



# AGEING RESEARCH ONLINE NEWS

Volume 5, Issue 1

News and information on ageing policy and research initiatives

March 2008

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## Meet the new Ministers responsible for Health and Ageing

On 3 December 2007 Nicola Roxon was sworn in as the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, and Justine Elliot as the Federal Minister for Ageing.



### **The Hon. Nicola Roxon MP – Minister for Health and Ageing**

Nicola Roxon has been a member of Federal Parliament since 1998 representing the western suburbs seat of Gellibrand in Melbourne. She previously held the positions of Shadow Minister Children and Youth, Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader on the Status of Women, Shadow Minister for Immigration, Shadow Attorney-General and Shadow Minister for Health. Minister Roxon is an honours law graduate, who worked as an industrial lawyer, union organiser and judge's associate to Justice Mary Gaudron in the High Court of Australia prior to her election to parliament.



### **The Hon. Justine Elliot MP – Minister for Ageing**

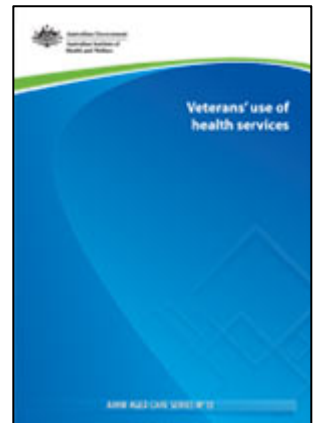
Justine Elliot has been the Federal Member for Richmond since 2004. Prior to being a Federal MP, Minister Elliot was a former community representative on the Northern Rivers Area Health Service Hospital and Community Health Council, a representative for Fingal Head on the Tweed Coastal Committee. She has also worked as a Youth Justice Convenor with the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice and was previously a Police Officer.

Minister Roxon and Minister Elliot are joined by The Hon. Kate Ellis MP – Minister for Sport, and Senator the Hon. Jan McLucas – Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing.

For more information on the Ministers, please see the Department of Health and Ageing's website at: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/Ministers-1>

## NEW PUBLICATION FROM THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF HEALTH AND WELFARE (AIHW) – Veterans' Use of Health Services

This report uses data linked between aged care services and Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), to examine patterns of use of DVA-funded medical and allied health services by DVA gold cardholders aged 70 years and over living in permanent residential aged care, and compare these patterns with those of gold cardholders of the same age and sex living in the community. The health services examined are: general practitioner (GP), including local medical officer (LMO) consultations, medical specialist consultations, pharmaceutical use under the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (RPBS), and hospital use. The book is authored by Phil Anderson and Jonas Lloyd, and was published on the 25th February 2008 by AIHW.



The report can be accessed online through the AIHW website, or by following the link through the ARO homepage <http://www.aro.gov.au>



*Contributed by Rosi Benninghaus*

The first National Dementia Research Forum in 2007 proved to be a great success with over 360 delegates (consumers, carers, service providers and researchers) attending the two-day event for information, inspiration and networking. The Forum was organised by the Dementia Collaborative Research Centres (DCRC) which were established in 2006 under ‘Dementia: A Health Priority Initiative’. Many delegates commented on the variety of activities offered at the forum which made the event interesting and provided a good overview of current developments in dementia research. A number of the forum talks can now be downloaded from <http://www.dementia.unsw.edu.au/DCRCweb.nsf/page/Research+Forum+2007+Talks>

The 2008 National Dementia Research Forum will be held at the Wesley Conference Centre in Sydney on 18/19 September 2008 - so mark these dates in your diary now! Showcasing the work and linkages of the DCRCs, the new program has been built on the foundations laid in 2007 and feedback received from delegates. The forum will offer a variety of plenaries (including four international speakers), workshops, debates, two poster sessions and, due to its popularity last year, another ‘*Breakfast with the Experts*’. A new feature will be a working lunch for emerging researchers on the first day of the Forum to assist networking and career planning.

For updates about the National Dementia Research Forum 2008, and a call for poster abstracts, visit the Centres’ website <http://www.dementia.unsw.edu.au>.

