

CONFRONTING THE CRISIS

20 April 2020 | businessnews.com.au

BUSINESSNEWS

GREAT *for the* **STATE**
SERIES 2 – EDITION 3

12-PAGE FEATURE

**Industry
takes action**
P34

**Thinking
regionally**
P36

**Researchers
accelerate**
P38

**How
WA healthcare
is preparing for
COVID-19** P31

Partners



Registered nurse Michelle Brown
will be on the frontline in
WA's pandemic fight.
Photo: Gabriel Oliveira

SERIES 2 – EDITION 3

Confronting the crisis

We highlight the Western Australians helping prepare our healthcare system for COVID-19.

OUR PARTNERS – HELPING US SHAPE GREAT FOR THE STATE



Carmelo Arto

Chief executive officer,
Breast Cancer Research
Centre WA

Finding a cure for metastatic breast cancer is what drives Perth medical oncologist Arlene Chan, a world leader when it comes to research into this advanced type of the disease.

A recipient of the Order of Australia, Professor Chan runs the busiest breast cancer clinical trials unit in Australia at the Breast Cancer Research Centre WA, where at least 17 successful trials have improved the way the disease is treated internationally.

Professor Chan founded BCRC-WA in 2009 with a unique vision to provide high-quality care to breast cancer patients, while concurrently conducting trials into the next generation of cancer drugs, ensuring her patients had access to the most advanced treatments.

While early stage breast cancer is the chief focus of most researchers internationally, BCRC-WA directs more than half of its research (67 per cent) into metastatic cancer, which is where the breast cancer has metastasised in another part of the body, such as the brain or bones.

(See page 35) ■



Gillian McKay

Partner,
enterprise transformation
KPMG

With the dramatic spread of COVID-19, business resilience and transformation are two of the most challenging experiences many organisations are faced with. Organisations, both large and small, must be able to adapt quickly and innovatively to respond to this disruption. Leadership is critical when navigating these complex and uncertain times for maintaining the productivity, motivation and resilience of staff, in order to survive and succeed over the coming months.

(See page 37) ■



Professor Tony O'Donnell,

Executive Dean,
Faculty of Science
The University of
Western Australia

Staff and students at UWA are working together to come up with solutions to the current pandemic and its far-reaching effects on our mental and physical health. In addition to the university's medical research strength and expertise in virology, respiratory and infectious diseases, epidemiology and public health, our scientific community is working on a number of significant projects.



Associate Professor Frances Hoyle

Associate Dean (community
and engagement),
Faculty of Science
The University of
Western Australia

These range from computer modelling on the epidemic curve to developing measures to addressing mental health and sleep issues, as well as physical activity needs for children and helping the more vulnerable in society access much-needed hand sanitiser.

(See page 39) ■

Great for the State
Part of Business News
Series 2 | Edition 3

Copyright ©
2020 Business News.
All rights reserved.

Join the community

Twitter: @wabusinessnews
Facebook.com/
WABusinessNews
Instagram: @wabusinessnews
LinkedIn.com/company/
wa-business-news

Future issues

The city of the future
May 18

Value adding
June 15

**Sharing prosperity with
our regions**
July 13

Environmental excellence
August 10

Asian engagement
September 7

A healthier society
October 5

**Diversity – embracing
inclusion**
November 2



Connections, nimble strategy key for sourcing China's PPE

Andrew Forrest has run a nimble and remarkably successful campaign to procure medical equipment from China, while WA's healthcare community has rallied to prepare for the COVID-19 pandemic.

ACTION Nicola (centre) and Andrew Forrest supervise the unloading of medical equipment. Photo: Benjamin Horgan, Minderoo Foundation

BUSINESSNEWS

Story by Matt McKenzie

Minderoo Foundation chairman Andrew Forrest is achieving through his network what governments cannot when it comes to securing equipment for the healthcare system, according to Australian Medical Association WA president Andrew Miller.

Minderoo pledged to procure \$160 million of protective equipment and medical supplies from China in early April, replenishing a shortage in Western Australia's hospitals as the COVID-19 pandemic continued its spread.

It was a welcome relief for healthcare employees, after

warnings in mid-March that supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand disinfectant had been exhausted in many locations.

"Mr Forrest has always been a game changer, and that's what we need, to change this game," Dr Miller said.

"There are only a few levers we can pull to get ahead of [COVID-19] and succeed where, sadly, other countries have not so far.

"You need someone who ... can do it at scale.

"And his scale is bigger than government, he's succeeded where governments have failed."

Continued on page 32

Connections key for sourcing Chinese PPE

Continued from page 31

Dr Miller said he had many offers from people to source equipment for local hospitals, but nine out of every 10 went nowhere.

"Having someone like him [Mr Forrest] means you can cut through all that," he said.

"He's got people who work for him on the ground there who can say 'Yes, I've seen the stuff we know that it's genuine'.

"It's still difficult to get hold of things, everyone is trying to buy.

