

AGEING RESEARCH ONLINE NEWS

Volume 3, Issue 4 News and information on ageing policy and research initiatives December 2006

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DEMENTIA RESEARCH GRANTS PROGRAM FUNDING ANNOUNCED

Research Grants worth a total of \$4.4million were announced by the Minister for Ageing, Senator the Hon Santo Santoro, last month.

The Dementia Research Grants Program is part of the \$320.6 million Budget initiative, *Helping Australians with dementia and their carers—making dementia a national health priority*. The Program seeks to build the evidence base in dementia research in order to improve the quality of life for people with dementia, and their carers. Specifically, the Program aims to significantly advance knowledge in early intervention and risk reduction, assessment, treatment and management, care and service, and epidemiology and population health.

Eight projects, summarised below, have been funded over three years. Further details are in the media release under Latest News on the ARO.

Chief Investigator	Title	Administering Institution
Dr Christopher Beer	<i>Improving quality of life of people with dementia living in residential care facilities: a randomised trial of educational interventions</i>	University of Western Australia
Associate Professor Gerard Byrne	<i>Prospective study of the emergence of syndromal and sub-syndromal anxiety and depression during cognitive decline</i>	University of Queensland
Associate Professor Nicola T. Lautenschlager	<i>Does vitamin D supplementation reduce cognitive decline?</i>	University of Western Australia
Dr Dina LoGiudice	<i>Models of care to address unmet need for older Indigenous people with dementia, their families and communities in remote Western Australia</i>	University of Western Australia
Associate Professor Stephen Lord	<i>Identification and quantification of risk of falls in cognitively impaired older adults</i>	University of New South Wales
Professor Daniel O'Connor	<i>Greek and Italian residents with dementia in aged care: language use, psychiatric medication, quality of life and satisfaction with care</i>	Monash University
Associate Professor David A. Scott	<i>Cognitive outcome and therapeutic interventions for coronary artery disease</i>	St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne
Professor Sergio E. Starkstein	<i>Deficits of insight and judgement in Alzheimer's disease: Diagnostic strategy and clinical significance</i>	University of Western Australia

DVA RESEARCH SEMINAR

Contributed by the Department of Veterans' Affairs

The Research Seminar series continues to attract a large cross-section of attendees from both the Veteran and the broader Health and Aged Care communities.

Representatives came from the Department of Health and Ageing, Department of Defence, Centre for Military and Veteran Health, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and a number of ex-service organisations.

The role of the research seminar series is to provide an opportunity for interested parties to gain an insight into the current research being undertaken into the health and well-being of the Australian Veteran community.

The latest seminar, held on 27 October 2006, featured three presentations:

Dr Keith Horsley and Dr Eileen Wilson from the Department of Veterans' Affairs presented the findings from the recently completed research into **mortality and cancer incidence in Australia's Vietnam Veterans**. Nearly 60,000 Australian males served in the Australian Defence Forces in Vietnam. This study examined the mortality and cancer incidence experienced within this cohort. The vital status of 97.3% of the population was successfully ascertained, with 1.9 million person-years of follow-up available. This study was unique in comparing the mortality and cancer incidence experience of National Service veterans who served in Vietnam, to those who served in Australia. This comparison controlled for the 'healthy soldier effect' by comparing the long-term health consequences between two groups of equal health and fitness at enlistment, which differ only in their Vietnam service.

Overall, the mortality experienced by National Service Veterans who served in Vietnam or in Australia only, was found to be significantly lower than the Australian population. Further, those National Service Veterans who only served within Australia were found to have experienced lower mortality than both those who did service in Vietnam and the Australian population. This finding within both groups of National Service Veterans was due to a significant reduction in mortality in the years after the Vietnam War and is consistent with a healthy worker effect. In the most recent decade, the mortality of the cohort did not differ significantly from the Australian general population. Of the cancers that have been associated with herbicide exposure, inconsistent results were found.

In comparing Vietnam Veterans to both National Servicemen who only serviced in Australia, and the Australian population, this study has been able to give

the clearest picture yet of the effect of war service on Australian Veterans of the Vietnam War.

Dr Jean Hollis, a past medical advisor to the Department of Veterans' Affairs, is an Old Age Psychiatrist, who currently sits as a professional member on the NSW Guardianship Tribunal and the NSW Mental Health Review Tribunal. Dr Hollis spoke on the findings of research into **antipsychotic medication dispensing and associated mortality rates in older Veterans**. Due to limited information on the safety of older conventional antipsychotic drugs, the Department of Veterans' Affairs invited Dr Hollis and collaborators to analyse the incidence of antipsychotic dispensing and the associated odds ratios of death from DVA data.

