

Impact Report 2023–24



**OLIVIA NEWTON-JOHN
CANCER & WELLNESS CENTRE**

The ONJ Centre's Wellness Garden is a green space designed to be a sanctuary for patients and their loved ones to reflect and recover.



Thank you for your support

The Olivia Newton-John Cancer & Wellness Centre (ONJ Centre) is a comprehensive cancer centre with a difference. It provides patients with world-leading medical treatment, integrated research, leading clinical trials and tailored, evidence-based wellness therapies and supportive care programs, within a calm and tranquil setting. This unique approach supports every aspect of a patient's physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing.

"We support this major change in a person's life, as well as their cancer treatment. Staying physically healthy, looking after your mindset and dealing with stress – those are part of getting better, too."

Dr Andrew Lim,
Director Clinical
Haematology, ONJ Centre



Olivia's vision

Dame Olivia Newton-John AC DBE championed the ONJ Centre from its inception in the early 2000s. As a long-term cancer patient herself, she was passionate about incorporating wellness therapies into cancer care. Her vision was to make wellness therapies accessible to all cancer patients.

Today, wellness therapies such as massage, art therapy and exercise have proven benefits when integrated into supportive cancer care, but 13 years ago this approach was unheard of in a public hospital setting. Olivia championed an innovative way of supporting the whole patient – mind, body and spirit.

Austin Health: A history of giving

Austin Health has a longstanding history of providing high-quality healthcare for the community. Founded with a philanthropic gift in 1882, generosity has remained one of our core values. Our staff compassionately care for patients in need, and our community of dedicated and loyal donors give to support Austin Health. We provide care for patients across four main sites, including the ONJ Centre.



Thank you!

“The ONJ Centre provides top medical research and the newest treatments, combined with the best in wellness care, where we support patients and their families with life enhancing wellness programs during their journey.”

Olivia Newton-John

Wellness and Supportive Care programs 2023-24

The ONJ Centre's Wellness and Supportive Care programs are available without cost to our patients. These vital programs are possible because of the generosity of philanthropic donors and fundraising initiatives, given these programs are not government funded. Donations to the ONJ Centre are typically directed into support for Wellness and Supportive Care programs, to ensure these important components of cancer care are sustained.

In 2023-24 more than **9,000 people** accessed our Wellness and Supportive Care programs, with more than **6,100 individual patient consultations** and just under **3,000 group attendances**.

Over time our wellness programs have grown in scope and number to include seven different therapies, allowing patients to each find the combination of therapies to meet their individual needs. In addition, we offer a range of information services and group support services.



The ONJ Wellness Centre is open Monday to Friday and is located on Level 3 of the ONJ Centre. The quiet space includes a lounge and Wellness Garden available to patients and their carers.



Suzi pictured with Olivia at the ONJ Centre

"Cancer treatment is vital, the treatment has given me life, but the wellness programs have given me hope and to combine the two together - incredible."

Suzi, ONJ Centre patient



In the Australian healthcare sector, government and policy makers are currently increasing access to supportive care in cancer, to manage side effects and reduce time in hospital. We are a leading advocate, having integrated wellness therapies into cancer care for more than a decade.

Wellness therapies proven to help

An expanding body of evidence demonstrates the value of wellness or 'supportive care' in improving experiences and outcomes for cancer patients.

Proven benefits of supportive care for those affected by cancer include:

- reducing levels of anxiety and depression, managing physical symptoms and increasing knowledge of the disease and treatment
- improved medical outcomes through better adherence to treatment including faster recovery, fewer post-hospital complications, enhanced self-care and greater ability to cope with difficult treatments.

Reference: (NBCC and NCCI 2003, NCCN 2005, IOM 2007, Stiefel 2006)

During 2023-24:

6,000

donations were made to the ONJ Centre



\$2.4 million in individual donations



\$1.2 million from bequests, major donors, trusts and foundations



\$937,000 from community fundraising



\$1.1 million through the Walk for Wellness campaign

Exercise
physiology and
physiotherapy

In 2023-24 **1,100 individual consultations** were provided and **2,500 people participated** in the group-based exercise training program at Exercise@ONJ. The team offers individual and group exercise programs with exercise physiology and physiotherapy staff. These are tailored to support an individual's cancer diagnosis, cancer treatment and side effects, as well as any other limitations/restrictions.

