

Cancer Society awards over \$1 million in research funding to advance cancer care

The Cancer Society is New Zealand's largest non-government funder of cancer research, awarding more than \$1 million in research funding, at the end of last year. This funding supports innovative scientists whose work aims to improve the lives of those with cancer, and improve treatment options. This year's National Research Grant Round includes two post-doctoral fellowships, two project grants, and a PhD scholarship, each selected for its potential to improve prevention, early detection, and treatment outcomes for New Zealanders.

One scientist who received funding is Dr Judy Ann Cocadiz'a from the University of Otago. She has received a post-doctoral fellowship to develop a small device that can capture tiny pieces of genetic material, called circulating tumour DNA (ctDNA), which are released into the bloodstream by cancer cells.

The device will be designed to be temporarily inserted into a blood vessel for a short period, allowing it to directly collect ctDNA, which can then be analysed for signs of cancer.



"This technology could help doctors detect cancers, even in early stages, and monitor for any remaining or recurring cancer after treatment without needing to take blood samples. This innovation could lead to earlier and more accurate cancer diagnosis and

monitoring, making it a powerful tool for improving cancer care and patient outcomes."

Another scientist who received funding is Stephen Jamieson, University of Auckland cancer pharmacologist Associate Professor. He has received a project grant to develop new treatments to tackle melanomas caused by a mutation of the NRAS gene. This mutation is found in about 15 to 20 percent of melanomas, and there is currently no specific treatment.



"We have identified a new target protein (SHOC2) within these cancer cells, which is needed for these cells to survive. We will use a variety of approaches to discover chemical compounds that disrupt the target protein. These compounds will act as starting points for the development of new and powerful drugs that will be used to treat NRAS-mutant melanoma."

Our support for post-doctoral fellowships has helped to propel researchers along their career path and has enabled significant progress to be made in a range of fields. We hope this round of funding will continue to build on that momentum. We are committed to helping create a future free from cancer. Funding these kinds of projects is a crucial way we can help achieve this vision. Thank you to everyone who supports us throughout the year, without you we wouldn't be able to help fund these potentially lifechanging projects.

Taking on 72 Holes for a Cause: Riki Mitchell and the HGC Tour Team Step Up for the Longest Day Golf Challenge

When Napier golfer Riki Mitchell first came across the Longest Day Golf Challenge three years ago, he knew it was something he wanted to take on. At the time, his health wasn't where it needed to be, but after a yearlong weight loss journey he finally felt ready. What began as a personal challenge quickly grew into something bigger. After Riki mentioned his plans, a golf mate whose family had been affected by cancer reached out, and soon a four-person team was formed. The team were all golfing buddies ranging from their early 20's to early 50's. For Riki, who has been a surf lifeguard for many years, the challenge was also a way to highlight the importance of sun protection and draw attention to the fact that cancer affects everyone. It was a way of showing that we can do more to protect ourselves and those around us with simple SunSmart measures, like wearing sunblock and a hat.



The HGC Tour Team, Left to Right: Will Wilson, Sam Web, Zane Norgate and Riki Mitchell

The team committed to walking all 72 holes with no carts or assistance, determined to take on the physical challenge in full. They prepared well, packing spare socks, shoes, and a change of clothing, and were supported throughout the day by friends and family who kept them fuelled. Despite one teammate recovering from a back injury, they found the day more manageable than expected. They teed off at 5.15am and finished around 7pm, greeted by a crowd of 20 - 30 supporters applauding each final putt. The emotional finish left a lasting impression, so much so that one teammate immediately asked how they were going to top it next year. Plans are already coming together to expand the group to 16 participants, with plenty of interest from their golf community.

Their fundraising efforts were just as spirited. The team promoted their challenge through Facebook, their golf group, and the Napier Golf Club website, and encouraged fun performance-based donations like \$10 per birdie. Riki even shot a personal best of 83 on the day, crediting his sister's excellent caddying skills. At one point, a supporter pledged \$50 if one of their team members could sink a particular putt - and they did. The creativity and enthusiasm behind their fundraising helped build momentum and brought many people into the cause.

Looking back, Riki says he would recommend the challenge to any golfer. It's a test of endurance, a meaningful way to support an important cause, and, above all, a genuinely enjoyable day spent with people who matter. Their group kept things competitive throughout, sticking mostly to the middle tees and challenging themselves to improve each round. With bigger plans already underway for next year, Riki and his team are planning to turn the Longest Day Golf Challenge into an annual tradition. Thanks to Riki and the team, as well as all their supporters and all those who took part in the Longest Day Golf Challenge! Your support is greatly appreciated and makes a huge difference in the lives of those experiencing cancer.

If you'd like to take part in the Longest Day Golf Challenge keep an eye on longestday.org.nz, the challenge will be back again in December and we'd love to have you involved!

