

NSW TISSUE BANK NEWSLETTER

June 2025

WELCOME FROM ALEX



As we move through 2025, I wanted to take a moment to acknowledge the dedication and resilience of our team. Every day, your hard work ensures that we provide the highest quality service, and it is a privilege to be part of this team.

The beginning of the year brought new opportunities and challenges. In March, some of our team headed to Brisbane for the EBAANZ and BAA Conference, as well as the RANZCO Corneal Society Meeting. While slightly interrupted by a cyclone, these events allow us to connect with peers, share knowledge, and bring back valuable insights that strengthen our work.

At the same time, we experienced a transition period as we farewelled Tim, Flavia, Niamh, and Chris. Their expertise, kindness, and contributions were invaluable, and while it was hard to see them go, we are deeply grateful for their impact. We welcome Lillian Rowland to the Tissue Bank as the newest addition to the Tissue Donor Coordination team, and we look forward to welcoming more new colleagues in the coming months who bring fresh perspectives and energy to our team.

Another ongoing priority is responding to the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) audit. The inspection process challenged us to refine and improve, ensuring we continue to meet the highest standards. While it required significant effort, it is reflective of our unwavering commitment to quality and safety.

As we embraced these changes and opportunities, I wanted to thank each of you for your dedication, hard work, and the heart you brought to everything you do.

Alexandra Viglianti

Procurement and Production Team Leader
NSW Tissue Bank

We at the NSW Tissue Bank would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the traditional owners of the land on which we base our work, and acknowledge Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.



RECIPIENT STORY

AUSTRALIA'S FIRST BI-LATERAL CORNEAL RECIPIENT: STUART KELLY

Stuart Kerry made history in 1957 as Australia's first bilateral corneal transplant recipient, transforming his life after years of blindness.

His daughter, Helen McKeon, inspired by his journey, has dedicated nearly 30 years to the NSW Tissue Bank, advancing tissue donation and helping countless Australians regain their quality of life.

NSW Tissue Bank's Living Donor Coordinator, Helen McKeon carries a deeply personal connection to her work. For 28 years, she has dedicated her life to tissue donation, a journey that began with her own father, Stuart Kerry.

Born in 1928 on a dairy farm, Stuart faced unimaginable challenges from an early age. He was born with keratoconus, a rare and painful genetic condition that causes the cornea to morph into a cone shape, compressing the eyes and inflicting severe pain. By the time he turned nine, his vision had begun to fail. At sixteen, he could no longer see hand movements in front of his face — only perceiving light.

Despite his worsening condition, Stuart refused to let blindness define him. As a young man, he secured a job as a courier in Sydney's bustling CBD, learning to navigate the city by sound and touch. But at 27, his life changed forever.

In 1955, Stuart received his first corneal transplant. Two years later, he made history as Australia's first-ever bilateral corneal transplant recipient.

Back then, recovery was safe but gruelling. Stuart had to remain lying down for two weeks, his head supported on either side to limit movement and encourage healing. Today, thanks to advancements in donor screening, testing, and the use of amnion tissue, recovery takes mere days.

With his vision restored, Stuart embraced life in ways he had never imagined. He met the love of his life, Marjorie, a matron at the nursing home where his mother resided. Marjorie not only became his wife but also taught him to drive in his 30s. Together, they built a life filled with love and adventure, raising four children — including Helen McKeon.

Helen remembers the impact of her father's restored vision. 'It completely transformed him,' she says. 'He went from a life without shape or colour to seeing clearly for the first time in over a decade. In the late 1950's, transplants were just 6mm, which meant night driving left the perimeter of vision blurry. Today, they're 9mm wide, ensuring clarity in all lighting.'

Stuart's contributions to the community and general giving nature was honoured in 1990 when he was awarded an OAM.

Inspired by the life-changing effect of her father's transplants, Helen felt a calling to join the NSW Tissue Bank. 'What they were doing was cutting-edge,' she says. 'My dad's transplants gave him a life he never thought possible. Seeing him fully engage with the world inspired me to be part of something bigger.'