### Alzheimer’s Australia Research Grants 2008

*Contributed by Dinusha Fernando*

The research branch of Alzheimer’s Australia (AAR), recognises that most of our current knowledge about dementia has been discovered by researchers in the last 15 to 20 years. Investing in dementia research today will promote continuing advances in this important field, and bring hope for all people with dementia and their families. AAR is happy to be offering a wide range of research grants in 2008 including travel grants, grants focussing on dementia care, and grants for new researchers, and is encouraging quality applications from all round Australia.

<p><b><u>Research Grants</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 4 AAR Dementia Research Grants for new researchers of \$20,000</li> <li>▪ Hazel Hawke Research Grant in Dementia Care of \$20,000</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Postgraduate Scholarships</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hunter Postgraduate Research Scholarship into the Causes of Alzheimer’s Disease (\$23,000 per year for 3 years)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Travel Grants</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rosemary Foundation Travel Project Grant of \$10,000</li> <li>▪ Rosemary Foundation Travel Stipend Grant of \$5,000</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Postdoctoral Fellowships</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ AAR Post-doctoral Fellowship (\$90,000 per year for 2 years)</li> <li>▪ 4 Viertel Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowships in Dementia (\$45,000 per year for 2 years with payments matched by applicants’ institution)</li> </ul>

Applications for the Research and Travel Grants will close 25 April 2008. Applications for the Post-doctoral Fellowship Grants are currently open, and will close on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2008. Postgraduate Scholarship applications will open 1 September 2008 and close 31 October 2008. Application forms can be found at <http://www.alzheimers.org.au/content.cfm?topicid=250>

If you have any questions please contact: Dinusha Fernando at [aar@alzheimers.org.au](mailto:aar@alzheimers.org.au)



# Men, Women and Ageing: Predictors of Ageing Well

*In the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health and the Perth Health in Men Study*

*Contributed by Deidre McLaughlin*

Maintaining health and independent living are high priorities for Australia's rapidly-expanding older population. This project capitalizes on two existing large-scale studies, to increase our scientific understanding of strategies for maintaining the health and well-being of older people living in the community.

Two separate longitudinal research projects, the *Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH)* involving over 12,000 older women selected from every part of Australia, and the *Health in Men Study (HIMS)* involving over 12,000 older men from Perth, Western Australia, have been following older Australians in order to determine what contributes to older people's health and quality of life.

The two research teams have designed the projects to be compatible, with identical survey questions and overlapping research designs. The Women's study is larger and has national coverage, while the Men's study includes more direct physical measures and a wider age range. This project is combining data from these two studies and is managed across two sites, one at the University of Queensland and the other at the University of Western Australia. The overall objective of the project is to explore successful ageing in men and women and to investigate potentially modifiable factors that may contribute to ageing well. This will inform the development of policy and interventions specifically targeting well being in old age.

The multi-disciplinary team of investigators is led by Professor Annette Dobson (UQ) and includes Professor Konrad Jamrozik (Adelaide), Professor Paul Norman (UWA), Professor Leon Flicker (UWA), Professor Osvaldo Almeida (UWA), Professor Wendy Brown (UQ), Professor Graeme Hankey (UWA), Professor Julie Byles (Newcastle), Associate Professor Nancy Pachana (UQ) and Associate Professor Jon Adams (UQ).

A Policy Advisory Group has been formed to ensure that the research program of the study is relevant to the needs of State and Federal Governments. The

Policy Advisory Group members all have extensive expertise in ageing and are drawn from State and Federal Government Departments and a national consumer organisation (National Seniors). This group meets regularly both by teleconference and at annual face to face meetings.

Four research fellows have been appointed, two each at Queensland and Western Australia, as well as a postgraduate student at UQ.

An important component of this project is the establishment of linkages to State and Federal health databases. Both ALSWH and HIMS have established linkages with key sets of data, such as the National Death Index. HIMS has established linkages to WA Department of Health data through the WA Data Linkage Unit and access to this database is currently being negotiated for the estimated 950 ALSWH women who reside in Western Australia. ALSWH has linkages to the Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS) and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) databases and linkage to these databases for the HIMS participants is under negotiation. Both HIMS and ALSWH are also currently negotiating for linkage to the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program National Minimum Data Set (MDS) Collection for Western Australia.

A further round of data collection is being planned in 2008 for HIMS and this will coincide with the fifth survey of the ALSWH participants. In addition, a sub-study of both the men and women is scheduled for October 2008 to gather additional data on cognitive status and psychological well-being in these older Australians.