"Having a buyer like him with a deep pocket who's prepared to pick it up and bring it here, that's amazing."

Mr Forrest's connections on the ground in China, the result of his years doing business there, have proved vital as the world descends on China's manufacturing industry with bucketloads of cash.

There's no shortage of confusion or animosity, however, with Germany accusing the US of piracy when a shipment of N95 masks headed to Europe was diverted mid-journey after the US offered more money for the precious cargo.

And it's not just governments seeking to secure shipments.

It's been claimed big industrial players such as US oilfield services company Halliburton are on deck in China, chasing supplies to buttress America's health system.

Mr Forrest is one of few philanthropists on the scene.

Demand is so high that US-based industrial company 3M has lifted production of N95 masks

from 400 million to a rate of 1.1 billion a year, and plans to increase further to 2 billion per annum by this time in 2021.

China ordinarily can produce 20 million face masks per day, about half the world's capacity before the crisis, according to a study published in *The Lancet* medical journal.

The World Economic Forum has said 77,000 ventilators were produced globally last year, while warning New York state has already signalled a need for 30,000 units of the equipment used to keep intensive care patients breathing.

Minderoo project lead Steve Burnell told *Business News* utilising existing connections and quick decision-making had been vital.

"It requires a deep understanding of the Chinese market and it requires an ability to take risks," Dr Burnell said.

"He [Mr Forrest] and we can make decisions quickly, while others have to go through chains.

"If you delay a few hours, the masks will be gone.

"What we're trying to do, given the urgency for Australia, is work between the cracks.

"If France, the US and Germany are competing for 500 million masks in a factory somewhere, if we can get 3 million we're doing those sorts of deals.

"This operation is just trying to focus on the immediate needs of frontline workers in WA.

"We hear a lot of things about the vulnerability, the fear, the angst people are feeling about a



Mr Forrest has always been a game changer, and that's what we need, to change this game - Andrew Miller

lack of equipment. We're committed to do it as long as it takes."

There are 12 people working on the project, including contractors and employees of Fortescue Metals Group, the iron ore miner Mr Forrest chairs.

Relationships and friendships mattered in China, Dr Burnell said, as competition was aggressive and getting worse.

"We've lost orders, they've just disappeared, we've had prices change on us," he said.

Pinning down the right equipment was just one part of the challenge.

The second was the logistics of getting it out of China and into WA, with issues including moving through Chinese customs clearance.

Dr Burnell said prices for freight aircraft had increased about three-fold in a month.

Three flights landed in Perth in early May, the first of which was a China Eastern plane chartered by Minderoo.

The flights carried more than 1 million N95 equivalent face masks, 400,000 surgical masks, 2.3 million medical-grade gloves, 100,000 nasal swabs, 200,000 medical coveralls, 10,000 medical goggles, 5,000 touchless thermometers, and 33 ICU-grade ventilators.

Minderoo has also announced plans to work with Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research, BGI Genomics, Clinipath Pathology, AMA and the government to dramatically increase COVID-19 testing.

While the procurement in China continues, the federal government has been running tenders for local production of masks and swabs, and many local businesses are taking action (see page 34).

The state government has undertaken its own procurement drive, ordering more than \$15 million worth of clinical equipment in late March.

That was comprised of 301 ventilators, 201 humidifiers, 4,000 pulse oximeters to check oxygen levels in blood, and 200 intensive care beds plus their associated equipment.

The government said capacity was already being increased across the system by reconfigur-

301 Ventilators bought by state govt

VANGUARD Warren Harding and Amitha Preetham believe telehealth can be used to take the battle against COVID-19 into the community.
Photo: Gabriel Oliveira

LEADING Andrew Miller has been a strong voice for action on COVID-19.
Photo: Gabriel Oliveira

ing existing beds to enable them to take critical COVID-19 patients.

Front line

With Mr Forrest and others working to source equipment, AMA WA's Dr Miller said the second big challenge was preparing the workforce for a surge in cases.

"Big hospitals have been training in teams, they've managed to divide their clinical staff into two separate streams so that one lot will be off for a week and the other lot will be on, and they can swap them over," he said.

"All sorts of ways of trying to reduce transmission between healthcare workers.

"Clinical staff's mental health has been taking a beating because of this constant anxiety around whether they will have the gear to do the job, and the training to do the job."

Dr Miller said the other big concern was that much of the junior workforce had disappeared overseas.

Many were from the UK and Ireland and had been required to return to help the healthcare systems in those countries.

St John Ambulance WA is one healthcare organisation that acted early, setting up a pan-

demio preparation committee in January.

Chief executive Michelle Fyfe said the main focus had been keeping nearly 10,000 staff and volunteers safe.

"The first thing we did was isolate our state operations centre, the triple zero centre," she said.

"They're in a confined space, they're the heart of our operation, we knew we had to protect them.

"It's a very specific role with very specific training."

