Sandy Di Rocco Lazarevski almost died of a heart condition called spontaneous coronary artery dissection (SCAD) at the age of 28. She had no warning. SCAD is often undiagnosed, frequently fatal and affects mostly women under 55. But thanks to kind supporters like you, the Victor Chang Institute is now undertaking the first-ever Australian research program into SCAD.

Sandy Di Rocco Lazarevski was grieving the sudden death of her brother two days earlier when she was struck by blinding pain gripping her chest, nausea and dizziness.

“I thought it was just stress,” she remembers.

Sadly, she was wrong. When the pain became even worse her husband called an ambulance. Within an hour of arriving at the hospital she found herself being rushed into open heart surgery. As she was wheeled into the operating theatre she wondered if she’d ever see her loving husband again.

Sandy was only 28 and apparently fit and healthy.

She had suffered an unusual and very dangerous type of heart attack, called a spontaneous coronary artery dissection (SCAD): an artery leading to her heart had spontaneously torn.

Her first thought was for her young children, Alexander, then 4, and Simona, still a baby.

“I was determined to survive,” she says. “I had to – for them.”

Now, the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute is launching the first Australian research program into SCAD.

Very little is known about the causes or triggers for SCAD, although there is emerging evidence that there may be a genetic link. Many – but not all sufferers – have recently given birth and/or have frequent migraines.

Two years later Sandy is still trying to rebuild her strength. Every day she wakes up wondering if it will be her last.

If she gets dizzy or tired while trying to get her kids off to school, she just has to lie down until it passes, even if it makes her children late.

She can’t lift things. It took months of rehabilitation to be able walk up a flight of stairs.

A possible genetic link to SCAD gives Sandy even more reason to worry for her kids.

“But I’m so grateful that we might get answers from this research, if not for me, at least for them.”

Sandy Di Rocco Lazarevski is grateful for every extra day she has with her two children, Alexander (7) and Simona (4).
If you're having heart surgery, you'll want to be sure your doctors are well prepared. The Victor Chang Institute's Dr James Otton puts the finishing touches on a 3D printed heart he has developed for surgeons to better plan operations and treatment.

YOU'RE INVITED: SEE LIFE SIZE 3D HEARTS THAT IMPROVE HEART SURGERY

Unique 3D models of hearts to help doctors prepare for complex surgery will be on display at the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (The Powerhouse Museum) from September this year. And you’re invited.

If you're having heart surgery you want to be sure that your doctors are well prepared.

Now, thanks to work undertaken by the Victor Chang Institute cardiologist and clinical faculty member Dr James Otton, patients can have a scan of their heart.

"Then we can print out the heart in 3D so we can plan surgery and treatment," says Dr Otton.

Two of these 3D hearts – one in colour and one transparent, will be on display at ‘Out of Hand’, a new exhibition on display at the Powerhouse Museum from September 16.

The exhibition focuses on the use of digital design and manufacturing, such as 3D printing, in art and science.

New 3D printing technologies like this are expected to reduce the time operations take and prevent unexpected problems during surgery.

"Eventually, it’s possible that fully functioning hearts could be bioprinted, with Australia at the forefront if the research is adequately funded."
Thank you for letting us get one step closer to finding answers to Elka’s deadly heart condition

Elka was diagnosed with a ‘big’ heart at 7 weeks old – but not in a good way. Her heart was oversize and swollen and doctors thought she’d never make it to her 18th birthday.

At 17, Elka was in surgery having a heart transplant to fix a genetic heart problem. But she’s still afraid of passing on the disorder to any children she may have in the future.

Elka was born with dilated cardiomyopathy, a heart muscle disease where the heart’s main pumping chamber is enlarged and weakened. The condition is considered a major risk factor for heart failure, strokes and sudden death.

But with the help of kind supporters like you, more than 10 years of meticulous genetic research undertaken by Professor Diane Fatkin and her team at the Victor Chang Institute has identified a genetic mutation behind this deadly heart condition that affects about one in 2,000 Australians.

“Thanks to this research, people at risk can now be identified early before they have established disease, so that we can try and prevent it,” Professor Fatkin said.

Genetic testing can now trace the disease in more than one in four patients well before symptoms emerge.

For Elka, it’s a ray of hope. “A diagnostic test will bring some peace of mind to people like me who carry the genetic marker for this disease.”

Your researcher recognised along with Einstein, Newton and Hawking

Professor Richard Harvey, one of the first researchers to join the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute 20 years ago has joined Albert Einstein, Isaac Newton and Stephen Hawking as a Fellow of the Royal Society of London.

You know that your donations to heart research are making a powerful difference when one of the Victor Chang Institute’s leading researchers is granted such prestigious scientific recognition.

Professor Harvey is a world-leading developmental biologist.

“It’s an unbelievable honour,” Professor Harvey said. “I’m really quite overwhelmed by it all.”

Professor Bob Graham, Executive Director of the Victor Chang Institute said that, “the Fellowship acknowledges Richard’s vital contributions to the molecular understanding of heart development and the causes of congenital heart defects”.