Analyses of the pooled data which are currently underway are addressing a diverse range of topics including smoking, stroke, overall mortality, healthy weight, trauma and social networks among the men and women.

This project was funded by the NHMRC/ARC Ageing Well, Ageing Productively Research Program.

For further information, please contact Deidre McLaughlin at:

[deidre.mclaughlin@uq.edu.au](mailto:deidre.mclaughlin@uq.edu.au)

or see the study website at

<http://www.menwomenandageing.org>.

## Dementia in Indigenous older Australians: How to assess the prevalence and extent of unmet needs.

*Contributed by Dr Dina LoGiudice*

A number of research projects, funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Dementia Grants, have been undertaken to address the needs of Indigenous elders with dementia. The Kimberley Indigenous Cognitive Assessment tool (KICA), was developed in 2003 in response to gauging these needs, and it was validated in several Indigenous communities in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Since that time it has been validated in Northern Territory, and will soon be trialled in Northern Queensland. This tool is now commonly used by health professionals working in remote and rural areas of Australia.

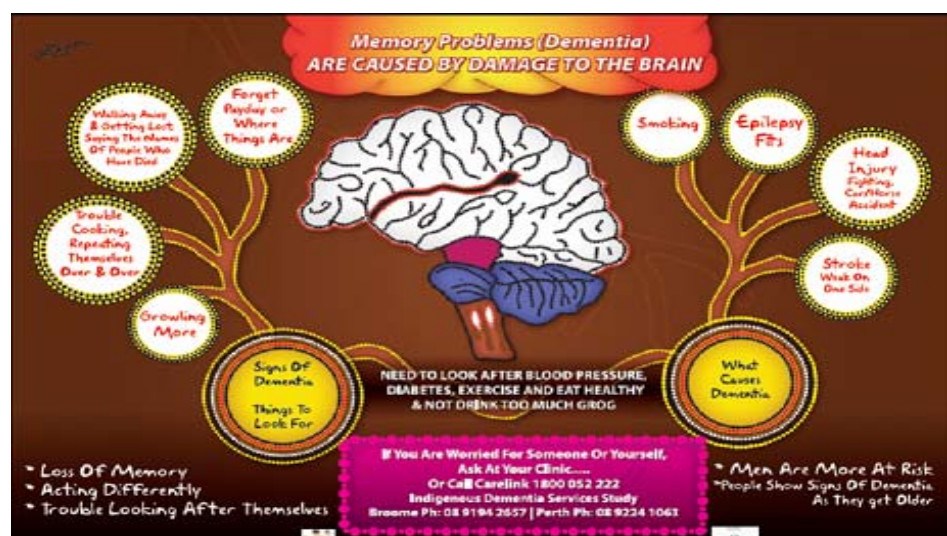
The results from the KICA project have so far indicated that Indigenous Australians living in the Kimberley have a much higher prevalence of dementia than previously reported for non-Indigenous Australians, particularly in the younger age cohorts. Risk factors associated with dementia in this sample are likely to reflect the underlying pathophysiological mechanisms that contribute to the development of dementia in both rural and remote Indigenous communities.

Following on from these results, a current study is now focusing on finding out to what extent the needs of people with dementia and their family carers are going unmet in these Indigenous populations. By working together with communities and service providers the study is trialling new approaches to providing aged care.

The study will initially involve interviewing service providers, workers and family carers. The information gathered through this research will be passed on to focus groups in several communities, so that the communities as a whole can determine the best approaches to care for older people with dementia. The study team will work with the services and communities to trial these new approaches, and to evaluate whether improvements are being seen in community members' health and well being.

It is acknowledged that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work, and that several different models of care will need to be developed and trialled as decided by each community. This study will be run in the Kimberley over 2007-08 and in Pilbara from 2008-09. It is hoped that the information gathered through the studies will aid to inform government policy and best practice guidelines, and to improve outcomes for those with dementia in these indigenous areas of Australia.