Those phone operators have also changed their triaging process, for example asking callers if they have been overseas recently, to ensure first responders would have the right protective equipment when they interact with patients.

To ease anxiety in the workforce, Ms Fyfe said St John had focused on its communication across the organisation, with a web portal available for team members to keep them informed of accurate medical advice.

In addition, there was a focus on providing wellbeing and mental health support for staff, with a culture that would encourage people to reach out if in need of help and look after peers.

Physical upgrades have included repurposing three ambulanc-

es to be used only for COVID-19 patients.

Work is under way to refit more ambulances for regional WA.

St John also secured P2 reusable face gear earlier in the year, enabling the organisation to conserve its protective equipment levels.

Ms Fyfe said the organisation had been preparing for a worse-case scenario from the beginning of the year.

"I'd prefer to be accused of overreacting than not being prepared," she said.

Private hospital businesses are also making changes.

Joondalup Hospital, which is run in a public private partnership with Ramsay Health Care, took a number of passengers from the *Artania* cruise ship that had stopped at Fremantle.

The federal government has committed to contribute 50 per cent of funding to agreements between state governments and private hospitals to add capacity to the system.

That will mean private hospitals are integrated into the state's management of the pandemic, and the government in return has promised to guarantee their viability after they cancelled elective surgeries.

But all that will require specifics to be negotiated with state governments, which had not been completed at time of writing.

Technology

There's also a WA plan to use telehealth to monitor potential COVID-19 patients at home to reduce pressure on the healthcare system and stop transmission.

Cisco, Curtin University, GP superclinic operator Health Integra, ASX-listed ResApp, Prospector Biomedical Laboratories and InteliCare Holdings are part of the consortium behind the project, under the banner of the proposed Indo Asia Centre for Digital Health Commercialisation.

The plan is to use mobile devices and wearables to track vital signs for patients, including heart rate, blood oxygen levels and breathing.

It could also use geofencing to ensure people are quarantining.

The team includes doctors, epidemiologists, academics and a data scientist, led by chief executive Warren Harding.

Rather than having potential patients visit clinics, doctors will analyse cases remotely, via video.

A cheap, wearable device can then be delivered to the patient's door, to be used in conjunction with a mobile phone.

"We need to also tackle it in the community, to support the work of COVID clinics or emergency departments," Mr Harding said.

"It taps in to the capacity of Perth health providers in the community, and keeps [patients] in the home.

"When facing an extraordinary challenge like COVID-19, you won't beat it by doing ordinary things.

"We're going to have some new norms created."

Health Integra director Amitha Preetham said a good example of how the system would work would be if a patient who returned from overseas was self-quarantining for 14 days and developed low-level symptoms.

"There's a risk of transmission

to other people in the GP waiting room, and many other patients will be visiting the doctor because they have other conditions such as diabetes," Ms Preetham said.

That would help flatten the curve of infections, easing front-line capacity, and reduce the need for protective equipment.

The telehealth system would also be very low cost, using existing patient mobile phones, public logistics for pharmaceutical deliveries, and cheap wearables.

Ms Preetham said it would be easy for people to use.

Over time, data will be collected and used to feed machine learning programs that will be trained to detect problems with patients early by picking up changes in vital signs.

It comes after the federal government announced a big expansion of telehealth in late March to ease pressure on frontline health clinics and reduce potential for transmission.

About \$100 million was allocated to fund a new Medicare service for people in home isolation or quarantine over video and phone applications such as Skype.

But the Indo Asia Centre for Digital Health Commercialisation plan goes further by integrating wearables and machine learning.

The US and other countries are going in the same direction.

The Indo Asia Centre team is seeking about \$500,000 in federal funding to get the project off the ground within weeks, with the state government offering support for the concept.

There has also been interest from resources companies to help support healthcare for fly-in, fly-out workers.

Longer term, the technology could be applied to aged care, or to monitor patients with chronic diseases and potentially exported if Australia gets in early to develop it, the centre said.

InteliCare has a prospectus in the market to raise \$5.5 million for telehealth and artificial intelligence services in aged care. ■



When facing an extraordinary challenge like COVID-19, you won't beat it by doing ordinary things - Warren Harding

Manufacturers retool for es

Hold the whiskey and the luxury dresses, WA manufacturing has shown its dynamism by shifting to sanitiser, scrubs and masks.

SCRUBBING UP
Erin Taylor (Left) and Kate Wilks are making clothing for doctors.

One of our customers contacted us, she's a doctor, she usually doesn't wear scrubs but needs them at the moment - Erin Taylor

Raise a glass

A number of distilleries and breweries have moved into production of hand sanitiser, including Legal Tender distillery, Whipper Snapper Distillery, Spinifex Brewing and Limestone Coast Brewing.

For Whipper Snapper, it was a matter of survival.

Co-founder Alasdair Malloch created a joint venture with Labwest Minerals Analysis and Ferngrove Wine Group to produce medical-grade sanitiser after restrictions to deal with the pandemic punched a hole in his business.

