

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## CANBERRA MUMS AND ST.GEORGE FOUNDATION INNOVATE TO KEEP SICK CHILDREN CONNECTED TO THEIR SCHOOLS

Canberra, Australia

Today at the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, St.George Foundation and MissingSchool announced funding of up to \$600,000 over three years to enable an Australian-first telepresence robot pilot.

“The Foundation’s new Inspire Grant supports innovative interventions that change the course of children’s lives, and this year we’re thrilled to award it to MissingSchool for their work on education connection for sick kids in Australia,” said Vanessa Barry, head of St.George Foundation.

“St.George Foundation funded MissingSchool’s research, released in 2015, which revealed a gap in education provision and prompted the first Commonwealth-funded research into the issue for kids who are facing the hardest challenge of their lives.”

MissingSchool’s pilot will place telepresence robots in willing schools to demonstrate that continuous two-way connection is possible between seriously sick children and their classrooms when they are absent, missing school.

“Tens of thousands of sick kids in Australia, who miss school often or for long periods, can potentially fall behind academically and experience isolation from their school communities leaving lifelong effects on productivity, and social and emotional wellbeing,” said MissingSchool Chair, Megan Gilmour.

“I pitched this idea to St.George Foundation from the Netherlands, while on a Churchill Fellowship in countries using similar solutions at scale - I know that Australia can take this leap for sick kids.”

ACT Education Minister Yvette Berry has agreed to explore a limited trial making the ACT the first jurisdiction in the national pilot, and one of only a handful in the world to trial this solution. Chief Minister Andrew Barr joined the announcement, affirming the ACT’s push to strengthen inclusion and innovation in ACT schools and its leadership in school connectivity and digital transformation.

Telepresence allows kids who are away from school to be seen and heard in their classrooms, and learn from their teachers with their classmates. The pilot is intended to be a catalyst for long-term solutions for sick kids that integrates connection between hospital, home and school. It can support all students to learn about inclusion through applied STEM.

MissingSchool is a volunteer not-for-profit organisation established in 2012 by three Canberra mothers whose sons were treated on the Turnbull Ward of the Sydney Children’s Hospital for their critical and life-threatening illnesses.



The three Canberra mothers identified improvements could be made to better support children in maintaining contact with their schools and classmates. As they spoke to more parents, educators and health professionals, it became clear many sick children and their families were seeking this support.

The St. George Foundation grant will help MissingSchool roll out up to 75 robots over three years to demonstrate cost effective and innovative ways to include these children in their regular schools.

“Medical science is saving and prolonging the lives of sick kids and we must act now to give them real-time inclusion in their classes and connection with their friends and teachers, to have hope and build positive futures,” said Ms Gilmour.

“The approach MissingSchool is pursuing demonstrates the way complex social challenges can be tackled by combining the strengths of government, private sector, and not for profits.”

To find out more visit [missingschool.org.au/telepresence](https://missingschool.org.au/telepresence)

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