The project team includes Professors Leon Flicker, Osvaldo Almeida and Nicola Lautenschlager, Ms Kate Smith, Naomi Ralph, Jocelyn Jones and Anna Dwyer (WACHA), Dr Dina LoGiudice, National Ageing Research Institute, Dr David Atkinson, Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services Council, Broome & School of Primary Aboriginal and Rural Health Care, University Western Australia. Dr Melissa Lindemann, Deakin University Melbourne and Mr Frank Schafer Alzheimer's Australia WA.



*There have been many organisations (including Kimberley Aged Community Services), communities and individuals who have contributed to the project, for which we are extremely grateful. (Poster by Anne Dwyer)*

The Dementia Collaborative Research Centres (DCRCs) are undertaking and facilitating a large number of dementia research projects in the areas of

- Assessment and Better Care Outcomes
- Consumers, Carers and Social Research
- Prevention, Risk Reduction and Early Detection

A number of projects, mainly literature reviews, have now been completed in the Assessment and Better Care Outcomes area. Summaries of findings can be downloaded from the DCRC website as listed below:

Behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia: a literature review of psychosocial treatments and the identification of further research topics regarding treatment effectiveness and implementation

<http://www.dementia.unsw.edu.au/DCRCweb.nsf/page/BPSD>

Four focus groups of GPs and practice nurses, examining current and proposed practice in dementia assessment, diagnosis and management

<http://www.dementia.unsw.edu.au/DCRCweb.nsf/page/GeneralPractice>

Competencies in Dementia Care: Across Care Settings and Levels of Nursing Practice and Recruitment and Retention of nurses in Dementia/Aged Care

<http://www.dementia.unsw.edu.au/DCRCweb.nsf/page/Nursing>

If you would like to receive the quarterly DCRC Newsletter, please email [dementiacrc@unsw.edu.au](mailto:dementiacrc@unsw.edu.au). Previous issues can be found at <http://www.dementia.unsw.edu.au/DCRCweb.nsf/page/newsletters>.

### DETECT

#### A new device to measure the early onset of Alzheimer's

The latest medications can delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease but none are able to reverse its devastating effects. This limitation often makes early detection the key to Alzheimer's patients maintaining a good quality of life for as long as possible. Now, a new device developed by the Georgia Institute of Technology and Emory University may allow patients to take a brief, inexpensive test that could be administered as part of a routine yearly check-up at a doctor's office to detect mild cognitive impairment (MCI), which is often the earliest stage of Alzheimer's.

Current assessment tests capable of detecting early Alzheimer's typically are taken with a pen and paper or at a computer terminal and last about an hour and a half. They must be given by a trained technician in a quiet environment, because any distractions can influence the patient's score and reduce the test's effectiveness. Because of their length and expense, the tests are not used as regular screening tools and typically are given only after there is obvious cognitive impairment such as forgetfulness or unsafe behaviour.

The Georgia Tech and Emory device, called DETECT, gives individuals a roughly ten-minute test designed to gauge reaction time and memory functions that, when impaired, are associated with the earliest stages of Alzheimer's disease. Preliminary analysis of the first 100 patients of a 400 person clinical study being conducted at Emory's Wesley Woods Centre has shown that the 10 minute DETECT test has similar accuracy as the 90 minute 'Gold Standard' pen and paper test.

"We really envision this to be part of the normal preventative care a patient receives from a general practitioner," said Michelle LaPlaca, Ph.D., one of the creators of the device and an associate professor in the Wallace H. Coulter Department of Biomedical Engineering at Georgia Tech and Emory University. The device is expected to be available commercially later on in the year. For more information check the research entry on the ARO at <http://www.aro.gov.au/aro/researchEntryView.do?id=2720&type=subject> (Information in this article is quoted from site entry on the ARO.)

## **A DIRECT look at quality of life for people with dementia living in residential care**

*Contributed by Dr Christopher Beer, Senior Lecturer in Geriatric Medicine*

As our population ages, we are seeing an increase in the prevalence of memory loss and cognitive impairment, such as in Alzheimer's disease. The quality of life for people living with dementia in nursing homes and hostels, and how to improve it, is an active area of research. The Dementia in Residential Care: Education Intervention Trial (DIRECT) is investigating the impact of dementia care education on residents' quality of life. Education will be offered to both General Practitioners and Residential Aged Care Facility staff.