"We had international tourists drying up," Mr Malloch said.

"Then all the market expo events cancelled on us.

"Then the shutdown of cafes, cellar doors ... that killed our front room.

"Then the [alcohol restriction] policy, we could only sell one bottle.

"We either had to find a way to survive or we were dead."

He said the period in March through which he stitched the new business model together was one of the toughest in his life.

Whipper Snapper also benefited from a clarification of rules by the Therapeutic Goods Administration, which simplified the approvals process to sell sanitiser in the market.

"Now we have some hope," Mr Malloch said.

"It's come together really, really nicely, we'd normally take months to release a new product."

For now it'll keep people in the business employed.

"We're not pricing it to make money out of it, we see it as survival, and we want to make it as cheap as we can," he said.

However, Mr Malloch said it was unknown how long the increased demand would last, and whether traditional supply sources would catch up.

Integral to the plan is Ferngrove, which is supplying 15,000 litres of wine per week, enough to make 1,500 litres of sanitiser.

Labwest will ensure the sanitiser reaches suitable quality standards.

That Malaga-based analytics business is another example of how companies are adjusting.

Traditionally, Labwest is focused on mining work such as trace element analysis.

Story by Matt Mckenzie Photos by Gabriel Oliveira

The economic dominance of Western Australia's enormous energy and mining projects can sometimes push the state's manufacturing capability to the sidelines, at least in terms of public awareness.

In recent weeks, however, some local businesses have highlighted the state's entrepreneurial spirit by adjusting their focus from consumer discretionary goods to medical needs, both out of necessity and social concern.

Sanitiser, medical scrubs and reusable face masks are among the healthcare essentials being produced by local businesses.

That adds to some existing medical manufacturing capacity in WA, including international giant Pfizer's 24-7 facility in Bentley that makes vials of cancer medication and sterile solutions, and Osborne Park-based Pelican Manufacturing, which produces face shields and other items.

Medical experts at the Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research have quickly adjusted focus to the manufacture of face shields for doctors, and are also engaged in a plan by Minderoo Foundation to procure testing kits.

The two women behind Mount

Hawthorn-based fashion label Ilka have added medical scrubs to their traditional lines of womenswear, wedding dresses and alterations.

Scrubs is the term used for outfits worn by medical professionals that are easy to wash and are used under protective equipment.

Co-founder Erin Taylor told *Business News* the move into medical wear was inspired by a customer.

"One of our customers contacted us, she's a doctor, she usually doesn't wear scrubs but needs them at the moment," Ms Taylor said.

Many doctors who otherwise dressed in professional clothes were preparing for a potential surge in cases of COVID-19 and needed scrubs, she said.

Since then the designers have sold out of a first batch of 80 gowns, with 300 metres more fabric on the way for a second batch.

Ms Taylor estimated production capacity would be about 50 sets per week, with demand driven by a few factors.

"Some people might have a shortage with their regular suppliers," she said.

"Some might buy from overseas.

"We've had heaps of people asking for fun ones."

Ms Taylor runs Ilka with her business partner, Kate Wilks, with four people employed in the studio.

Production of scrubs has kept the team busy as the economic environment softens.

"The main source of our revenue ordinarily is foot traffic to our store; we have our own online presence but unless you're a really big player you won't do a heap," Ms Taylor said.

"This has really boosted us in the past couple of weeks."

Perth-based label Hoodedwept has also been offering its services to medical professionals.

The label, which has previously appeared on runways in Paris, was founded by Neil Sheriff.

Mr Sheriff said his autumn and winter season lines had already been produced so, with restrictions on social distancing, he had changed his retailing model to allow customers to view pieces by appointment.

He said that, given the additional time he now had on his hands and availability of materials, he wanted to help.

"It was something I felt compelled to do, it's silly to have this

production base and not use it," Mr Sheriff told *Business News*.

"We've got the machines, the fabric, I'm happy to bang out batches when they run low.

"We are trying to help wherever we can."

Mr Sheriff said he had registered with six medical businesses around Perth offering to supply, and had produced for some individuals.

The masks would be made free of charge if those businesses had supplies run low, Mr Sheriff said, although most had sufficient numbers for now.

Hoodedwept had donated a batch of masks to Los Angeles, where a friend operated a medical centre that was running short.

Those masks came with his brand's flare, too, coloured black to fit Hoodedwept's monochromatic theme.

Mr Sheriff said retailing had suffered an immediate hit, although he was more optimistic than most about the sector's long-term future.

"The whole thing is quite surreal," he said.

"Everyone pulls together and becomes communal.

"There are small fashion production bases all around [Perth], but because we're not known for it ... it's like a secret agency."

essential products

Managing director Brad Whisson said quality control was vital, and some other hand sanitisers on the market had a much lower purity, at around 20 per cent alcohol content compared to the regulated 80 per cent.

