“Our research agenda is driven by an appreciation that better health has a wider positive impact beyond the individual male; on relationships, families, communities, business and the economy”
The Freemasons Foundation Centre for Men’s Health

The Freemasons Foundation Centre for Men’s Health, established in 2007, aims to advance knowledge about, and empower men to be partners in the management of, conditions that contribute the most to ill-health, loss of independence and workforce participation, and premature death.

The Centre currently comprises a multidisciplinary network of scientific researchers, spanning the three South Australian Universities, SAHMRI, CSIRO, the public hospitals and some private health services. Our researchers have expertise in clinical, basic, behavioural, social, epidemiological and demographic research and work collaboratively to tackle complex health problems. Clinical input comes from a range of medical and allied health specialities. The work of the Centre is supported by administrators, statisticians, educators, students, volunteers and consumers.

The Centre is funded by a generous donation from the Freemasons Foundation with matching funding from the University of Adelaide. Direct research support has also been received, including major funding from the National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian Research Council, the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia, Cancer Australia, the USA Department of Defense and SA Health.
Our Research Programs

Our research programs focus primarily on the common and often interrelated chronic conditions that constitute the bulk of the disease burden in men.

- Cardiovascular disease
- Diabetes
- Anxiety and depression
- Prostate cancer
- Bowel cancer
- Lower urinary tract symptoms
- Erectile dysfunction
- Testosterone deficiency
- Sleep disordered breathing

Our programs also have a focus on vulnerable groups, health literacy, social determinants and the need for a more holistic approach to health service delivery for men.

Our Governance

The Centre’s activity and output is guided and monitored by an independent Scientific Advisory Committee. A Board of Patrons comprising leaders in industry, media and culture, sports and government provide a pivotal community linkage and inform our strategies and operations. An Executive Officer provides management and oversees strategic direction with the Centre Director and Management Group.
Our Measure of Success

In our first 5 years:
- 11 PhD students trained.
- 11 additional PhD students currently enrolled.
- Six early-career post-doctoral researchers supported and trained that now hold independent positions.
- 140 peer-reviewed scientific papers published.
- More than 150 presentations at national and international research meetings.
- Federal and state government health briefings, and participation in standing committees and enquiries.
- Played an integral role in the development of the SA Men’s Health Strategic Framework, released in 2008.
- Representation on national and international working groups and committees relating to men’s health

In so doing we have advanced knowledge and influenced policy and practice relating to health care for men.

Here are some examples of the Centre’s research that have influenced the development of health care guidelines, practice and medical student training.

Engaging men in health care

We have defined the attitudes of men towards health, healthy behaviours, health care services, and preferences for and response to, particular styles of communication with medical practitioners.
Wee problems - not just age or the prostate

We have found that lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) such as getting up to pass urine two or more times a night (nocturia), passing small amounts of urine often during the day (frequency) and when you got to go you really got to go (urgency) may be markers of significant underlying disease (depression, cardiovascular disease and diabetes) and share risk factors for these disorders (obesity, obstructive sleep apnoea, high blood pressure, abnormal blood fats, inflammation, lack of physical activity and a poor diet). We have shown marked benefit from just a 5 to 7% decrease in weight with a healthy diet.

Loss of mojo - Obesity and chronic disease, not age

Our research has demonstrated that ageing in and of itself is not a cause of decreasing blood testosterone levels. Rather this occurs because of obesity, depression, or the use of certain medications. As with LUTS, we have shown that just a small amount of weight loss leads to a substantial increase in testosterone levels.
Obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) is a condition where the airway collapses during sleep and prevents the movement of air into the lungs. It is linked to heart disease, stroke, depression, diabetes, impaired concentration and memory, erectile dysfunction and getting up at night to pass urine. It impairs quality of life and workforce engagement and productivity. It has generally been said to occur in 4% of men, being more common in older and more obese men. We found that about 8% of men over the age of 40 years report having been diagnosed with OSA. However, in the largest community based sleep study undertaken in Australia, we have discovered that 52% of men in this age group have OSA and it is moderate to severe in 25%.

