

# When you need a boost, that's what friends are for

A friend's death motivated Dr Ronnie Goldberg to set up Friends-R-4 for cancer research, writes **Natalie Puchalski**.

AFTER highlighting Australia's status as having the lowest rate of organ donation in the developed world, Ronnie Goldberg, OAM, is well under way with his new fight, this time against cancer.

As chairman of the Have a Heart, Give a Part campaign, Dr Goldberg, a dentist, played a key role in prompting the Government's decision last year to provide \$150 million to boost organ donation.

Shortly after, he turned 70 and was looking forward to "putting his feet up, playing golf and spending time with the grandchildren". But that all changed after several tragedies.

First, his best friend, Dowell Mitchell, learned he had a "vile form of leukaemia". Then another friend, Frankston dentist Rod Robertson, was also diagnosed with leukaemia.

Soon after that, Dr Goldberg's best friend from childhood, whom he prefers not to name, learned that he had melanoma.

It was after Dr Robertson's death last year that Dr Goldberg felt motivated to act. While visit-

ing his friends had brought them a few minutes of relief, he felt he needed to do something more lasting.

And so he set up Friends-R-4 to raise funds for research into various areas of cancer, including early detection, treatment and medical equipment.

His first project was to raise \$180,000 for research by the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre into the development of new anti-cancer medication, to reduce the outcome and side effects of chemotherapy.

With "generous support" from the community, Dr Goldberg's Friends-R-4 was able to raise \$90,000, which was matched by Australian Rotary Health.

"I had three years to raise the money and I raised it in six months," he said.

After the success of this first project, Friends-R-4 now has three more in the works.

One was triggered by a particularly alarming statistic Dr Goldberg discovered: 40 per cent of all children who have radiotherapy for brain tumours have permanent brain damage.



Ronnie Goldberg, OAM, has turned his attention from boosting organ donations to funding cancer research.

PICTURE: KEN IRWIN

As a result, Friends-R-4 is raising money for a five-year research study at the Royal Children's Hospital, to produce a neuropsychological cognitive test that may help early identification of brain defects in children undergoing treatment.

Another frightening fact —

Australia is the "melanoma capital of the world" — and once again Dr Goldberg was moved into action, helping raise \$100,000 for the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre to fund studies into treatments for melanoma.

This week, Dr Goldberg's

childhood friend died from melanoma at 65. His friend, he says, underwent "horrible" treatment before his death.

"Basically what I've done is personally declared war on cancer," Dr Goldberg said.

This "war" has now also extended to funding stem-cell

research into finding effective therapies to kill myeloma stem cells and cure patients.

So far, the Pratt Foundation has donated half of the \$180,000 needed, but it is up to Friends-R-4 to match that amount.

"And I've got other rotary clubs involved — I'm driving

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Ronnie Goldberg

them mad, taking on all these things," Dr Goldberg said.

"But the second \$90,000 is harder to get."

However, Dr Goldberg is optimistic about the generosity of the Australian community.

"In this day and age, there was the bushfires and the floods, and then there is the global financial crisis and all the funding has gone down and I'm still going out and it's still happening," he said.

"The Australian people are beautiful. I don't know any other country in the world where people help other people like they do here."

To donate, visit [friendsr4.org.au](http://friendsr4.org.au)