Thanks to a $2million grant from the Australian Cancer Research Foundation (ACRF), St Vincent’s Institute has been able to purchase state of the art equipment to fit out the new ACRF Rational Drug Discovery Centre. The aim of the Centre is to help develop new treatments for cancer by providing researchers with cutting-edge technology.

How many Australians are affected by cancer?
One in three Australian men and one in four women are directly affected by cancer before the age of 75 and over 100,000 new cases are diagnosed every year. While survival rates have increased significantly over the past 20 years, cancer remains a leading cause of death: while more than half of the diagnosed cases are successfully treated, every year over 36,000 Australians die of the disease.

Why invest in research into cancer?
Cancer costs the Australian health system over $2.7 billion per year, and its cost in terms of pain and suffering is inestimable. The only way to change these statistics is with high-quality prevention, early detection and new treatments: our best chance of achieving these goals is with basic medical research.

What will the new ACRF Rational Drug Discovery Centre provide?
The new ACRF Centre at SVI will provide Australian cancer researchers with access to early stage drug discovery tools, help bridging the gap that exists between academia and industry in the drug discovery pipeline. Funding from the ACRF has been used to purchase key equipment to underpin the new Centre.

What cancer research is carried out at SVI?
Cancer is a complex and varied disease, which is why, at SVI, we approach it from different angles. The Structural Biology Unit investigates how changes in protein structure can lead to cancer and focuses on finding ways to develop new drugs based on these structures to treat cancer. The Stem Cell Regulation Unit investigates stem cells and their role in cancers of the blood and bone. Other groups work on understanding how the DNA damage that underlies most cancers develops; on how apparently healthy cells become cancerous; on identifying the genes involved and developing new treatments to halt cancer metastasis.

Who are the lead researchers in the Centre?
The ACRF funding is supporting the research of Professor Michael Parker, Associate Professor Louise Purton and Dr Carl Walkley, and will enhance the identification and follow-up of promising drug targets for cancer therapy, with a focus on cancers of the blood and bone.
Professor Parker’s contribution to the elucidation of medically important structures and their use for drug discovery (most recently, high-profile insights into the GM-CSF receptor) and A/Prof Purton and Dr Walkley’s internationally recognised research into blood stem cell development and cancers of the blood and bone represent a unique collection of resources. Combined with new facilities funded by the ACRF, the team is poised to make exciting new discoveries that will impact upon cancer treatment.

Who will use the Centre?
The Centre will be available to all Australian cancer researchers. Instruments in the Centre have already been used by some of the national and international groups who collaborate with researchers at SVI.

What is so notable about the ACRF funding?
While cancer research at SVI is funded by the Federal Government’s National Health and Medical Research Council and a number of other national and international research sources, these do not generally fund the purchase of equipment. However, access to state-of-the-art equipment makes a huge difference in research outcomes and, indeed, to the ability of researchers to get funding for their research projects. For this reason, support from the ACRF is crucial to the success of Australian research.

About SVI
For more than 50 years, researchers at St Vincent’s Institute (SVI) have been conducting medical research into the cause, prevention and treatment of common diseases including cancer, diabetes, obesity, bone diseases, Alzheimer’s disease, cardiovascular disease and infectious diseases. SVI is affiliated with St Vincent’s Hospital and the University of Melbourne.

About the ACRF
In the 29 years since its formation, the ACRF has awarded more than $86.0 million in cancer research grants. Almost $60.0 million of that has been given in the last seven years. These very substantial grants support leading-edge Australian initiatives, ensuring our scientists remain at the forefront of global cancer research.