For nearly three decades, Helen has been a driving force at the NSW Tissue Bank. She played a pivotal role in securing TGA approval for the collection, storage, and use of both skin and amnion, contributing to two 600-page dossiers that have shaped the future of tissue donation in Australia.

Though Stuart passed away in 2017, his legacy lives on. 'He still inspires me every day,' Helen reflects. 'I hope the NSW Tissue Bank continues to push the boundaries of tissue innovation, helping countless Australians the way my dad was helped.'

NATIONAL DONATION AND TRANSPLANTATION RESULTS 2024



On Tuesday, 25 February 2025 the 2024 National Activity Report was released.

Key national takeaways include:

- In 2024, there were 1,694 deceased eye donors, up 10% from 1,546 in 2023.
- There were 2,630 corneal transplants, up 6% from 2,486 in 2023. Since 2009, more than 33,000 Australians have received a corneal transplant.
- There were 311 deceased tissue donors, down 5% from 328 in 2023. Tissues that can be transplanted include heart valves, bone, tendons, ligaments and skin.
- There were 3,081 living tissue donors in 2024, which resulted in 3,133 living tissue donations, predominantly from patients undergoing hip joint replacement surgery. The number of living tissue donations was 4% higher than 2023 (3,013).

The NSW Tissue Bank assessed over 25,500 notifications identifying 446 ocular donors and 37 musculoskeletal donors. Through living donor programs, femoral head donations reached a four-year high with 417 living donors, alongside 17 identified amnion donors.

Congratulations to the NSW Tissue Bank for supporting the following life changing interventions in 2024:

- 1,002 ocular grafts distributed for surgeries including sight restoring corneal transplants.
- 262 split skin grafts distributed across the east coast to aid in burn injury treatments.
- 360 amnion grafts were distributed for transplant, 54 more than the previous year, primarily supplied for ophthalmic use, 54 more than the previous year, primarily supplied for ophthalmic use.
- Registration rates to the Australian Organ Donor Registry remained the same to 2023, at 41% - and the consent rate (measured by organ donation consent process) fell two points landing at 53%.

Keep up the good work and let's amplify the conversation and action around organ and tissue donation in NSW. Register, talk, and change lives.

Read the full report [here](#).

1,694 Deceased eye donors in 2024 up by 10%



OUR STAFF



Helena Lopes - unsplash.com

FAREWELLS

In this edition, we are catching up on farewells and celebrating some remarkable individuals who have had a profound impact on the NSW Tissue Bank.



FLAVIA RUSSELL

Flavia Russell, our Tissue Donor Coordinator (TDC) Extraordinaire, dedicated over 12 years to the Tissue Bank, accumulating a wealth of expertise and knowledge through her unwavering commitment to organ and tissue donation. As a senior TDC, Flavia's strong presence, empathy, and respect for donors and their families have been pivotal in improving the quality of life for thousands of recipients. Her advocacy and tireless work have left an indelible mark on the team and the community.

Flavia, Niamh and Chris have certainly left their mark at the NSW Tissue Bank, and their contributions will forever be valued. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to them for their dedication and wish them all the best in their future endeavours.



NIAMH KIERNAN

Niamh Kiernan, our ultimate professional and Tissue Donor Coordinator, joined the team four years ago, bringing with her a wealth of experience in tissue banking and quality system management. A true team player and friend to all, Niamh is known for her calm demeanour, rationality, and unwavering diligence in every aspect of her role. Her genuine care and commitment, particularly in the living donor program, have been integral to the success of our work.



DR CHRISTOPHER HODGE

Dr Christopher Hodge (Chris), Data and Innovation Scientist - Research & Development for the NSW Tissue Bank. For the value Chris delivered, it is hard to believe that we only had his services one day a week. Applying an integrations mindset to his work across three different vision institutes, Chris helped steer the NSW Tissue Bank toward emerging initiatives, research and broader professional horizons. A highly regarded academic, having over 125 published academic papers and Senior Clinical Lecturer, Chris' appointment as a Senior Research Fellow (USyd) is a most fitting progression and we know he will knock this one out of the park too. Congratulations Chris!