“His work sets a level of scientific excellence that is the benchmark of the work at the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute.”
Before his heart transplant last November, Joel Seeto, 18, couldn’t even walk upstairs. Now he wants to thank supporters of the Victor Chang Institute for the research and technology that have given him his life back.

You may have received a letter a year ago about a young man called Joel Seeto, who was urgently awaiting a heart transplant.

We’re sure you’ll be pleased to know that Joel had a successful transplant in November 2015.

"Before my surgery, doctors used the ‘heart in a box’ to test if the donor’s heart was right for me," says Joel.

The ‘heart in a box’ refers to the unique preservation solution developed at the Victor Chang Institute that helps keep a heart beating ‘in a box’, for up to 14 hours. It also increases the number of donor hearts available by as much as 30 percent.

Here’s an update from Joel:

“Before the transplant I couldn’t run or even go swimming with my mates. Even just resting was a struggle. It wasn’t really very fun for an 18 year old.”

“The first call for a heart transplant didn’t work out. The heart was no good.”

“Then I got another. It was pretty heavy saying goodbye to my parents. But I fully thought that I'd be okay and I didn’t think it would be the end or anything. I knew I was in really good hands.”

“I can’t really believe that now, just a few months later, I’m thinking of joining a touch football team. It’s totally different. It’s crazy. Less than a year ago I would’ve been so out of breath and now I can run almost further than my mates and stuff like that.”

I've got two thank yous. Firstly to the donor family. Thank you for the incredible gift, it’s something I’ll always be grateful for. And secondly to the regular donors at the Victor Chang Institute. You’ve made a massive difference to my life. Thank you!
If you’re amongst the 3 million Australians who suffer from high blood pressure, then current research by pharmacologist Dr Nicola Smith could be directly relevant to you.

Approximately 3 million Australians suffer from hypertension and if it’s not managed, high blood pressure can lead to heart attack, stroke or sudden death.

There are currently six types of drugs used to control and suppress the symptoms of high blood pressure, but unfortunately the medications even in combination simply don’t work for 1 in 6 sufferers.

Dr Smith’s goal is to develop a new alternative drug treatment to help those sufferers who do not respond to the medications currently available.

She’s deeply passionate about her work and is seen as a high achiever in her area. Having furthered her training overseas, she’s been with the Victor Chang Institute since 2011.

"With fantastic supporters like you behind us, we’re going to find the answers," she declares.

"With you behind me, I won't stop until I have a solution."

Name:  Doctor Nicola Smith
Faculty: Cardiac Receptor Biology Laboratory

Your contributions make this cutting edge work possible. Thank you.

And don’t forget the Heart Beat Ball coming up 24 September at the Sydney Town Hall. I do hope I get to see you there.

Thank you again for your generous support.

Your gifts do save lives.

PROFESSOR ROBERT M GRAHAM
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SAVE THE DATE – 2016 HEART BEAT BALL

Paint the town red at the Victor Chang Institute’s annual Heart Beat Ball to be held at the historic Sydney Town Hall on Saturday 24 September 2016.

Kick up your heels and raise funds for life-saving heart research at the same time with a glamorous Roaring Red 1920’s theme.

Organise a table of friends of colleagues, and dance and dine the night away – all for a life saving cause.

You’ll join an amazing crowd of generous supporters, be entertained and hear about some of the extraordinary achievements in heart research that you have made possible.

All event enquiries:
Events Coordinator
events@victorchang.edu.au
or (02) 9295 8761.

IN MEMORY OF MONICA

Women Against Heart Disease Lunch

If you were one of the people who attended the Women Against Heart Disease Lunch in memory of Monica O’Loughlin, thank you from the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute and Women In Focus CBA.

We hope you had a wonderful time and most importantly learnt a thing or two about your heart health and the importance of medical research.

A huge thanks to our Master of Ceremonies Dr Norman Swan, for bringing his expertise and passion for medical research to our cause.

Sincere thanks also to brave survivor Pamela McKenzie for sharing her extraordinary journey living with spontaneous coronary artery dissection (SCAD), and to interventional cardiologist Dr Stephanie Wilson for highlighting issues with heart disease in women.

Left Actor and writer Kelly Landry at the Women Against Heart Disease Lunch.

Centre Nicole Chettle and Dr Norman Swan show their support for Women Against Heart Disease.

Right The Sky News Team add their support to the fight against heart disease in women.

PUBLIC LECTURE “STEM CELLS – HYPE AND HOPE” Sponsored by ClearView

INVITATION
Tuesday 8 November 2016, 2pm– 5pm, followed by drinks until 6pm

Public Lecture
Stem Cells – Hype and Hope
Sponsored by ClearView

Location: Garvan Institute of Medical Research,
Garvan Auditorium, 384 Victoria Street Darlinghurst, NSW
Enquiries: s.janisz@victorchang.edu.au or (02) 9295 8763
Cost: FREE