



Media Release

01.00AM AEDT, Friday 1 November 2024

Record donation awarded to UNSW Sydney will enable the Kirby Institute and partners to advance cervical cancer elimination in the Pacific

A \$25.9 million donation from the Swire Group will support cervical cancer screening and treatment for over 130,000 women in seven Pacific countries.

UNSW Sydney has received the largest single philanthropic donation in its history to work with regional partners to tackle one of the deadliest preventable cancers in the Pacific.

The \$25.9 million donation from the Swire Group will enable UNSW's Kirby Institute to work with partners in Australia and our region to support vital cervical screening and treatment services for over 130,000 women in seven countries: Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

Rates of cervical cancer in the Pacific are among the highest in the world, according to the World Health Organization, with Pacific women up to 14 times more likely to die from cervical cancer than women in Australia.

“Cervical cancer is the number one cause of cancer-related death among women in the Pacific and is devastating to women, families, and entire communities across our region. This generous investment will enable countries like Samoa to partner with the Kirby Institute to advance our vision of a world free of cervical cancer,” said the **Hon. Fiamē Naomi Mata’afa, Prime Minister of Samoa**.

Almost all cases of cervical cancer are caused by human papillomavirus (HPV) infection, a common virus spread through sexual contact. Most women with HPV infection or early cervical disease do not experience symptoms, so early detection through screening is crucial.

“This landmark investment will enable us to work with countries across the Pacific over the next five years to advance our collective vision of a world free of cervical cancer and ultimately save thousands of lives across our region,” says **Professor Andrew Vallely**, who is co-leading the work at the Kirby Institute at UNSW Sydney with **Project Manager Vanessa Price**.

The Swire Group, which made the \$25.9m donation, is headquartered in the United Kingdom.

“We are delighted to support the Kirby Institute, who have an excellent reputation in the region for highly impactful research conducted in partnership with local leaders, communities, and organisations,” said **Sam Swire, Executive Director**.

“Through Swire Shipping we have been serving the Pacific Island nations for over 70 years. Tragically, in the Pacific, women are dying from a disease that is preventable, and this programme targets its elimination,” he said.

UNSW’s Kirby Institute has worked with partners in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Australia since 2010 to co-design and evaluate strategies for cervical screening in PNG and other countries in the region. This new grant will build on the successes of the earlier [Eliminating Cervical Cancer in the Western Pacific \(ECCWP\) program](#) funded by the Australian Minderoo Foundation and complement the [Elimination Partnership in the Indo-Pacific for Cervical Cancer \(EPICC\) program](#) funded by the Australian Government, and recently expanded as part of the [Quad Cancer Moonshot Initiative](#) in September 2024. Collectively, these initiatives will support countries on their journey to implementing sustainable cervical cancer elimination strategies.

The **Vice-Chancellor and President of UNSW Sydney, Professor Attila Brungs**, said that today’s announcement is a triumph of effective collaboration to address an issue with major societal impact. “Through the generosity of the Swire Group, the commitment of Pacific country health departments, the tireless work of communities and services on the ground, and the expertise and support of UNSW’s Kirby Institute, we are moving towards a future where cervical cancer is no longer a threat to women.”

In-country leadership will be supported by UNSW’s Kirby Institute with key Australian and regional partners the University of Sydney, Australian Centre for Prevention of Cervical Cancer (ACPCC), Family Planning Australia, and the Pacific Community (SPC).

Overcoming barriers to access

Despite huge efforts over many years, barriers have prevented Pacific countries from establishing and sustaining population-based cervical screening and vaccination programs. Challenges include the diverse geography of these nations, which are among the most remote and isolated in the world. This project will utilise advancements in cervical screening so that women who present to clinics can self-collect their own specimens, with results available in an hour.

“This approach is a game changer for the Pacific. Previous approaches involved invasive pelvic examinations and results could take weeks. Now with this donation from the Swire Group we can work with partner countries to sustainably build this highly effective screening strategy into health policy and services, enabling access to cervical screening and treatment and saving women’s lives,” says Ms Vanessa Price from UNSW’s Kirby Institute.

Dr Leanne Panisi, Head, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, in the Solomon Islands says this funding presents an amazing opportunity for the Solomon Islands to move forward. “We see the burden at my end with patients, I see the suffering. I see patients with end stage cervical cancer in my clinic every week,” she said.

Dr Paulus Ripa, who leads the ECCWP Program in the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea, wants to see the end of suffering for women and their families. “Close to 30,000 women have already benefited from the screening program here in Papua New Guinea, and now our neighbours across the Pacific will also have access to this life saving service,” he said.

In the past decade, UNSW’s Kirby Institute has conducted research in partnership with the PNG Institute of Medical Research, national and provincial health authorities, medical societies and most importantly, women and their communities. This included the [first field trials in the world](#) to demonstrate the clinical effectiveness, safety, acceptability, scalability and cost-effectiveness of point-of-care HPV self-collection, testing and same-day treatment for cervical cancer prevention. This approach is now a key component of the WHO global elimination strategy.



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STAKEHOLDER QUOTES:

“The support provided to the seven Pacific Island countries including Fiji to address cervical cancer is significant and very much appreciated as we, in Fiji are in the process of introducing the HPV test and treatment across the nation. Following a successful pilot project earlier this year, this project that will contribute to tackling our cervical cancer disease burden by addressing the early diagnosis and treatment using gold standard practices endorsed globally and moving towards achieving the 90 - 70 - 90 goals.”

Dr Jemesa Tudravu, Permanent Secretary for Health and Medical Services, Fiji Islands.

