

Australian Foundation For Diabetes Research

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NEWSLETTER
JUNE 2026

National Recognition for Professor Bernard Tuch, AM

The Board of the Australian Foundation for Diabetes Research (AFDR) is pleased to announce that its Chief Scientific Officer Professor Bernard Tuch has been awarded the Order of Australia General Division.

"This is in recognition of the several decades of commitment and perseverance by our CSO Professor Tuch pursuing the goal of developing a stem cell therapy for diabetes", said Chairman Steven Nemes, OAM. "Dr Tuch has the passion to achieve the desired goal while working through the hurdles ahead".



Professor Bernard Tuch AM

Professor Tuch sees the national recognition as one more step of the support he and the AFDR have received over the more than two decades of its existence. Donors and research funders include the National Stem Cell Foundation of Australia, Breakthrough T1D, the Lions Foundation and the Gandel Foundation.

Professor Tuch says: "The honour reflects the support, encouragement and collaboration of so many people throughout my career – from professional colleagues to the patients who have inspired and motivated the development of a cell therapy for diabetes that does not require recipients to take anti-rejection medication."

"I am deeply grateful to my parents for their unwavering support and guidance, particularly my father, who fled Europe in 1938 in search of a better life in Australia."

Breakthrough T1D International

The AFDR was successful in obtaining a Pilot and Feasibility Grant from Breakthrough T1D, formerly called Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International. This was to produce further research data in animals to explore the possibility of proceeding to a phase 1b clinical trial as a cell therapy for T1D with the bioengineered device that the AFDR has pioneered.

Previous works conducted at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) have shown the need for a substance called extracellular matrix (ECM) to be added to the bioengineered device thereby allowing the enclosed insulin-producing cells to function efficiently.

The ECM is derived from donor human pancreases. Approval for the use of such pancreases was obtained from the NSW Organ and Tissue Donation Service. With guidance from colleagues at the University of Madison Wisconsin, Professor John Odorico and Dr Connie Chamberlain, research personnel at UTS have now produced ECM for the first time in Australia.



Dr Vamshikrishna Malya planning to isolate ECM at UTS

The data supporting the benefit of adding ECM to the bioengineered device as a therapy for diabetes in animals was published in the peer reviewed journal Diabetology in January this year.

International Collaboration: NewcelX

The development and testing of our bioengineered device as a therapy for T1D involves multi-disciplined teams internationally as well as in Australia.

A key team, headed by Dr Kfir Molakandov, is in Israel which is where the devices are about to be tested in immunodeficient rats. There, Kadimastem Ltd differentiates human embryonic stem cells into insulin-producing cells over a period of five weeks. Previously, these cells were refrigerated and flown to Sydney, where they were cultured before being placed in a device and transplanted into laboratory mice.

“Carrying out the animal experiments across the corridor from where the cells were produced is more efficient than flying them to Sydney and subjecting them to extra stress”, said Professor Tuch. Initial experiments using immunodeficient mice have shown this strategy to be workable, with blood sugar levels of recipient diabetic mice normalised.

Kadimastem has shown that the above experiments can continue to occur despite the current war with Iran and the necessity to use underground bunkers as a preventative measure. Getting ECM and scaffolds for the device into Israel has been delayed on occasions though, because of reduced aircraft carriage.

Kadimastem Ltd has recently merged with the Swiss company NLS Pharmaceuticals Ltd to form the newly listed Nasdaq company NewcelX. A press release in January from that company named the AFDR as one of its collaborators.



Dr Kfir Molakandov



Lions Foundation

The Lions Australia Diabetes Foundation has once again been of great assistance to the AFDR in providing funding support. This was for \$40,000 and was provided via its chairman & Trustee Jim Cowburn and Honorary Secretary and Trustee, Stephen Box.

In 2019, the not-for-profit benefactor through the Lions Lugarno Club had also provided \$40,000 to support the efforts of the AFDR in achieving its goal. This was matched by an equivalent amount from the National Stem Cell Foundation of Australia (NSCFA) with which the AFDR had signed a Donor Supported Research Funding Agreement.

In December 2025, Professor Tuch attended the Annual General Meeting of the Lions Foundation Lugarno and spoke of the developments of the research program and of the alliance with Kadimastem in Israel. He thanked the organisation for its friendship and support over the years.



President Mike Warner, Professor Bernard Tuch and Elvio Munzone OAM holding the cheque donated by the Lions Foundation of Lugarno to the AFDR at its AGM.

National Stem Cell Foundation of Australia

It has been 7 years that the NSCFA has supported the AFDR in matching donations to develop a stem cell therapy for diabetes in humans. Over that time, a million dollars has been raised, and spent on the Project. In concluding the Agreement between the two organisations the Board of the AFDR wishes to express a big thank you to Graeme Mehegan, general manager of the NSCFA and the Board of the NSCFA for its assistance in trying to change the paradigm of how insulin-dependent diabetes might be treated using stem cells.





HELP BRING THIS THERAPY TO PATIENTS

Donors are vital to continuing this life-changing work. There are several ways to contribute:

1: Credit Card

Australian Foundation for Diabetes Research – complete details below

2: Cheque or Money Order payable to
AFDR, PO Box 821, Maroubra NSW 2035

3. Bank Transfer

AFDR: BSB 062 230, Account No 1027 3887
OR

The AFDR is endorsed as a *Deductible Gift Recipient*, meaning that donations are tax deductible.

Via Credit card:

☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$200 ☐ \$500 ☐ \$1000

☐ \$4200 = shipment of cells from Israel

☐ Other \$.....

☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard

Name on card

.....

Card number ____ / ____ / ____ / ____

Expiry/..... Validation number ____

MAKING A BEQUEST

A bequest is another powerful way to support the future of diabetes research. Sample wording and instructions are included below.

I give to the Australian Foundation for Diabetes Research:

- the sum of _____,
- the following assets in my estate: _____, or
- ___ percent of my estate, free from all duties thereon.

* When drafting your will, please select only the relevant alternative.

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