We have shown in animal models that males with obesity caused by a high fat diet pass their obesity to their offspring because of changes that occur in their sperm. This research is ongoing and being extended into human studies but has already led to changes to screening and intervention programs, previously only offered to females, at world-leading in-vitro fertilisation units Repromed and Monash IVF.
Can testosterone prevent diabetes in men?

We have shown that the men at highest risk of developing type 2 diabetes are aged 50 years or over, are overweight or obese and have a low blood testosterone level. This has led to a successful application to the National Health and Medical Research Council for funding to conduct an Australian multicentre trial of over 1500 men across 6 national centres to determine whether testosterone treatment with a weight loss program (Weight Watchers) is effective in preventing diabetes in men.

Reducing chronic disease risk and improving health

The Centre, in collaboration with the CSIRO and SA Health, developed and successfully trialled GIRTH, a 12-week peer-led healthy lifestyle community program run by men for men. The program promotes healthy eating, physical activity, good sleep habits and stress management, self-management techniques and provides education on a range of male specific health education topics. The program, which has been well received, results in significant reductions in waist circumference, other indicators of heart and metabolic health, general physical and mental health and overall well-being.
Overcoming drug resistance

The androgen receptor (AR) is a cell protein that binds testosterone and plays a critical role in the development and spread of prostate cancer. Current hormone therapies for men with advanced prostate cancer block the AR. We have identified that a cause of drug resistance is the presence of super-active altered forms of the AR that can function in the absence of testosterone. In collaboration with the University of Texas SouthWestern, a new class of drug that block these altered receptors has been developed and trials are planned.

Better screening of potential new drugs

While many new drugs may show potential for the treatment of cancer when tested using traditional laboratory models, most of these fail to show any benefit in humans. We have developed a laboratory “explant” model that uses human prostate tumour tissue to evaluate new drugs for potential use in advanced prostate cancer. The explant model preserves the features of the prostate cancer and therefore better predicts likely response. This model has been adopted internationally and will save money and time in getting effective drugs to market to improve the treatment and outcomes of men with prostate cancer.
The Next Five Years

Our goal over the next five years is to build upon this success to further impact on men’s health.

We aim to:

- Establish a link between metabolism in prostate cancer cells and responsiveness to treatment.
- Take new drugs from our laboratory to trial to improve the treatment options for men with prostate cancer.
- Develop a test that can more accurately predict the aggressiveness of prostate cancer to inform treatment.
- Further characterise chronic disease in Aboriginal, regional and rural men, farmers and migrants and develop and trial intervention strategies tailored to the needs and preferences of these groups of men.
- Develop novel approaches to chronic disease prevention for men, including the use of e-health technology.
- Use our male targeted strategies to increase the uptake of bowel cancer screening by men.
- Work with our national and international partners to raise the profile of men’s health research and health policy.
- Support the research endeavours and develop the career pathways of our students and young scientists.
- Translate our new knowledge into communities through public education events and contribution to policy.
Business Partnerships

Although we receive government grants and fellowships for outstanding young scientists, we face significant challenges as a result of extremely limited public funding being available. Government policy forces a greater reliance on the private sector as sources of funding.

The Centre seeks to partner with business to support young researchers working in men's health. This sort of investment builds research expertise and capacity in men's health in South Australia. The ultimate benefits are healthier men, with implications for their families, the work force and therefore the economy. Our young scientists are our future; we need to keep them here.

There are a range of research and program initiatives in high priority areas of men's health that require financial support. Sponsorship may fund named student scholarships, early career researchers or education activities, as examples.
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The Freemasons Foundation

The Freemasons Foundation is the charitable arm of the Freemasons and one of the leading charities supporting men and their families in the community. The Centre for Men’s Health is an initiative of the Freemasons Foundation, and the Foundation has been financial partners and provided in-kind professional and other support since 2007.
Our Scientific Advisory Committee

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