

Melissa Leong says Australia is slow to acknowledge women's achievements. Picture: Jonathan Ng

Women still have Leong way to go

Zara Powell

Melissa Leong is all for celebrating successful women, although she says Australia still has some catching up to do when it comes to recognising their achievements.

The food critic and media personality was among the judges for this year's Marie Claire Women of the Year Awards, stepping out in a Viceta Wang dress last night.

"I think collectively Australia is slow to acknowledge women," she said.

"On one hand it is (recognition for successful women) getting better, but there is still a lot of embedded misogyny that stops women being pushed forward when they certainly deserve to."

And her support for women extends beyond Australia, with Leong also throwing her support behind Meghan Markle.

"Historically, Meghan has had a tough run of things, but I think she does such a great job," she said.

The former MasterChef judge wished the Duchess of Sussex well in her upcoming appearance on MasterChef Junior, claiming she would do an "amazing job".

Also at the awards were model Lara Worthington, singer Tina Arena and RecipeTin Eats founder Nagi Maehashi.

Having been a nominee herself last year, Leong admitted choosing the winners was no easy task.

"Every single one of the women nominated is so worthy of winning," she said.

"Everywhere you look, you are drowning in the most brilliant women that Australia has produced."

Meanwhile, Leong is enjoying a new chapter of her own, hosting Channel 10's Healthy, Wealthy and Wise, her first solo television show.

Progress in drugs to fight dementia

Alzheimer's trial promising

Ike Morris

A drug aimed at reducing Alzheimer's symptoms has shown promising results in older Australians in its second round of trials.

Australian biotech company Actinogen yesterday released the results of their phase 2 trials of the drug Emestedastat, which works by blocking the production of the stress hormone cortisol in key areas of the brain.

Developed under the brand name Xanamem, the trial involved 247 patients in Australia and the US with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease, taking a daily pill over 36 weeks.

While it showed it slowed the progress of the disease by 30 per cent in those over the age of 75 – representing half the trial group – it did not record a statistically significant benefit in the overall trial group.

According to Actinogen, most participants in the trial experienced few side effects during the 36 weeks.

Actinogen chief executive Steven Gourlay said a recent $10.8 million research and development tax incentive rebate awarded by the federal government put them in a stronger cash position amid the trial.

"It encourages companies like us to do as much research in Australia as we can," Dr Gourlay said.

"So it's been good for Australian jobs, it's been good for Australian science, and it's been great for helping companies like us to do the work that we need to do to answer important questions like, 'Does this drug that controls cortisol work in Alzheimer's disease?'," he said.

The next trial is expected to involve 700 patients and would begin in mid-2027, with the company hoping to get the drug to market in 2030.

Dr Gourlay said if that trial proved successful, he would hope they would be in a position to mass produce the drug, pending approval by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA).

He said he would also welcome it being listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme following further trials and pricing assessments

"We would obviously be developing a lot of economic data to show the PBS when the drug gets approved, as you do in Australia and a lot of European countries – less so in the US – to show that the drug really is creating value: preventing people from going into nursing homes, improving quality of life, reducing system costs," Dr Gourlay said.

"And hopefully that would be convincing, and that would then bring forward the day that PBS would give us an approval."

Dementia – an umbrella term for neurological conditions including Alzheimer's – is the leading cause of death among all Australians.

According to Dementia Australia, 446,500 Australians are currently living with dementia, with that number expected to increase to more than one million by 2065.

News of Xanamem's results was released on the same day Dementia Australia released No Time to Lose: A United Call for National Dementia Reform, renewing its call for the federal government to "take decisive action to address one of the nation's greatest health, social and economic challenges".



Makybe Diva and her three Melbourne Cup trophies.

Fourth Melbourne Cup trophy is stolen

A man accused of stealing Makybe Diva's three Melbourne Cups has been freed on bail as police reveal a fourth Melbourne Cup was also nicked.

Chrysovalandis Tassakos, 39, was granted bail in Melbourne Magistrates' Court on Thursday – just 48 hours after his arrest following a police manhunt. He is charged with three counts each of burglary and theft, as well as handling stolen goods and financial advantage by deception.

Police allege thieves dressed as tradesmen entered Flemington's Hill Stand and stole Makybe Diva's 2003, 2004 and 2005 Cups, worth $1 million each, after smashing a glass display cabinet about 6.30am on Monday. Tassakos is also accused of stealing the 1948 Caulfield Cup – won by Red Fury – at Caulfield Racecourse between November 4 and 11.

The 39-year-old ran from court and straight onto a public bus seconds after he was freed on bail. He was wearing white Nike runners, black Lacoste tracksuit pants and held his black T-shirt over his head.

His release comes as it can be revealed another man, Sama Mirzaagha, 36, was on bail when he too was allegedly involved in the theft of Melbourne Cups. Mirzaagha did not apply for bail.

His lawyer Justin Riazaty told the court he had "grave concerns" about police conduct in the matter, calling it a "flimsy" case.

"There seems to have been a rush to charge and investigating later," Mr Riazaty said.

Details on the fourth Melbourne Cup that was stolen were limited, with police only able to say it was allegedly taken from Flemington on November 12.