Relay For Life 2026 - Last Chance!



Taranaki - 10am - 10pm Saturday 28 March 2026,
TET Stadium and Events Centre, Inglewood

Whanganui - 2pm - 10.30pm Saturday 28 March
2026, Cooks Gardens, Maria Place Whanganui

Hawke's Bay - 2pm - 9pm Saturday 6 June 2026,
Rodney Green Arenas, Taradale.

**Secure your team's spot today at
relayforlife.org.nz**

Gisborne - 12pm Saturday 14 March - 12pm Sunday
15 March 2026, Gisborne A&P Showgrounds

Manawatū - 12pm Saturday 28 March - 12pm
Sunday 29 March 2026, Hokowhitu Riverside
Pathway, Palmerston North

Or scan here!



Meet Tanita - one of our amazing volunteers!

Tanita moved to Gisborne in 2017 and is a busy stay-at-home mum, who also has a passion to serve her community by supporting and helping others. She works one morning a week as a volunteer receptionist, and says "I love volunteering here. Every Thursday is different. I love to help wherever I can, and do it to the best of my ability".

Tanita is also keen to learn new skills through her volunteering, and as receptionist, she undertakes administrative tasks, assists visitors with enquiries, and supports staff with admin and prep related to current fundraising and projects.



Tanita encourages others to volunteer for the Cancer Society, saying "it's worth it – it's rewarding and you gain more knowledge and compassion towards others. It's amazing what the Cancer Society offers clients and families". Tanita has a heart to honor people who may be struggling with challenges. She is warmed by the fact that the Cancer Society is able to provide the services they do through the generosity of volunteers – the way a community is brought together by helping each other. We love having Tanita as a part of our Gisborne centre, appreciate her commitment, heart for others and friendly, and her caring nature that is evident to all.

If you want to be like Tanita and volunteer for the Cancer Society to help those in our community who need it, we would love to hear from you! Call us on 06 348 7402 or visit www.cancer.org.nz/get-involved/volunteer.

Thank you to all our amazing volunteers and supports. Without you we couldn't do what we do to support those with cancer who need it.

Dr Tanya Keough Runs Marathon for Cancer!

Nine years after her last marathon Tanya dusted off the running shoes and took on the massive challenge to raise funds in support of the Cancer Society. Having been diagnosed with Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia in her mid-thirties, a rare age to get that form of cancer, Tanya spent over a year in treatment. Through her chemo treatment Tanya was hospitalised seven times due to sepsis and other complications. To her the prospect of being able to run a Marathon again seemed distant. But in November of 2025, nine years after her last marathon, she crossed the finish line with a time good enough to qualify for the Boston marathon!



It took many months of hard training to build up her fitness, squeezed in between her three jobs, including working as a GP in Taranaki. Supported by her professional coach she was running upwards of 70km a week in the lead up to the event. For Tanya running a marathon was a meaningful way to give back to the local Taranaki community, "There was no reason for me to run a marathon if not to fundraise. I wanted to do it for a purpose." In the end the community stepped up to support her effort, with many of her clients, colleagues, the Taranaki GP Faculty all donating to cheer her on.

We can't thank Tanya enough for sharing her incredible journey with us. From adversity to achievement, she has inspired many people in her community to help make a difference. Her support means many others in Taranaki experiencing similar journeys will be able to find help and support with the Cancer Society. Thank you.



Do Something Bold, Jump For Cancer!

The Cancer Society has partnered with skydive companies across Aotearoa New Zealand to offer you a free jump when you raise \$1,000. You can sign up as an individual or as a team. Either way, each person must raise \$1,000 or more to qualify for a free jump.



Check out the amazing places you can jump all over NZ at our website, then sign up and raise \$1,000, and we'll be in touch to book your jump for you.

If you don't know where you want to jump yet, that's absolutely fine. We can talk you through your options and help you pick the jump site that's right for you. Just give us a call on 06 356 4011.

Sign up today at jumpforcancer.org.nz

Upcoming Dates for your Diary

February

All Month.....Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month
4th.....World Cancer Day
11.....International Day of Girls and Women in Science
28th.....Rare Diseases Day

March

4th.....HPV Awareness Day
April
7th.....World Health Day
24th-30th.....World Immunisation Week

Grants Thank You

The Cancer Society Central Districts Division and its regional centres are immensely grateful to the following grant providers who have provided support in the past few months.

- Hastings District Council
- Horowhenua District Council
- JBS Dudding Trust
- Lion Foundation
- Mangatawa Beale Williams Trust
- Meridian Energy
- New Plymouth District Council
- NZ Community Trust
- Palmerston North City Council
- Shannon Community Development Trust
- Sunrise Foundation
- The Helen Graham Charitable Trust
- Trust House
- Ventia
- Whanganui Community Foundation
- Whanganui District Council