



## I CAN TOO BECAUSE I'M A CANCER RESEARCHER

Dr Zaklina Kovacevic wears many Can Too hats, from a swimming participant to a cancer researcher, a fundraiser and a grant beneficiary.

*"As an early career cancer researcher, my first big grant was funded by Can Too and that really opened up the world of Can Too to me," said Zaklina.*

*"This grant was a massive boost in my career which enabled me to perform the research that I was interested in but also to build my track record which opened up further opportunities, without which I'd really have struggled to go further with my research."*

The Senior Research Fellow spoke to some of Can Too's training pods about her work which encouraged her to join the Foundation.

*"I was really inspired by all the people I met and the incredible things they were doing for people like me."*

She dived into a Can Too 1km swimming program, then 12 weeks later completed the 2.8km 2019 Palm Beach to Whale Beach Macquarie "Big Swim" event.

*"I've never really been a swimmer I would go to the beach and just frolic in the water, so this was a first for me to learn how to ocean swim properly."*

***"I was on such a high after finishing the Big Swim. Running up that beach having all the Can Tooers supporting me and my family waiting at the end, I felt like I achieved something really amazing."***

She then jumped in the deep end embarking on the 2019 Balmoral 5km Swim program.

*"At the first training session I thought 'oh my god what have I got myself into'. But I've built up the confidence and skills with the amazing coaches and support people, who made it enjoyable. It's a little bit crazy but I should be able to get there".*

Can Too Coach Mike Langley said that he normally wouldn't recommend someone jump from the 1km program to the 5km swim but Zaklina's got that mental resilience to do it.

*"I don't think I've ever seen someone smile so much – even when she's taking a breath in the water she's smiling; she's super positive and I'm stoked to see her doing the 5km swim," says Mike.*

**Zaklina fulfilled her goal to complete the long-distance swim and found that the determination required was similar to what drives her in the lab.**

*"When I finished the 5km race the feeling was absolutely amazing. It was a big high and I was so glad that I pushed through. There were times in the water where I thought 'I can't do this it's too hard', but then I thought about how tough it is for people dealing with cancer and undergoing chemo."*

*"It's similar to research, where we get discouraged by lack of funding or things not working and there's seemingly no end in sight. You feel like you've hit a brick wall and*



*you don't know where to go next, but you just have to persevere and use the passion that drives you and eventually a solution will present itself."*

**Zaklina and her team have made several research breakthroughs including understanding how a molecule has the potential ability to stop the metastasis of breast, prostate and pancreatic cancer.**

*"My group and I are investigating how we can use this molecule to prevent these cancers from spreading and from developing resistance to current therapies.*

*"Other exciting findings are that this molecule can be used as a potential biomarker for whether a certain patient might be more likely to develop resistance or metastasis, so that's been quite exciting."*

Growing up Zaklina loved science, especially medicine and how the human body worked.

*"At uni I fell in love with cancer research as cancer is a huge problem in our society with so many people affected by it. It felt natural for me to contribute to research that will help people. I enjoy the challenge of trying to understand such a complex disease and hopefully will develop a new strategy on how we can tackle this major problem."*

Zaklina explains that supporting Australian early to mid-career researchers is so important, as they are vulnerable to underfunding and we risk losing them to

overseas research teams which is a terrible shame and a loss for Australia.

"For early and mid-career researchers they don't have that track record that senior professors have, which makes it difficult to compete with them for funding. The fundraising by the Can Too community gives us opportunities, making us more competitive when applying for bigger government grants and it really helps kick start careers.

"I Can Too because I believe in the power of research to change lives and hopefully find a cure for cancer. I want to thank all the people that have sponsored and supported me throughout this journey and all the incredible people I've met with Can Too. I've really loved every moment that I've been involved with Can Too."