The study has successfully recruited 45 facilities and 35 GPs and is currently screening residents with cognitive impairment, in order to enrol around 400 subjects. The project has already undertaken a learning needs analysis including GPs, RACF staff, and the relatives of residents with dementia to explore what to include in the educational package.

This was undertaken with support from the WA General Practitioner Network. The package, which will offer flexible delivery of targeted topics in high quality dementia care, is currently being designed, in collaboration with Silver Chain Nursing Association. The study is overseen by a Steering Committee of stakeholders such as the University of Western Australia, Curtin University, Brightwater Group, Royal Freemasons, and Alzheimer's Australia.

In the next phase of the study, half of the facilities and GPs will be randomised to be offered the education intervention, and residents will be monitored for changes in their quality of life, utilising a range of validated scales and questionnaires. Progress to date has been assisted by generous support from the DIRECT Expert Reference Group. Members of the Expert Reference Group include representatives from McCusker Learning, Monash University, and Aged Care Services Australia.

The Dementia Research Grants Program, which is funded by the Commonwealth Government, aims to improve the quality of life for people with dementia and their carers through research into identified gaps in applied and translational dementia research. The program aims to achieve this through the establishment of multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral research programs and by supporting areas of dementia research that focus on practical applications of evidence based research. For more information, contact Dr. Christopher Beer via email at: [christopher.beer@uwa.edu.au](mailto:christopher.beer@uwa.edu.au).



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# NHMRC/ARC

## Ageing Well Ageing Productively

### Research Program

#### Examining a core assumption of policy and services for older Indigenous Australians

It's been over twenty years since the age benchmarks used in aged care service planning were set at 50+ years for the Indigenous Australian population and 70+ for the non-Indigenous population. An underlying assumption is that Australia's Indigenous population ages earlier than the non-Indigenous population – that is, the Indigenous population aged over 50 has the same set of conditions and care needs as the non-Indigenous population aged over 70. But the evidence for this is not established.

The gap in life expectancy of nearly twenty years is probably the most iconic statistic in Indigenous health. However, while it is well documented that the Indigenous population has worse health outcomes across all age groups relative to non-Indigenous Australians, our understanding of the details of the observed pattern is far from complete. The use of age 50 for Indigenous aged care planning may have been a pragmatic policy decision rather than a misconception but there has been no follow-up to determine either its benefits or unintended consequences.

To look at these issues the project is:

- Analysing health survey, mortality and hospital data to compare the health status of Indigenous Australians aged 50 years or over to the non-Indigenous population aged 70 years or over;
- Comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients of aged care services and their patterns of use using data from the Aged and Community Care Management Information System maintained by the Department of Health and Ageing, data collected by Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACAP MDS v 2) and data from the Home and Community Care Program in the Northern Territory;
- Examining changing demographics of the older Indigenous population since the mid 1980s; and
- Examining policy documentation and undertaking interviews with key policy makers and providers to understand the origins and implementation of the policy.

The 2 year study commenced in January 2008 and is a collaboration of researchers at Charles Darwin University (Tony Barnes, John Condon, Philippa Cotter and Teresa Cunningham), Melbourne University (Ian Anderson) and the Australian National University (Len Smith). Further information is available from Philippa Cotter [philippa.cotter@cdu.edu.au](mailto:philippa.cotter@cdu.edu.au)

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*New courses on the ARO*

#### **New Gerontology Program at LaTrobe University**

LaTrobe University has just announced a new gerontology program in the beginning of 2008 in it's Health Sciences department, offering Graduate Certificates, Postgraduate Diplomas, and Masters in the growing field of gerontology.

These courses aim to meet the needs of a wide range of graduates who wish to develop knowledge and skills that will enable them to pursue career interests in areas associated with older people. The programs are relevant to a wide range of professionals including health and welfare administrators, medical practitioners, nurses and allied health professionals. The programs are multi-disciplinary in their approach and integrate biological, psychological and social perspectives on ageing. Content addresses the promotion of healthy ageing and independence, as well as services and policies related to the support and care needs of the frailer aged.