“We are immensely grateful for the support from the Swire group to continue this life saving work for our women in Vanuatu. Being one of the first countries in the Pacific to launch our national campaign to eliminate cervical cancer, the donation will bring continuous and sustainable support to set Vanuatu on a pathway to eliminate cervical cancer, aligning with the WHO global strategy to eliminate cervical cancer as a public health problem.”

Dr Jenny Stephens, Director Public Health, Vanuatu Ministry of Health

“We envision a cervical cancer free Tonga, where every woman has access to life saving HPV screening and treatment, creating a healthier future for women and fostering a society that prioritises prevention, education and access to healthcare. This funding will enable Tongan and Pacific women to live a life free from the burden of cervical cancer.”

Dr Falahola Fuka, Specialist in Obstetrics & Gynecology, Ministry of Health Tonga

“The Kirby Institute is incredibly grateful for this donation from the Swire Group, and we are excited to continue our work in partnership with Pacific Island communities to eliminate cervical cancer. It is not acceptable that women in our neighbouring countries face considerably worse health outcomes than Australian women. At the Kirby Institute, we work with people for people to ensure that all we all have equal access to high-quality, accessible, and appropriate health care.”

Professor Anthony Kelleher, Director, Kirby Institute

“We are delighted that this major new investment will directly complement the ECCWP and EPICC programs, which are sustainable solutions for cervical cancer elimination across the full continuum of vaccination, screening and preinvasive and invasive cancer treatment programs.”

Professor Karen Canfell AC, the University of Sydney, Lead, ECCWP/EPICC programs.

“We are profoundly grateful to the Swire Group for this exceptional donation, which exemplifies true partnership and empowers us to significantly enhance our efforts, ensuring a lasting impact on public health in the Pacific region.”

Lindsay Robinson, Chief Advancement Officer at UNSW Sydney

Media contacts

Key spokespeople will be available at the Kirby Institute at UNSW Sydney on Friday 1 Nov for interviews. [Media pack available here](#) (password KirbyMedia2024)

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About the Kirby Institute

The Kirby Institute is a world-leading health research organisation at UNSW Sydney working to eliminate infectious diseases, globally. We put communities at the heart of our research. That way, we are better able to design tests, treatments and cures that have the greatest chance of success, helping us to eliminate infectious diseases globally. www.kirby.unsw.edu.au

About UNSW Sydney

UNSW Sydney is a global top 20 university determined to drive progress that benefits everyone through learning, teaching and research. A member of the prestigious Group of Eight (Go8) Australian universities, UNSW helps tomorrow's leaders unlock their full potential, channeling their skills and passion into careers with impact. Ranked #1 in Australia for research quality and impact, UNSW pioneers research that improves lives the world over. We have a global reputation for driving breakthroughs in a range of fields, including inequality, climate change, renewable energy and quantum computing. We turn ideas into action to advance progress for all. www.unsw.edu.au

About the Swire Group

The Swire Group is a diversified company, with businesses encompassing property, beverages, aviation, shipping, and other trading activities. Its core businesses are focused on Asia Pacific, with its key operations in Hong Kong and the Chinese Mainland. Within Asia, Swire's activities primarily come under the Group's publicly quoted arm, Swire Pacific Limited, which is the largest shareholder in two Hong Kong listed companies: Swire Properties and Cathay Pacific Airways. For more information, please visit www.swire.com

About Swire Shipping

Swire Shipping is the wholly owned, deep-sea ship owning and operating arm of the multinational Swire group. Headquartered in Singapore, Swire Shipping is dedicated to Asia Pacific markets, with a long-standing focus on the island nations of the South Pacific. For more information, please visit www.swireshipping.com

About University of Sydney

The University of Sydney's through their Faculty of Medicine and Health are leaders in healthcare education and research, highlighted by its involvement as the lead partner in the EPICC program (Elimination Partnership in the Indo-Pacific for Cervical Cancer), funded by the Australian government and the Minderoo Foundation. This groundbreaking initiative aims to put countries in the Indo-Pacific on the path to cervical cancer elimination. By fostering international partnerships and collaborative research, the program empowers healthcare professionals and communities to implement effective prevention and treatment strategies. With a focus on innovative solutions and community engagement, the University of Sydney is dedicated to improving health outcomes, shaping future leaders, and driving transformative change in global health practices.

About Australian Centre for Prevention of Cervical Cancer

The Australian Centre for the Prevention of Cervical Cancer is a not-for-profit organisation drawing on over 50 years of expertise in cervical cancer prevention through laboratory and educational services, and 25 years of experience operating cancer screening and vaccination registries. These combined services have resulted in some of the lowest cervical cancer incidence and mortality rates globally. The Australian Centre for the Prevention of Cervical Cancer is a holistic entity that offers a comprehensive suite of services to support, monitor and manage population health programs, including screening and vaccination. This unique combination of services is proven to achieve better health outcomes and will ultimately save lives.



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About Family Planning Australia

Family Planning Australia is a leading provider of accredited cervical cancer screening clinical services, health promotion and education programs for health professionals. Family Planning Australia is fully accredited by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Family Planning Australia international development program advances sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Pacific, by developing the capacity of local sexual and reproductive health and education systems to expand services and knowledge, empower communities, and support sustainability. Family Planning Australia advocate as a non-governmental organisation with United Nations consultative status.

Pacific Community

The Pacific Community (SPC) is the principal scientific and technical organisation in the Pacific region. SPC is an international development organisation owned and governed by the 27 Pacific Island countries and territory members. SPC serves its members by interweaving and harnessing the nexus of climate, ocean, land, culture, rights and good governance; through trusted partnerships; investing in Pacific people; and understanding of the Pacific contexts.



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