adds. This intentional process allows us to better engage with new information each day in more bite-sized chunks. "Learning is completely blended now, and requires you to have an understanding of what business your organisation is in, and how you can make your impact align to what they're looking for."



Hear more big ideas by signing up for Sydney Ideas

Build belonging into digital-first spaces

As more of our work and personal lives shift online, Manon says the challenge isn't just about maintaining real-world connection but creating it authentically. At Canva, this means designing an environment that is accessible and remote-first, ensuring the workflow for each day – from meetings to the way information is shared – works fully online. This allows teams to really treat in-person time in the physical office as meaningful. Instead of gathering people in a room to watch presentations, these in-person moments are used only for connection and relationship building.

As having a strong sense of belonging at work has become more important than ever, Manon also works to create connection where possible, across all functions of the business. "You've got that layer of organisational alignment, but we want connections across different dimensions," she explains. "This might look like connecting people through lived experience, such as parents and carers coming together, or establishing women's collectives, pride groups, neurodiversity communities and more." In establishing accessible spaces that are still digital-first, yet connect through common ground, teams can build stronger relationships and increase their sense of belonging. "If you segment things by location, you'll simply break that connection apart."

Explore purpose through a portfolio career

"All the research shows that Gen Zs and Alphas are really driven by having a sense of purpose, and expect purpose," says Manon. "But until you have those key skills to bring to the table, you need to do your best to be helpful, add value, and build your toolkit." Once early-career employees have the skills to barter with, Manon encourages them to focus on pursuing their moral ambitions and making impactful change. "Try to think about your career in eras rather than a single linear path, which will help you achieve more," she says. "There are so many opportunities to have a job for money and then contribute to social enterprise on the side – it's the age of the portfolio career, after all." A 'portfolio career' – where workers take on multiple roles, clients or projects at once, rather than committing to a single employer – has become a mainstream reality for many.

Whether by embracing more than one role through your employer or jumping into a portfolio career, Manon encourages professionals to recognise that we're all multifaceted, and that there are many ways to exercise the different parts of our personality. "You might be a graphic designer but also serve as the chair of your company's neurodivergence community at the same time," she says. "There are so many ways you can explore different personas and wear different hats – you shouldn't ever have to give up seeking to serve a broader purpose in life or at work."

FAREWELL TO ARTEMIS

The end of an era for the supercomputer that powered thousands of research projects

When the University of Sydney's high-performance computer Artemis was shut down for the final time, some researchers felt as if they were saying goodbye to a dear colleague. Over a decade, Artemis drove discoveries across disciplines, leaving a lasting legacy and helping to pave the way for a new approach to research computing at the University of Sydney.

Written by Cassandra Hill

For a moment in late 2025, staff from across the University of Sydney community took time out to farewell the supercomputer, Artemis, with a small celebration, reflecting on its years of service and the pivotal role it played in countless research projects.

"Artemis was regarded with a sense of great affection by many staff and students," says Professor Simon Ringer, the University of Sydney's Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research Infrastructure). "Its decommissioning certainly was the end of an era, as Artemis achieved so much for the University through the research it enabled."

When the first version of Artemis arrived in 2015, it was eagerly anticipated by researchers. Artemis was designed to speed up the University's complex data analysis, supporting work in fields such as bioinformatics and genomics, as well as data-intensive research and modelling in earth sciences, agriculture, astronomy and physics.

"When Artemis went live, there was a great sense of excitement – it felt like opening a whole new world of possibilities," Simon says. "This was something completely new – faster, bigger, more powerful. Suddenly, our researchers could collaborate more, tackle questions that had seemed out of reach before."

However, he recalls that there was some trepidation at first.

"Investing in and installing something this big was a bit daunting initially, but it quickly became clear that it was the right move. Major research infrastructure like this is what lets our researchers do their best work and accelerates discoveries. It's about building something that boosts research, while delivering real benefits to the wider community."

Major upgrades followed in 2016 and 2018, and Artemis went on to support more than 7000 researchers working on around 4000 research projects. In total, it delivered an estimated 360 million CPU core hours and contributed to more than 16,000 research papers.