Details of the courses can be found in the ARO course directory at:

<http://www.aro.gov.au/aro/courseSearchPerform.do?organisation=&searchText=LTU&Search=Search>

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# SELF MANAGEMENT RESEARCH SEMINAR

Hosted by the Department of Veterans' Affairs

Contributed by Fern Lees

On Wednesday 27 February 2008 the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) hosted a Research Seminar entitled 'Self Management'. The Research Seminar is part of a series which the DVA Applied Research Program organises quarterly. This has been the first time the Department has created a research seminar with a theme. Having a central theme provided an opportunity for the presenters to interact with one another. The audience gained a broader understanding of three different aspects of the topic, and audience participation was increased.

Self Management was chosen as the theme because of the excellent health outcomes in this field of study. Self management of chronic illness, prescribed medicines and alcohol related disorders has vast potential to benefit the veteran community as well as the future younger veteran population. The presenters were very passionate about their topics and were able to provide the audience with examples of positive outcomes of their research programs.

## The Presenters

- Dr Debbie Kralik & Dr Anne van Loon – Royal District Nursing Service Research Unit, University of South Australia
- Robert Peck – Medicine Management, Department of Veterans' Affairs
- Dr Jill Beattie - Flinders Human Behaviour and Health Research Unit, Flinders University, South Australia



*Left – Right: Presenters Dr Jill Beattie, Robert Peck, Dr Debbie Kralik, Dr Anne van Loon and Repatriation Commissioner Brig Bill Rolfe (retd) AO.*

## The Presentations

### 'Transition in Chronic Illness, Self Care'

The aim of this presentation was to provide the audience with information on effective ways to work with people learning to live with chronic illness. Presenter Dr Anne van Loon spoke about the transition frame work and the 4 stages through transition; 'Familiar Life', 'Ending', 'Limbo' and 'Becoming ordinary'. Dr Debbie Kralik then took the audience through 'Look, Think and Act'; a process of self care designed to assist people to adapt to their chronic illness and reclaim a sense of order and control in life. Dr Kralik's team have created information booklets on Transition in Chronic Illness and Self care which can be downloaded at [www.rdns.org.au](http://www.rdns.org.au)

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## **‘Veterans’ MATES – Helping veterans get the best from their medicines’**

The Veterans' MATES program has been running for three and a half years. Mr Robert Peck spoke about the aim of the MATES program which is to improve medication use for veterans by delivering eighteen educational modules.

The modules are designed to educate Veterans, general practitioners and pharmacists about home medicine review. To date 20,000 general practitioners and 168,000 veterans have received at least one education module to assist in targeted better medication management. Further information on the Veterans’ MATES program can be found at <http://dva.gov.au/health/veteransmates/index.htm>

## **‘Veterans: Real Partners in Health – A trial of implementing evidence based care and self management for veterans with alcohol related disorders’**

Dr Jill Beattie presented a research project which is currently being funded by the Department of Veterans’ Affairs Applied Research Program. Vietnam veterans, and veterans in general, have high rates of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and alcohol-related disorders. This has major consequences in terms of morbidity, early mortality, physical and mental health, relationship breakdown, and unemployment.

Dr Beattie explained that there are a variety of interventions available to veterans such as PTSD programs; alcohol, relationship, and anger management programs; as well as crisis intervention, detox, medication therapy, counselling, and rehabilitation programs. However, there has been no systematic method of assessment and management of alcohol-related problems in veterans with psychiatric co-morbidity.

The audience was shown the ‘Flinders model’ and how it is being used in a clinical trial to assist veterans’ self management with alcohol related disorders. The team at Flinders University, lead by Dr Malcolm Battersby, is half way through the study, and Dr Beattie reported preliminary results have been encouraging. Many of the participants reported that they were better able to control their alcohol intake, had experienced improved sleep and were rebuilding relationships with their families. One participant reported that he had been able to walk the Kokoda trail!