"It's [20 per cent product] worse than nothing because people think their hands are safe," Mr Whisson said.

He said after Labwest endured the mining downturn, he knew how Mr Malloch felt when Whipper Snapper came under pressure.

"We've got very good supply lines," Mr Whisson said.

"We've got good relationships with people for bottles, chemical suppliers."

Bentley-based manufacturer Epichem is a subsidiary of ASX-listed PharmAust Manufacturing, one of the state's biggest suppliers of chemicals for medical purposes.

In recent weeks, however, it

has added hand sanitiser to its repertoire to donate to the healthcare and aged care sectors.

"How much we produce will depend on raw materials," CEO Colin La Galia said.

"We'll make as much as we possibly can."

Epichem illustrates, however, that a level of medical manufacturing capacity is enduring in WA.

Mr La Gallia said a large proportion of drugs the company produced were shipped to Europe and the US in normal circumstances.

He said Epichem's competitive advantages included the quality of using an Australian lab and respect for intellectual property here, compared to other businesses in India and China.

The exchange rate and research and development tax incentives also helped, Mr La Galia said. ■



GENEROUS Colin La Galia says the company will be making and donating hand sanitiser.

SPONSORED CONTENT

WA breast cancer specialist's determination to cure the incurable

While early stage breast cancer is the chief focus of most researchers internationally, BCRC-WA directs more than half of its research – 67 percent – into metastatic cancer, that is where the breast cancer has metastasised in another part of the body, such as the brain or bones.

As well as being passionate about research, Professor Chan is passionate about her patients and ensuring their best chance of survival.

"For women diagnosed with metastatic or advanced breast cancer, they already have the odds stacked against them as there is currently no cure. However, access to trial treatments and providing best evidence-based care are helping women to defy their predicted life expectancy," Professor Chan said.

"For many years now, the average life expectancy for a patient with a metastatic diagnosis has been around two -three years, however, we are seeing 15 per cent of our patients living beyond five

years, and five percent are still going strong a decade later.

"Even five years ago, this was unheard of. And it is all down to research – striving for those ongoing advancements in cancer treatment, and making them available to patients for free and years before they are available to the public."

Professor Chan said BCRC-WA has more than 30 trials currently underway.

"Nearly 1200 patients have been involved in over 100 trials since BCRC-WA was established. In that time we have seen a 50% increase in the survival rate for more than 160 patients," she said.

In an Australian first, BCRC-WA also unveiled a plan to develop a world-class integrated research, treatment and support centre for breast cancer mid-2020.

Carmelo Arto
CEO, Breast Cancer
Research Centre – WA



PREPARED Rebecca Tomkinson says the RFDS has additional PPE, tools and equipment for its teams.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service is increasing its capacity by 25 per cent in preparation for a potential increase in COVID-19 cases in the regions.

RFDS readies response for the regions

Story by Madeleine Stephens

On standby when Australians were flown from Wuhan to Exmouth, and having transported Western Australian passengers on the *Diamond Princess* ocean liner to Perth, the Royal Flying Doctor Service has prepared early to play its part in the state's COVID-19 response.

It is now preparing for a surge in demand, according to RFDS WA chief executive Rebecca Tomkinson.

Having completed modelling for varying levels of demand, Ms Tomkinson said her team was gearing up for a busy few months ahead.

"We are building to be able to deliver 25 per cent surge capability," she said.

"We don't know that we will definitely need to utilise all of that but we are building our capability and employing to be able to meet that level of demand, should it be asked of us."

Ms Tomkinson said the RFDS had been planning its COVID-19

strategy since January and was regularly updated on global medical developments concerning the virus.

"We have additional PPE, tools and equipment for our teams and we have specific infection control measures for de-infecting our aircraft," Ms Tomkinson told *Business News*.

To meet the potential demand, the RFDS had employed 34 more nurses, doctors, engineers and pilots, from WA where possible.

"We have been very humbled by the level of interest from all

of those professions, wanting to come and work with us," Ms Tomkinson said.

"Some of those people are coming out of retirement, some of those people are on our alumni list, so they have worked with us before and gone onto other professions.

"Some of those people have moved from part time to full time, some of those people are just new to our service and are looking to be able to deliver a contribution.

"Some of those in the engineering space are coming out of

other affected industries, so we are really doing everything we can to look at how else we can support communities at this time."

As well as additional staff, the organisation had plans to acquire more planes.

"We are absolutely going to utilise our own fleet, we have brought back some assets that were in our decommissioning phase and brought them back online, and are also working with the aviation industry to bring on additional aircraft assets," Ms Tomkinson said.

\$1m
FMG donation to RFDS



Lifting capacity requires an increase in funding and the RFDS has received significant corporate donations in recent weeks.

Gina Rinehart and the Rinehart Medical Foundation donated \$6 million, BHP \$2 million and Fortescue Metals Group \$1 million, while Chevron, RFDS corporate partners Rio Tinto and CBH Group, and the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of WA member companies have also pledged money.