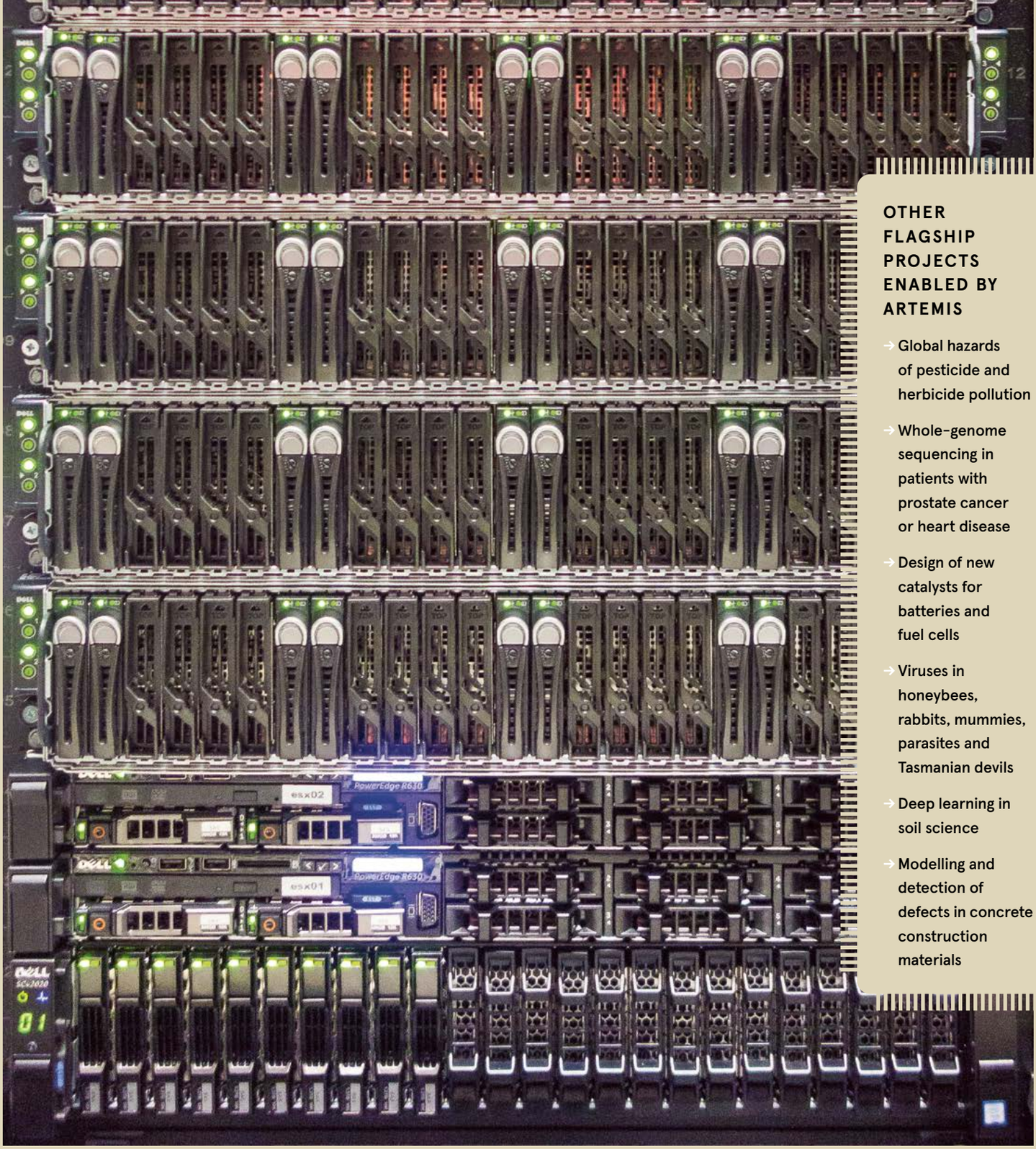
Among its most notable achievements was enabling evolutionary virologist Professor Edward (Eddie) Holmes, with a colleague in China, to become the first to map and publicly release the COVID-19 genome. This work also earned Eddie the accolade of 2020 NSW Scientist of the Year.

"My team played a key role in revealing the origin and early spread of SARS-CoV-2, the causative agent of COVID-19," Eddie says. "This work requires the computational analysis of huge amounts of genome sequence data. This would have been impossible without Artemis; it absolutely transformed the research I was able to perform."

Artemis ultimately underpinned a vast range of significant research projects at the University – from modelling global plate tectonics to surveying the Milky Way to developing advanced engineering simulations and quantum cryptography.

A LONG HISTORY OF LANDMARK COMPUTERS

In many ways, the University is the cradle of Australia's digital computing and computer science story. Artemis was the latest in a long line of groundbreaking University of Sydney computers that began with Australia's first digital computer, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Automatic Computer (CSIRAC), which was operational on campus from 1949 to 1964. It was followed by SILLIAC, famously financed by a donor's Melbourne



OTHER FLAGSHIP PROJECTS ENABLED BY ARTEMIS

- Global hazards of pesticide and herbicide pollution
- Whole-genome sequencing in patients with prostate cancer or heart disease
- Design of new catalysts for batteries and fuel cells
- Viruses in honeybees, rabbits, mummies, parasites and Tasmanian devils
- Deep learning in soil science
- Modelling and detection of defects in concrete construction materials

Cup winnings, which ran from 1956 to 1968.