Information about the Flinders model can view at the Flinders Human Behaviour & Health Research website. [http://som.flinders.edu.au/FUSA/CCTU/self\\_management.htm](http://som.flinders.edu.au/FUSA/CCTU/self_management.htm)

## **The Audience**

The audience included Department of Veterans’ Affairs staff and invited guests such as; members of the Centre of Military and Veterans’ Health, Defence, Veterans’ Associations, the RSL and ex-servicemen associations. Members of the audience commented:

*" I found the research seminar held yesterday to be very interesting and relevant to my role. The seminar theme of 'self management' brought together a good range of research from this area. The work being done by Dr Debbie Kralik and Dr Anne Van Loon looking at Transition in Chronic Illness was of particular interest to me in thinking about the correlates between managing chronic illness and managing rehabilitation from an injury or illness and re-engaging in work and community. Looking at behaviour change and stages of change in the fresh way it was presented I can see has broader applications beyond dealing with Chronic Illness. A worthwhile seminar. "* Simon Graham, Rehabilitation Policy, Department of Veterans’ Affairs

*"The Seminar was extremely informative and the information that the individual research projects will provide upon completion will be of great benefit to our members. The availability of the DVD later on will also be of benefit to those that were not able to attend the seminar as well as providing an excellent reference resource in the future."* Pat McCabe, Secretary ACT TPI Association.

The Department of Veterans’ Affairs will be holding its next Research Seminar on May 14 2008 at the DVA Canberra office, Lovett Tower, 13 Keltie Street in Woden ACT. All interested parties are invited. Further information will be on the ARO Notice board at <http://www.aro.gov.au/aro/noticeBoard.do>. Enquires can be made to the Applied Research Program of the Department on (02) 6289 6529.

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## Can vitamin D supplementation protect memory in old age?

*Contributed by Nicola Lautenschlager*

Australia's population is ageing rapidly and so is the frequency of age-related disorders. Dementia is one of the most common age-related disorders and one of the leading causes of years of life lost due to disability in Australia.

There is increasing evidence that the onset of dementia can be delayed with targeting potentially modifiable protective factors or risk factors. One potentially protective factor is vitamin D. Vitamin D is important for healthy bones and muscle function, but is now also discussed as being important for healthy brain function.

With the support of the NH&MRC Dementia Research Grant Scheme the WA Centre for Health & Ageing (WACHA) is currently conducting a randomised placebo-controlled clinical trial to investigate whether supplementation with vitamin D can help to reduce cognitive decline. The trial is called VITA-D. Currently older adults, 65 years or older, who feel they have mild problems with their memory, but have not been diagnosed with dementia, are invited to participate in the trial.

Overall 110 older adults with mild memory problems, who have low levels of vitamin D, will be randomised to either active treatment with vitamin D or placebo. Cognitive performance, quality of life and functional levels will be compared at visits after 6, 12, and 18 months of treatment.

If our hypothesis is confirmed, vitamin D supplementation might prove to be a simple, effective and inexpensive way of delaying cognitive decline in old age.

This study commenced in 2007 and to date, we have screened already over 500 interested participants for eligibility. We still require many more participants, and expect to continue recruitment throughout 2008.

More information on the VITA-D project, as well as other studies conducted by WACHA, can be viewed at our website: <http://www.wacha.org.au>. Older adults who may be interested in participating are welcome to call us on (08) 9224 2855.

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### PLEASE OFFER FEEDBACK ON THE ARO WEBSITE AND NEWSLETTER

To ensure we are providing a quality service for all our users, the Department of Health and Ageing and the ARO site administrator would like to hear any comments or suggestions you have in regards to our services. We are interested in your experience of both the ARO website and the ARO quarterly newsletter.

In particular, issues we are eager to gain information on are:

- Your experience entering research onto the ARO
- Usability of the ARO website
- Relevance of topics/research on the ARO and in the quarterly newsletter
- Organizations you would like to hear more about



This is both an attempt to gauge your level of satisfaction with our services, and a tool to help guide future directions for the contents of both the website and newsletter. Please assist us by participating in this venture. The best way to have your say is to contact the ARO site administrator by emailing: [aro@health.gov.au](mailto:aro@health.gov.au).

# National Health and Medical Research Centre (NHMRC) DEMENTIA RESEARCH GRANTS PROGRAM

## ROUND 2

On the 4th March 2008 the Minister for Ageing announced \$9.1 million in grants under Round Two of the Dementia Research Grants Program. The aim of the program is to promote and support the growing need for dementia-focused research. The grant recipients are as follows;

