

Statewide first Medical research

Mega-biobank set to stockpile body samples

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Health editor

More than 3 million samples of DNA, tissue, blood and tumour cells from willing NSW patients will be stored in the biggest biobank in the southern hemisphere designed to turbocharge medical research in the state.

The \$12 million NSW Health Statewide Biobank officially opened yesterday at the Professor Marie Bashir Centre, RPA in Camperdown. It offers researchers a smorgasbord of crucial biospecimens to help better detect, diagnose and treat diseases.

Small and large-scale population studies will be able to draw on the biobank's stores to track health and disease trends including cancers, heart disease, dementia, diabetes and rare diseases over decades, and patch into international studies.

"This is going to provide the research material for almost every area of health," NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard said of the joint initiative with the Office of Health and Medical Research and NSW Health Pathology Sydney Local Health District and Health Infrastructure. "It will save our researchers years of time that would have otherwise been spent collecting samples and will enable greater participation in even more international studies."

Researchers will be able to deposit or dip into samples, much

like a library or a financial bank. Though these stockpiles of human tissue will be kept in a -80 degree storage system and -196 degree cryogenic vats.

The robotic technology is designed to speed up the time it takes for promising lab discoveries to become clinical treatments by cutting through the laborious processing needed to sort and retrieve specific samples.

Some of the highly valuable, rare samples will be used exclusively by NSW Health-funded research, but the bank will be available to any medical researchers across NSW private and public institutions. National and international institutions could also apply for access.

NSW chief health officer Dr Kerry Chant said it was almost impossible to anticipate what avenues of research were conceivable in decades to come using material in the state-of-the-art biobank.

She encouraged individuals who wanted to donate samples to speak

with their doctors about research projects for which they may be eligible. If patients were approached by their doctors to take part, Dr Chant said: "Think about it."

"Involvement in medical research is a really important thing ... it changes people's lives," she said.

"Things that people died of pre-

viously we know have cures. We have great vaccines, we have great immunotherapies, our chemotherapies improved, all of this required often via specimens and people participating in clinical trials," Dr Chant said.

All participants will undergo a consent and ethics approval process, which would likely include provisions to inform participants if test results discovered they had a life-threatening and treatable condition.



Statewide Biobank researches diseases that touch all our lives.