Over the past year and thanks to donor support, we have been able to incorporate more validated, exercise-specific monitoring technology. Drs Gen Douglas and Ashley Bigaran produced exciting new research, the 'FAB study' (Fatigue after Bone Marrow Transplant study), looking into how a tailored exercise program can improve stamina and reduce fatigue for stem cell transplant patients.

"The FAB study identified that high intensity interval training is not only feasible in complex post-transplant patients, but that it significantly helps fatigue, physical function and mental health. For my patients, this has led to improvements in self-confidence, happiness and improved capacity in their daily lives."

Dr Gen Douglas,
Haematologist, ONJ Centre



Scan to learn more
about art therapy



Scan to learn more
about exercise

Medical
acupuncture

In 2023-24 there were more than **900 individual consultations** for medical acupuncture, a proven method of targeted pain relief and particularly helpful for pain from treatments such as chemotherapy or surgery. This year our medical acupuncturist, Dr Ian Relf developed a new, non-invasive, medical laser acupuncture treatment that is highly effective for pain relief; his research findings were published in leading medical journal, *Clinical Breast Cancer*.

Art therapy

Art therapy helps patients express and process feelings through creative expression, while reducing the stress of the cancer experience. In 2023-24 more than **650 individual patient consultations** were conducted, and we ran a new Art Therapy Open Studio to reach more patients.

Music therapy

In 2023-24 we delivered more than **750 individual patient consultations** in music therapy and launched a new weekly music therapy group. Like art therapy, music therapy is a research-based approach using creative expression to relieve stress and pain. Our registered music therapists help patients identify how music might be most helpful to support health and wellbeing.

Oncology massage

In 2023-24 more than **1,000 individual consultations** took place in our oncology massage program, with specially trained oncology massage therapists. Massage is one of our most popular therapies, as it relieves tension and can reduce many cancer-related side effects such as nausea, pain, sleep difficulties, fatigue, stiffness and anxiety.

“Massage therapy is what I enjoy the most. It is good to have something I can look forward to – I feel better, I feel energised, it helps with my sleep.”

Anthony, ONJ Centre patient



Scan to learn more about oncology massage



Cancer information and programs

In 2023-24 we supported more than **100 patients** through the cancer education program and the newly launched cancer information nursing consultations. The consultations are led by two senior cancer nurse coordinators, who provide education programs and supportive care for patients and caregivers.



The Brain Tumour Support Service is philanthropically funded by the John Cummins Memorial Fund. Service staff Dianne Legge (far left) and Helen Panotopoulos (far right) met with patient Tess Richardson and philanthropist Di Cummins (holding flowers) to recognise 15 years of giving in 2024.



Our Information Lounge is an informal area designed for patients, families and carers to relax while we ensure they are equipped with resources tailored to their needs.

Clinical psychology

In 2023-24 the clinical psychology team assisted with more than **700 individual consultations**. Psychologists provide patients with crucial mental health support to manage the emotional changes, side effects and major life adjustments that come during the cancer journey.

“The mental challenges are real during cancer treatment. It was a very frightening time. It felt like I couldn’t live a normal life outside of treatment, or the hospital, so having the wellness component was important.”

Adriano, ONJ Centre patient

Sexual Health Service

We offer a specialist Sexual Health Service to support patients experiencing sexual difficulties because of their illness or treatment. Sexual Health Nurse Consultants are available at any stage of cancer treatment. This year the service ran a Sexuality and Cancer Day (Health Professional and Patient Seminars) for the first time.

Brain Tumour Support Service

One of the only services of its kind in Australia, the Brain Tumour Support Service gives specialist supportive care to people affected by a primary malignant brain tumour, including the provision of information, practical problem-solving, support, service navigation, and resource provision across all phases of care.