Chief Investigator	Administrative Institute	Recommended Funding	Grant Title
Professor Dimity Pond	University of Newcastle	\$792,180 over 2 years	Outcomes of best practice diagnosis and management of dementia in general practice.
Ms Mandy Vidovich	University of Western Australia	\$467,208 over 3 years	A randomised clinical trial of cognitive activity for older adults with mild cognitive impairment.
Professor Sergio E Starkstein	University of Western Australia	\$516,278 over 3 years	The mechanism, predictive value, and impact of apathy in patients with Alzheimers disease and their caregivers.
Professor Maria A Fiatarone Singh	University of Sydney	\$895,506 over 3 years	SMART: Study of Mental Activity and Resistance Training: a randomised controlled trial.
Professor Lynn Chenoweth	University of Technology, Sydney	\$1,473,395 over 3 years	Person-centered environment and care for residents with dementia: a cost effective way of improving quality of life and quality of care.
Assoc. Professor Sally Green	Monash University, Victoria	\$1,051,265 over 3 years	Evidence-based care of people with dementia.
Professor Gavin Andrews	University of New South Wales	\$133,050 over 2 years	Confirming the burden of disease associated with dementia using new empirically driven, Australian-based disability ratings.
Dr Julian Trollor	University of New South Wales	\$904,409 over 3 years	The role of metabolic and inflammatory factors in cognitive decline and cerebro-vascular pathology in the elderly.
Ms Lee Fay-Low	University of New South Wales	\$220,200 over 2 years	Dementia literacy in Greek, Italian and Chinese Australians.
Dr Victor Vickland	University of New South Wales	\$380,500 over 3 years	A computer model of service delivery for behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia: a tool for policy makers and service providers.
Assoc. Professor Glynda Kinsella	LaTrobe University, Victoria	\$551,452 over 3 years	Early intervention for amnesic mild cognitive impairment: a randomised

Chief Investigator	Administrative Institute	Recommended Funding	Grant Title
			trial of memory management.
Dr Maria Cooke	Griffith University, Queensland	\$148,475 over 1 year	The effect of music on agitated behaviours in older people with dementia: a randomised control trial.
Dr Nancy Panchana	University of Queensland	\$547,250 over 3 years	Validation of a competency assessment method for persons with dementia.
Professor Len Gray	University of Queensland	\$516,698 over 3 years	Clinical outcomes, staff And carer perceptions of acute hospitalisation of patients with dementia.
Professor Helen Chenery	University of Queensland	\$648,360 over 3 years	An efficacy study of a cognitive-communicative intervention to improve transition to residential care in dementia.

More information on the grants can be found at <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/news/media/rel08/080303.htm>.

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### Productive Ageing Forum

Sydney NSW

1<sup>st</sup> April

<http://www.nationalseniors.com.au/National%20Policy%20documents/PAC%20Conference%202008.pdf>

### AAG Regional Conference

Wollongong NSW

1<sup>st</sup> – 2nd April

[info@eastcoastconferences.com.au](mailto:info@eastcoastconferences.com.au)

### NSW Grandparenting Forum

Sydney, NSW

7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> April

<http://raisinggrandchildren.com.au/events.html>

### Annual Brain Impairment Conference

Melbourne VIC

1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> May

<http://www.assbi.com/>

### ACSA National Community Care Conference

Sydney NSW

14<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> May

<http://www.agedcare.org.au/Conferences/2008%20Community%20care%20conference/2008-community-care-conference.htm>

### National Dementia Research Forum

Sydney NSW

18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> September

<http://www.dementia.unsw.edu.au/DCRCweb.nsf/page/Forum>

### Australian Association of Gerontology 41<sup>st</sup> National Conference

Fremantle, WA

19th – 21st November

<http://www.aagconference.com>

## INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

### Alzheimer Europe Conference

Oslo, Norway

22<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> May

<http://www.alzheimer-conference2008.org/>

### Alzheimer's Association International Conference on Alzheimer's Disease

Chicago, USA

26<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> July

<http://www.alz.org/icad>

### IFA's 9<sup>th</sup> Global Conference on Ageing

Montreal, Canada

4<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> September

<http://www.ageingdesignmontreal.ca/en/intro.php>

### CONTACT US

Should you have any queries about this newsletter or the ARO, or suggestions for contributions please contact the ARO Site Administrator. Email: [siteadmin@aro.gov.au](mailto:siteadmin@aro.gov.au), or phone: (02) 6289 5584.

*Newsletter compiled by Jenna Gray, March 2008*