"We have always relied on the generosity of Western Australians and lots of mums and dads out there fundraise for us and we are absolutely determined to return the favour and to show them the support we have always benefited from and to be there, on this one day, when they really need us the most," Ms Tomkinson said.

"I get quite emotional about it because at this time when it is really hard for everyone, people are still finding the ability to help us and ... the words don't really do it justice but [we are] really grateful for that.

"We have been really delighted in the level of response and it has taken us a long way closer

to meeting and delivering on the funds we require, but we still have a way to go."

The RFDS is one part of the rural healthcare system fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms Tomkinson said the service worked in partnership with WA Country Health Service and St John Ambulance, so bringing on extra team members would mean its staff could help in other areas of the healthcare system.

"It's not just about what we need but being able to provide additional support to the overall health system from the way in which we are gearing up to deliver that support," she said.

"It's a team effort."

Recognising the vulnerability of the regions, the state government enforced intrastate travel bans in early April, splitting the state into nine areas.

Testing clinics have opened in Bunbury and, more recently in Broome, in response to a growing number of cases in the Kimberley.

Hospitals are also preparing by reallocating resources. Geraldton Hospital has referred all maternity patients to St John of God

Geraldton Hospital to free space to treat COVID-19 patients.

Australian Medical Association WA president Andrew Miller said he was worried about rural WA because regional communities were small places with broad social networks, making it easier for COVID-19 to spread.

"These areas don't have back-up staff," he said.

"Once people get quarantined you have to bring in people from elsewhere, which brings its own risks.

"We're extremely concerned about the regions, another reason we're grateful to everyone for accepting these travel bans that are in place." ■



We are building to be able to deliver 25 per cent surge capability - Rebecca Tomkinson



SPONSORED CONTENT

Responding to Covid-19: business transformation and the role of leadership

For a few years now we have heard many organisations talk about transformation – digital, customer, operating model. The term 'VUCA' – volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity being increasingly used by business leaders to describe the changing environment in which we live. Right now, with the dramatic spread of COVID-19 that is disrupting lives, livelihoods, communities and businesses worldwide, I'm not sure we could have imagined the disruptive impact to all aspects of society that is unfolding day by day.

Business resilience in the short term will be critical for organisations in navigating the immediate and volatile impact on engagement with customers and employees, as well as the disruption to their traditional supply chains. Whilst business continuity plans have been put into action, the global

scale of the problem means that service delivery is being impacted across geographies, and organisations, new and mature (or large and small), have been overwhelmed by the speed and scale of change and having to adapt and innovate to respond to the disruption like never before.

At KPMG we are seeing many examples where organisations are looking to make rapid and significant transformational changes to their business and operating models in response to COVID-19. Product lines are being redeveloped to cater for current demand, supply chains are being re-modelled to cope with changing global distributions and employees are working remotely more than ever before, learning different technologies to remain connected and productive.

In order for organisations to

respond to this crisis, leadership is critical during these uncertain weeks and months ahead. Leaders play a key role in charting courses for the future of their organisation. But many leaders too are looking for guidance on where to focus with so much complexity, and how to maintain the productivity, motivation and resilience of their staff, in the face of new virtual working arrangements and uncertainty.

To be effective, leaders need capabilities to execute strategy and motivate their teams to continue to deliver organisational outcomes in ambiguity in order to survive, thrive and be stronger, and undoubtedly changed, on the other side. Focusing on business continuity to secure a sustainable future, people and their well-being, performance and productivity, the constant change and need to adapt



business and operating models at pace, and personal resilience will be key.

One thing is certain though, the concept, need and speed of transformation will unlikely be considered by most organisations in the same way again.

**Gillian McKay, Partner
Enterprise Transformation**

Time, teamwork put WA on front foot in viral fight

**We need to get
people on clinical
trials as soon as
possible, from the
first moment they
present in hospital**

-Dana Henderson

Hard-border closures and a partial lockdown in WA are providing medical researchers with the opportunity to explore potentially life-saving COVID-19 treatments.

Story by **Jordan Murray** Photos by **Gabriel Oliveira**

Recent data suggests Australia as a whole is doing a good job of reducing the rate of new COVID-19 infections and managing to flatten the curve.

However, of all states and territories, Western Australia has stood apart for its comparatively aggressive response to the disease in recent weeks, implementing strict border controls and expanding its testing criteria.

Those measures have contributed to the caseload in WA currently standing in the hundreds, with little evidence to indicate sustained community transmission of the disease as is the case in Victoria, NSW and Queensland.

And while the research community as a whole is prioritising the fight against COVID-19, WA's success in suppressing the virus has bought the state's researchers time and resources to begin clinical trials that could lead to the discovery of potentially life-saving treatments for patients.

Gary Geelhoed, who has been executive director of Western Australia's Health Translation Network for the past two years, understands the urgency of the task at hand.