In 2023-24 **178 patients and carers** were assisted. There were **1,578 outpatient consultations** and **93 inpatient interventions** provided.

Group support services

Many patients find support in a group setting is highly reassuring, as it allows them to learn from other's experiences and share common fears and questions in a safe environment. Many wellness programs are offered in groups, and the Wellness Centre offers supportive care programs.

"I was in complete shock. But when I went to my first support group, I met people with brain cancer who were doing well. And most importantly, everyone in the room 100 per cent understood what I was going through."

Tess, Brain Tumour Support Group member

Metastatic Breast Cancer Support Group

A support group tailored for women who are under 55 years and living with metastatic breast cancer. The group facilitates both face-to-face and online support options.

Brain Tumour Support Groups

For people diagnosed with a primary malignant brain tumour and their loved ones, these groups help members deal with the diagnosis and its effects, while connecting to others in a similar situation. We also offer 'Brain Space', an online support group specifically for younger patients. These groups are run by staff from the Brain Tumour Support Service. In 2023-24 the Brain Tumour Support Service ran 24 support groups and supported more than 100 people.



Members of the Brain Tumour Support Group.

Strong for Oesophago-gastric Cancer Surgery program

The ONJ Centre's new Strong for Oesophago-gastric Cancer Surgery (SOCS) program demonstrated impressive results for patients in 2023-24. The SOCS prehabilitation initiative, led by Dr David Liu and Dr Ashley Bigaran, is designed to enhance the wellbeing of patients before they undergo major oesophageal and gastric cancer surgery, via the provision of physical, nutritional, psychological and pre-operative medical support.

Since the program started in 2022, the results for patients have included:

- up to an 11-day decrease in length of stay in hospital post-surgery
- fifty per cent decrease in respiratory complication rates.

For our health service, this has substantially reduced healthcare costs. The study is ongoing, and our team is preparing the results for peer-review publication, as well as looking for opportunities to expand the program to include other cancer types.



Olivia's Walk for Wellness is our annual calendar event dedicated to fundraising for ONJ Centre Wellness and Supportive Care programs. The Walk supports everything we do, and we do everything for patients in light of this generosity. We invite you to join us in October to experience this wonderful community event. Stay up to date at walkforwellness.com.au.

Your support creates a brighter future

The ONJ Centre's leadership is shaping the future of comprehensive cancer care. We are recognised as global leaders in integrating evidence-informed wellness and supportive care therapies into routine cancer care.

In 2023-24 the Wellness and Supportive Care programs have been involved in local and national initiatives that highlight and advocate for wellness therapies as part of comprehensive cancer care.

Last year, the ONJ Centre co-chaired the Inaugural National Integrative Oncology and Wellbeing in Supportive Cancer Conference Symposium alongside Chris O'Brien Lifecare and Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. This symposium included a range of international and national experts from leading organisations foregrounding the importance of wellness therapies in comprehensive cancer care.

The ONJ Centre is at the frontier of cancer medicine, running 250 active clinical trials at one time. We provide access to breakthrough therapies and deliver cancer treatment via inpatient, outpatient and home-based models of care.

Built around a philosophy of wellness, the ONJ Centre provides care beyond clinical treatment. Each year our staff contribute to the growing evidence base proving the benefits of wellness therapies in cancer care, via their research findings, academic contributions and speaking engagements.

Our goal for the coming years is to ensure every ONJ Centre clinical department integrates wellness therapies and supportive care programs into standard care, while we continue to provide meaningful, tailored care to patients and families.

From all of us at the ONJ Centre, **THANK YOU** for all that you do to help us improve the care of those affected by cancer.



Scan to watch patient Adriano's story



Contact us

Thank you for your generosity. Your support helps our patients enjoy the immediate benefits of integrating wellness programs as a part of their overall treatment.

For more information, please contact:

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**Shaping the
future through
exceptional care,
discovery and
learning.**