With Artemis decommissioned in 2025, the University continues its tradition of forward-thinking computing as it phases in a new suite of computing capabilities, known collectively as Sydney Research Cloud. This includes a new partnership with the Pawsey Supercomputing Research Centre, which gives researchers access to Setonix, Australia's most powerful supercomputer, and increasing capacity for AI-enabled research.

Simon says that Sydney Research Cloud will offer researchers more user-friendly, scalable and secure research computing.

"Our capacity to support AI-based research – machine learning and inference [prediction based on large data sets] – is receiving a huge boost, and we'll be able to drive faster, more powerful modelling. Sydney Research Cloud will give our researchers access to a flexible range of modern processing units with the reliability they need to both drive and collaborate on globally significant research."

Although now retired, Artemis lives on in the discoveries it helped to make possible and in the foundations it laid for the future, as the University of Sydney steps into its next era of research computing.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

More stories of alumni at work around the world.



NICOLE LARKIN

BDesArch ’11, MArch ’14

Nicole is a coastal architect whose practice focuses on adaptation to sea-level rise through design, policy and urban planning. Her work focuses on urban areas where rising seas directly affect housing, public foreshore access and the relationship between civic and natural landscapes. Nicole began her career at Tzannes Architect before founding her own practice in 2013, and is widely recognised for her research and advocacy on ocean and harbour pools. In 2022, she was engaged by the NSW Government to co-author its Coastal Design Guidelines. Supported by a 2025 Marten Bequest, Nicole pursues international best-practice research into adaptive waterfronts and serves as a member of the NSW State Design Review Panel.



DAN LODEN

BE (Chemical) ’05

With 20 years’ experience across the Australian carbon market, Dan has built a career spanning the corporate, government and not-for-profit sectors. He has a strong focus on carbon legislation, compliance and Traditional Owner engagement. Early in his career, Dan negotiated a $24 million benefits package for the Larrakia people of Darwin, delivering long-term support for Elders and education opportunities for young people. He has since supported the evaluation and development of carbon-farming projects in Western Australia and led a pioneering engineering design course across 30 universities, teaching people-centred design to support community development. Dan’s commitment to social impact also extends globally, including volunteering in a rural orphanage in India to deliver sustainable energy solutions.



ELAINE MALICKI OAM

BA ’67, DipEd ’68

Elaine began her career teaching HSC English and Ancient History while raising three sons. A local dispute over a tennis court unexpectedly set her on a new path – community advocacy. Her determination to protect the Lane Cove Valley from a proposed freeway then sparked decades of public service. Elaine was elected to Ku-ring-gai Council, where she became its longest-serving councillor and held the role of mayor for three terms. Her leadership earned her Emeritus Mayor status, a 2014 Minister’s Award for Women in Local Government, and a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2019 for contributions to local government and community. After 30 years of service, Elaine retired from public life to focus on family and being a grandmother.



SARFRAZ KHAN

BCom ’16, LLB’19, LLM ’23

Sarfraz was born in Fiji and migrated to Australia at the age of 10. His early experiences shaped his commitment to equity, inclusion and fairness, and motivated him to become the first in his family to attend university. Sarfraz has since built a career across private practice, government, higher education and the not-for-profit sector. His work has included contributing to early investigative frameworks at the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, and strengthening governance and compliance systems at the University of Sydney. Sarfraz now serves as a Disability Advocate at Multicultural Disability Advocacy Australia, and as Company Secretary of the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW. He uses his legal expertise to support people with disabilities – particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Share your story with us



LOUISE MAHONEY OAM

BN ’97

Louise is a Registered Nurse and the CEO of Dreams2Live4, a national charity that fulfils dreams for adults living with cancer. Her career began at St Vincent’s Hospital Sydney, where she worked across intensive care, community health and emergency services, with roles in Fiji and Saudi Arabia. Inspired by her sister Annie’s pursuit of her own dreams during cancer treatment, Louise co-founded Dreams2Live4 with Annie at Prince of Wales Hospital. Following Annie’s passing in 2009, Louise continued their shared vision, delivering more than 4000 dreams. Now in its tenth year as a national charity, Dreams2Live4 has also reached its goal of providing a dream every 24 hours. Louise was honoured with the AMP Tomorrow Maker Award in 2019, and a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2022 for service to the community through charitable organisations.



SHANNAN KEEN

BA ’10, MBMSc ’12

Shannan is a neuroscientist and internationally recognised advocate for people living with the rare neurological condition Locked-in Syndrome. Her early research at the University of Sydney’s Brain and Mind Research Institute and Neuroimaging Lab led to the founding of the Australian Register for Disorders of Consciousness in 2012. Working across Australia, the UK and Europe, Shannan also founded and hosts the annual International Locked-in Syndrome Conference. In 2023 she launched the Locked-in Syndrome Community Forum – an online space connecting individuals, families and medical professionals. Her book, *Giving a Voice to Those Living With Locked-in Syndrome*, has attracted international attention, including a seven-page UK *Sunday Times Magazine* cover feature. She was also the Expert Advisor on short film *The Quiet Soul*.



