

# Next-gen cancer drug here

**Rebecca Whitfield-Baker**

South Australian researchers at the forefront of developing “the biggest breakthrough this century” in treatment for chronic myeloid leukaemia (CML) are heralding a decision to allow patients here easy access to it.

The new drug, which targets abnormal cancer-generating proteins in cells, has been 25

years in the making, with SA experts partnering with a Switzerland-based pharmaceutical company to help fine-tune and test the emerging treatment.

This month Asciminib, which comes in tablet form and is sold under the brand name Scemblix, has been added to Australia’s PBS schedule, effectively taking it from a trial drug to a recognised treatment option.

Adelaide-based Professor Tim Hughes, a consultant haematologist at the Royal Adelaide Hospital and SAHMRI researcher, said the progress was “fantastic news”.

“I think there will be a lot of patients with CML who will be a lot better off if they can get access to this drug ... there are about 7000



**Professor Tim Hughes**

patients in Australia today,” he said.

Professor Hughes, who has facilitated significant SA trials, said while there had been major advancements in treatments in the past two decades – taking the disease from being a death sentence to one

that could be mostly managed – previous treatment options often caused debilitating side ef-

fects. “In addition to attacking leukaemia cells, they also damage healthy cells which can result in unpleasant side effects such as nausea, diarrhoea and muscle pain,” he said.

“This new drug ... has been designed to specifically target the leukaemia cells with almost no spill over into the normal cells and that hasn’t been possible before. This is the first time we have a drug with a high level of potency but also a pret-

ty impressive level of safety and tolerance.”

The added bonus for patients was that the new treatment didn’t impact negatively on major organs such as the heart and lungs, he said.

Adelaide woman Lisa McNeil, diagnosed when she was just 30, has lived with the disease for 21 years and was among the first to test the drug in its trial stage here. “It is an amazing leap forward,” she said.

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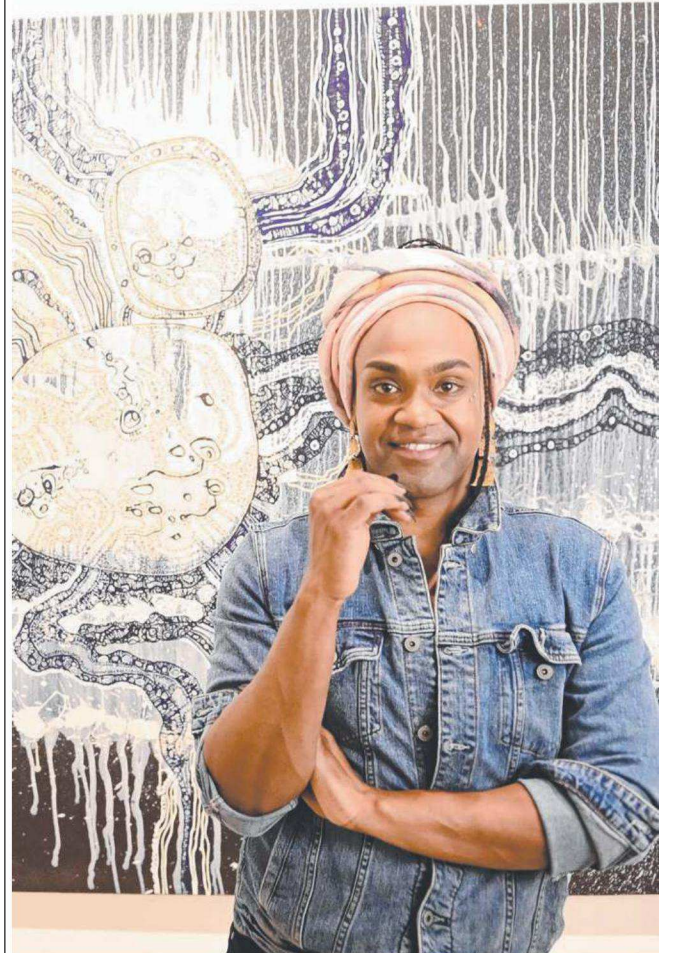
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Winning artist Zaachariaha Fielding. Picture: Jeremy Piper

## Making waves

**Todd Lewis**

South Australia’s supremely talented Zaachariaha Fielding has made more waves in the world of creativity after taking out one of Australia’s oldest and most prestigious art prizes.

The gifted musician and innovative storyteller was awarded the Wynne Prize, the sister art prize to the Archibald, for his painting Inma. The work depicts the movements and sounds of Mimili, his home community

in the eastern part of the APY Lands.

Winning the award was a landmark moment for Fielding, who began exploring a passion for painting when his touring career – as one half of electronic dance duo Electric Fields – was put on hold due to Covid-19.

“I started painting when my shows were all cancelled in America,” he said. “But it also gave me another career, which has been interesting. I had no idea what was possible.”

## Edna statue stays hid

A statue of Dame Edna which late comedian Barry Humphries described as “hideous” will remain locked in storage unless his family gives permission for it to be put back on public display.

Since Humphries died last month, aged 89, there have been calls to erect a permanent tribute to him at Moonee Ponds, a suburb made famous by Dame Edna. A heavily criticised bronze

statue is unlikely to be taken out of storage.

The statue was on display from 2009 until it was put in a warehouse in 2016.

“I am told ... it has been removed and impounded in a warehouse,” Humphries said. “It is the one act by Melbourne developers which I applaud.”

Among those pushing for a statue is Maribyrnong MP Bill Shorten.