The network was founded in 2015 in response to a request from the National Health and Medical Research Council, the industry's peak funding body, to ensure the states were facilitating original and cooperative research where possible.

Responsible for coordinating research between WA's major universities, medical research institutes, private and public hospitals, and the Department of Health, Professor Geelhoed said WA had structures in place that uniquely positioned it to devise treatments for COVID-19.

For instance, he said the state's biobank – a repository of biological samples used for medical research – had improved markedly in recent years, with the network having instituted greater

organisation and standardisation of how samples were collected from patients.

It's the rapid scale-up of that sort of vital infrastructure and the widening of access to it that Professor Geelhoed said had given WA a strong base from which to perform urgent clinical research.

"Having that largely in place now as the pandemic has started has been very useful," he said.

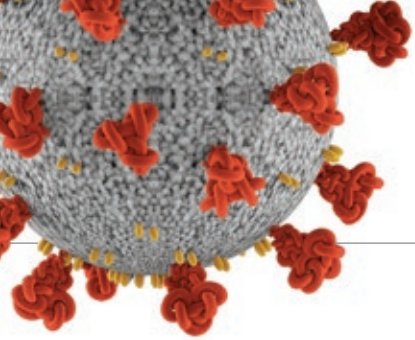
"That's an example in the past of work we've done bringing everyone together.

"What we're doing now is the vision we had at the WAHTN.

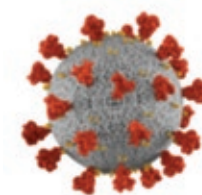
"Slowly, year after year, we're edging towards that and getting much more collaboration."

Immediate outcomes

WAHTN's aim to invite and encourage cooperation has taken on renewed importance in recent weeks, as major medical research foundations from across the state have appealed to businesses and philanthropists



EARLY MOVES Dana Henderson says it's important clinical trials are started as soon as possible.



to fund the network's COVID Research Response initiative.

Among the foundations leading that effort are Spinnaker Health Research Foundation, Charlie's Foundation and the Royal Perth Hospital Medical Research Foundation.

Seeking \$1 million in immediate funding (to be matched by the state government), the foundations are appealing for a further \$5 million to ensure the state's researchers have sufficient resources to undertake comprehensive clinical trials in the coming months.

"What we're trying to do is co-ordinate everything," Professor Geelhoed said.

"Research can be academic, but in this case it's very clinical.

"As everyone knows, there is no treatment for COVID-19.

"You can be supported to the extent of being intubated, and then it's in the lap of the gods whether you live or die.

"These trials will give you access to possibly ... effective or life-saving treatment."

Professor Geelhoed said the immediate focus for the program would be ensuring the state's sickest patients had access to experimental treatments if necessary, with an expansion of clinical trials integral to that goal.

One of the most prominent trials the network is seeking to expand is experimental treatment into community-acquired pneumonia originally set up after the 2009 swine flu pandemic.

Professor Geelhoed said by expanding the patient eligibility for those trials as well as rolling it out to major hospitals outside of the CBD, the research community would be able to better understand its efficacy in treating COVID-19.

Elsewhere, he said the network was supporting the Telethon Kids Institute's proposed studies into

repurposing existing treatments for tuberculosis and some cancers in acting as a prophylactic to prevent community spread of the virus.

WAHTN is also emphasising support for longer-term studies into the COVID-19 pandemic, such as work by Sean Hood at the University of Western Australia and Christopher Reid at Curtin University into the mental health effects of quarantines and social distancing.

"What we're doing here in WA is working across the board so it's much more efficient, there's less duplication, and we're creating these platforms to standardise biobanking and getting consent," Professor Geelhoed said.

"It makes it so much easier to start trials and collaborate easily with people doing similar things.

"There's certainly a lot more activity going on the east coast, but [we're doing] it much more

efficiently and in a much more targeted way."

Though clinical research can sometimes be thought of as something disconnected or too academic to be immediately useful, Professor Geelhoed insisted research performed now into COVID-19 would yield immediate benefits for patients.

Perhaps best known for his stint as president of the WA arm of the Australia Medical Association as well as his tenure as WA's chief medical officer between 2012 and 2018, Professor Geelhoed said his career had focused on promoting collaboration between the health services for the benefit of patients.

"It's never been considered all that important in some health services, yet evidence [shows] that [when] you can combine academia, research and clinical services together, you get better patient outcomes," he said.

Funding

With researchers in WA now scaling-up their work and preparing to roll-out clinical trials on a state-wide scale, several medical foundations have expressed a need to highlight the direct impact clinical trials will have in the near term.

Dana Henderson, chief executive of SHRF, explained that WAHTN's response program differed from typical research because the focus was on directly treating patients infected with virus, rather than on academic or abstract understandings of the illness.

"It's not about the project, it's about how the research will impact people as they come into hospital, mitigate death and save lives," Ms Henderson said.