DR EZRA LOCKHART

MHlthSc(DD) ’16

Ezra is an internationally recognised systemic therapist, clinical scholar and academic, specialising in developmental disability and mental health care. He has published extensively in this area and was nominated for the Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN) Prize in 2025, which places him among the world’s top 1 percent of leading scholars. Ezra is also the founding Clinical Director of Easy Does It Counseling, a minority- and LGBTQIA+-owned practice focusing on inclusive care for neurodiverse and marginalised populations. He was appointed Associate Professor of Marriage and Family Science at the United States’ National University in California in 2025, and is currently focused on expanding ethical teletherapy, digital psychoeducation, and mentoring the next generation of therapists.



DR BEN BROWN

BVSc ’03, MCom ’19

Ben has combined clinical excellence with a deep commitment to animal welfare to build veterinary capacity locally and globally. Since 2014, he has volunteered as a Veterinary Surgical Instructor with World Vets, providing veterinary care and training in communities across Central and South America. He has also been an active member of World Vets’ Disaster Response Team, aiding in Nepal during the 2015 earthquakes and in Australia during the 2019 Black Summer bushfires. Ben is also the Director and co-owner of Sydney Animal Hospitals Newport and Avalon, where he oversees companion animal practice and remains actively involved in surgery and clinical care. Ben’s Master of Commerce focused on social entrepreneurship and innovation, and he recently earned a postgraduate certificate in small animal surgery.

JUST THE FACTS

Dealing with vast amounts of information is just another day at the office for University researchers and academics. Here, three researchers each explain an idea at the centre of their current work.



ON REFUGEE RECRUITMENT

Misconceptions and biases about people from refugee backgrounds persist among employers, leading businesses to miss out on a valuable source of talent. I'm leading a project that is reshaping how Australia addresses refugee unemployment while also responding to critical skills shortages. In partnership with IKEA, Woolworths Group, and social enterprise Community Corporate, we've worked collaboratively to show how inclusive recruitment strengthens both individual and business outcomes. Our work has already supported hundreds of people into meaningful jobs and helped companies embed inclusive hiring practices. I'm now collaborating with IKEA's global headquarters to strengthen refugee workforce integration worldwide.



Professor Betina Szkudlarek specialises in intercultural training, global leadership and refugee workforce integration at the University of Sydney Business School. Internationally recognised for the excellence and impact of her research, Betina also consults for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. Her work with employers focuses on fostering inclusive workplaces and developing the leadership capabilities of their people.

ON MUSIC AND IMAGINATION

Can music really be good company? In a four-year study involving 600 participants worldwide, we set out to test whether music influences imagination – particularly thoughts of social connection. Using behavioural, neuroimaging and computational methods, we found that compared with sitting in silence, listening to music made people far more likely to imagine social scenes – such as dancing or laughing with others. It evoked feelings of warmth, connection and companionship, even without lyrics or vocals, suggesting that music alone can prompt social thoughts. These findings deepen our understanding of how music shapes imagination and point to low-cost ways in which music could support cognitive behavioural therapies, such as exposure therapy for social phobias, guided visualisation for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and interventions to reduce loneliness.



Dr Steffen Herff is a cognitive neuroscientist and leader of the Sydney Music, Mind and Body Lab at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. He explores how music is processed in the brain and ways it can be used to support mental and physical health.

... AND ON THE HUMAN TOUCH

Working as a PhD candidate with Steffen (see left), I've found that even the smallest of human touches in music can make it feel more alive. We compared repetitive drumming – with subtle micro-variations in timing and volume – to perfectly uniform beats and silence. Listeners exposed to these subtle fluctuations reported richer mental imagery, longer imagined journeys, and more immersive scenes. These findings help explain why live music often feels more compelling than flawless recordings. They also point to practical applications – from psychological therapies to music performance and sport. It's a reminder that the human touch still matters – fuelling imagination and connection.



PhD candidate Ceren Ayyildiz is studying the profound ways in which music influences our minds, through the Sydney Music, Mind and Body Lab at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

Learn more about the impact of the Sydney Music, Mind and Body Lab



University of Sydney
Community Festival 2025.
Photo: Nicola Bailey

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

COMMUNITY FESTIVAL

Sat 7 Nov | 11am-4pm

All welcome



Free event

Talks and workshops ✳ Campus tours ✳ Museum exhibitions
Kids' entertainment ✳ Lawn games ✳ Face painting
Circus school ✳ Interactive research ✳ Live music
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