



## **\*\*\*Media release\*\*\***

### **Professor Sam Berkovic awarded \$16.5 million NHMRC grant**

Professor Sam Berkovic and team were awarded a major \$16.5 million grant from the National Health and Medical Research Council on Thursday 25 February, to further their research into the genetic causes of epilepsy.

Professor Berkovic is director of both the Comprehensive Epilepsy Program and The University of Melbourne's Epilepsy Research Centre at Austin Health. He has already made an invaluable contribution to the understanding of the genetics of epilepsy, discovering many genetic alterations responsible for particular types of epilepsy, including the first gene for epilepsy in 1995.

His discoveries have changed the way specialists think about the causes of epilepsy and stimulated many other genetic researchers to focus on inherited seizure disorders. Professor Berkovic hopes that his new work will contribute to the development of new diagnostic methods and treatments for epilepsy.

In this study, Prof Berkovic will lead a collaborative research team with ten investigators across Australia, in Melbourne, Adelaide and Queensland.

They will investigate how genes associated with epilepsy are inherited and the how genetic variations result in development of seizures. Advanced brain imaging will be used to understand the effects of genetic variation on brain structure and function.

"Over the course of the grant's five year period, we hope to understand more about the types of genes involved and how they affect the brain. This research has important implications for the diagnosis of epilepsy, and hopefully eventually for treatments," Professor Berkovic said.

Jeffrey Zajac, Professor of Medicine at The University of Melbourne Department of Medicine at Austin Health said that Professor Berkovic and his collaborators are considered the leading group in the world in this field.

"This grant will allow them to continue competing at an international level. The close collaboration between the basic science research at The University of Melbourne and the clinical studies at the Austin Hospital creates a unique environment that allows this sort of research to thrive," Professor Zajac said.

Listen to [Professor Berkovic's podcast](#) to find out more about his research into the genetics of epilepsy.