Continued on page 40

SPONSORED CONTENT

Dealing with the Impact on WA



Of late, we have typed coronavirus or COVID-19 into our mobile devices so often that if mistyped, the spelling is automatically corrected. Since December 2019, COVID-19 has profoundly impacted global health and our social systems.

The strategy taken by governments and regulatory agencies to limit community spread of the virus by social distancing is allowing us to prepare for peak infection and provides the time scientists desperately need to develop rapid screen-

ing techniques and protective vaccines.

The University of Western Australia's response to the needs of the WA community ranges from the production and provision of hand sanitiser, through to new research to understand and model the spread of the virus.

Collaborative work being developed through the Faculty of Science (DNA Zoo) with colleagues from Baylor College of Medicine in the US on understanding the epidemiology of COVID-19 could prove

critical in managing how we 'exit' from a community-wide period of distancing and self-isolation.

Self-isolation poses challenges for many in our communities, and in times of such uncertainty it is normal for us all to feel worried and anxious. The physical isolation necessary to maintain social distancing can be challenging and can leave many feeling disconnected and alone. In response, experienced clinical psychologists from the School of Psychological Science, and UWA's Robin Winkler Clinic, are providing community support through a free, eight-week, online group therapy program (www.uwa.edu.au/facilities/robin-winkler-clinic).

The School is also working with the UWA Health Promotion unit on a series of short videos to help people deal with other manifestations of stress: such as managing sleep, mindfulness, and feelings of isolation.

COVID-19 has had a major impact on education, with many school students now studying from home. To support teachers and parents, UWA's Faculty of Science and the Graduate School of Education have made available a suite of science resources, including work sheets and study notes

for teachers, students and parents. The online site (www.uwa.edu.au/science/resources/science-resources-for-teachers) also includes links to other sources of learning materials suitable for students from primary school through to Year 12.

For parents with younger children, the UWA KIDDO program (www.kiddo.edu.au/kiddo-at-home) is helping families stay active by providing free activities, challenges and videos for children aged three to eight. These can be done at home, to encourage active movement and to provide a boost to mental and physical health.

Professor Tony O'Donnell
Executive Dean, Faculty of Science, and
Associate Professor Frances Hoyle
Associate Dean (Community and Engagement), Faculty of Science
The University of Western Australia



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WESTERN
AUSTRALIA

WA on front foot in virus fight

Continued from page 39

"The fact is that we don't know how to treat this, and unless we get clinical trials in place, no amount of PPE will save you when you need a respirator.

"We need to get people on clinical trials as soon as possible, from the first moment they present in hospital.

"More importantly, we have to have a sense of understanding which clinical trials ... are working."

The aspect of collaboration for foundations funding the COVID-19 response program that are otherwise operating in a competitive environment is testament to the urgency of the work at hand.

Vicki Rasmussen, executive director of Charlie's Foundation, said given the vast impact the pandemic would have on the community, it made sense for WA's health services community to work collaboratively.

"The hospitals, the three main ones, have their niches and areas of focus, but this is one focus and it's state-wide," Ms Rasmussen told Business News.

"It's giving us the opportunity to ... put one project for the entire state before everybody and work on this collaboratively."

Jocelyn Young, executive director of RPH's Medical Research Foundation, expressed a similar sentiment, noting a need for everyone in the health services sector to work towards the singular goal of treating COVID-19.

"There have been many researchers speak about how important it is that we're linked to the work of the global community," Ms Young said.

"We can't operate in isolation. "By being connected and working with colleagues both nationally and internationally, the impact [of clinical research] can be fast tracked." ■



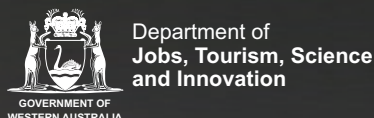
It's giving us the opportunity to ... put one project for the entire state before everybody and work on this collaboratively

-Vicki Rasmussen

2015 WAHTN founded

FIGHT Vicki Rasmussen says COVID-19 has required a collaborative approach from WA's health services sector.

SPONSORED CONTENT



Call for local medical safety gear production

The Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation is looking for businesses with the capability to manufacture or supply medical personal protective equipment.

Huge international demand for medical supplies to deal with COVID-19 has the potential to impact locally. The pandemic response has also resulted in a massive reduction in business activity.

One of the state government activities to potentially help with both these issues has been to call for input from the local business community.

The department, working with ICNWA, have launched a project page on ICN

Gateway seeking expressions of interest for businesses with manufacturing capability for PPE and supplies such as:

- Face masks
- Gowns
- Safety glasses
- Hand sanitiser
- Gloves
- General health equipment and PPE

The department is not just looking for businesses that are already in the medical equipment supply chain. Willing businesses that are in a position to adapt their current processes or collaborate with others to make the needed equipment should also make contact.

Businesses with capability or transferable technologies are encouraged to go to gateway.icn.org.au to register and for more detailed information.