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Siew Ng, Administrative Officer

Siew Ng has been with the NSW Tissue Bank since its opening week in June 2013, initially job-sharing the administrative officer role before transitioning to a full-time role.

Siew ensures that the NSW Tissue Bank runs as smoothly as possible, she's the beating heart of the bank's administrative zone.

Humbly, Siew describes her role as 'opening and closing the doors,' but it's so much more. Sue is the first voice you are greeted with as she advises you to "Turn the doorknob, please" and the last face you see when you say goodbye.

She keeps the sclera consent forms separate from billings and provides integral administrative support for our team.



When asked about the most famous person she's opened the door for, she responded, "Tobi Wilson, CEO of SESLHD".

While not manning the desk at NSW Tissue Bank, Siew is an avid home gardener - growing an assorted range of vegetables, an orchid enthusiast, and brings in fresh bread to the NSW Tissue Bank from her husband's work.

When questioned about Siew, staff shared words such as "Legendary, essential, lovely, indefatigable".

Thank you for your 12 years of service and looking forward to 12 more.



PROMOTIONS

Our Senior Hospital Scientist, Meidong Zhu, has been promoted to Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Sydney's Save Sight Institute.

With over 40 years of experience in ophthalmology, eye banking, and research, Meidong has played a pivotal role in advancing the field and mentoring the next generation of specialists.

Career Achievements & Impact

- **Academic Contributions:** Meidong has published 76 research papers, with over 4,315 citations and a h-index of 33. She has also contributed to book chapters and media publications.
- **Research Leadership:** She has led or participated in 100+ clinical trials in retinal and corneal research, working with both investigator-initiated studies and pharmaceutical industry collaborations.
- **Funding & Recognition:** Over the past decade, Meidong has secured over \$2 million in research grants, including NHMRC and ORIA funding.

- **Tissue Banking Innovation:** She pioneered a human tissue supply network in NSW, significantly benefiting research and postgraduate training at the University of Sydney.
- **Global Leadership:** Beyond Australia, she has helped establish modern eye banks and train staff in China, India, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Myanmar.
- **Awards & Honours:** Her contributions have been recognised with prestigious awards, including the Lions NSW Sydney Eye Hospital Service Medal (2011) and the Keith Small Gold Honour Award (2012) for excellence in eye banking.

This promotion is a testament to her dedication and outstanding contributions to ophthalmology, research, and education.

Congratulations, Meidong!

2024 TGA CONFERENCE

The Tissue Bank Quality Assurance Team attended the TGA Conference in Melbourne on November 19-20, 2024, joining over 180 industry professionals to discuss the latest in regulatory developments.

Clinical Governance and Quality Manager Vanessa Terpos and Quality Officers Kimanh Fok and Patrick James represented the team, gaining valuable insights into the evolving landscape of therapeutic goods regulation.

Kimanh shared her top three takeaways from the event:

- 1. Stronger Regulatory Knowledge:** Reinforced understanding of Australia's therapeutic goods regulations.
- 2. Future-Focused Insights:** Gained awareness of upcoming TGA priorities and reforms shaping the Tissue Bank.



- 3. Industry Connections:** Engaged in hands-on workshops with professionals from diverse industries, exchanging insights on the challenges of good manufacturing practices (GMP).

Attending the conference was a valuable opportunity for the team to stay ahead of regulatory changes and strengthen industry connections, ensuring the highest standards for the tissue bank.

With plenty to come in 2025, we celebrate the incredible achievements of our staff and network in our first quarter.

Thank you for being part of our journey to transform lives through tissue donation.

Warm wishes,

The NSW Tissue Bank Team



Health
NSW Organ & Tissue
Donation Service

Incorporating:
NSW Bone Bank
Lions NSW Eye Bank
Australian Ocular Biobank