This study analysed the risk of death for older veterans and war widows who were dispensed an antipsychotic drug during 2003 and 2004. The model was adjusted for age, gender, residential status, and the dispensing of drugs reflecting cardiovascular and overall medical risk. The subjects were further analysed as either incident or prevalent users and two sub-analyses were performed. Mortality rates, survival curves and Cox Proportional Hazards models were used to establish the relative risk of death.

Mr Mark Bensink reported on behalf of the Centre for Online Health (COH), University of Queensland. The COH was commissioned by the DVA to conduct research into the **identification of e-health technology directions for veterans**. The majority of Australian veterans are aged over 70 years, live at home and are afflicted by a variety of medical conditions. The potential for using e-health technologies and practices to deliver health services is particularly relevant in the Australian context, however a number of questions needed to be answered. For example, does an e-health technology/practice offer a clinical advantage over the alternatives? Is it a better use of scarce resources than conventional alternatives? Who would benefit from its use?

Information on the characteristics and health care needs of Australian veterans was compiled, with the results being used to identify areas of interest where scientific evidence exists. Home telehealth and its application to seven specific diseases/conditions, were identified as e-health activities particularly relevant to the health care needs of Australian veterans. These diseases/conditions are mental health, heart failure, diabetes, smoking cessation, cancer, arthritis and hypertension.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs will be holding its next Research Seminar on 23 February 2007 at the DVA Canberra office, Lovett Tower, 13 Keltie Street, Woden ACT. All interested parties are invited. Further information is on the ARO Noticeboard.

Ageing Well, Ageing Productively

THE DYNAMIC ANALYSES TO OPTIMIZE AGEING (DYNOPTA) PROJECT

Contributed by Associate Professor Kaarin J. Anstey

The Dynamic Analyses to Optimize Ageing (DYNOPTA) project involves drawing together data from nine Australian longitudinal studies of ageing, with a combined pool of over 50,000 participants. The collective information provided by the studies will be used to identify key factors for disease prevention, reducing ill-health, and promoting engaged and successful ageing among older Australians.

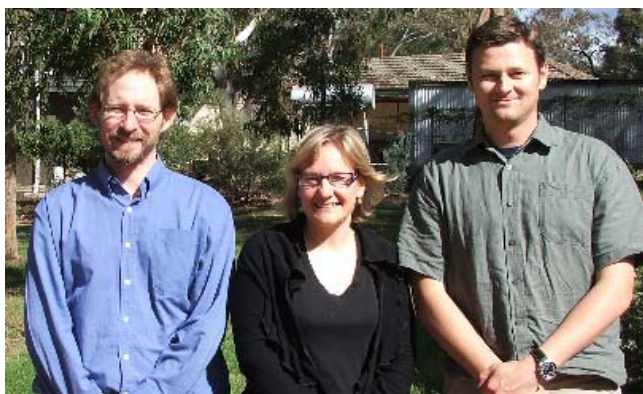
The focus of the project is upon conditions that significantly contribute to the burden of disease including cognitive decline and dementia, sensory impairment, impairment in mobility and common mental disorders such as depression. Although individual studies contain rich data on particular topics, there are often only small numbers of people in individual studies with specific medical conditions, or combinations of different conditions. Pooling data from multiple studies will help to overcome this problem, and will maximise the existing investment in these studies, providing adequate data to study ageing in Australia at a level of detail that is not otherwise possible.

The DYNOPTA project also includes the significant innovation of developing the first Australian dynamic microsimulation model of the health and social outcomes of the baby boomer and older cohorts. The simulation modelling will allow for evaluation of the

impact of modifying risk factors, and costs associated with different trajectories of health and ageing. The DYNOPTA program will be guided by an interdisciplinary life course approach, incorporating interdependencies among demographic, behavioural, social, economic and health factors in the study of optimal ageing. The outcomes will have significant implications for health promotion, and are likely to inform social and medical interventions to compress morbidity and optimise healthy ageing in Australia many years into the future.

The project will not officially commence until an agreement is signed by all 10 participating institutions, but this process is underway. Despite this, the project team based at the Australian National University has been working with the Australian Social Sciences Data Archive to

streamline methods for data sharing, and begun collating the technical information from each study needed to effectively pool and harmonise data from the nine contributing studies. Individual study investigators have reached agreement regarding issues of intellectual property arising from the creation of the new data source, and the first meeting of the project's Scientific Committee, comprising the Chief Investigators, has been scheduled for December 2006. All of those involved in the project look forward to working together on this challenging and innovative project.



Researchers from the Centre for Mental Health Research: Dr Peter Butterworth, Associate Professor Kaarin Anstey and Dr Tim Windsor

Grant recently entered on the ARO

The Judith Jane Mason & Harold Stannett Williams Memorial Foundation Medical and Scientific Research Grants – Alzheimer's Disease

The Judith Jane Mason & Harold Stannett Williams Memorial Foundation is seeking applications from those wishing to conduct research into cures or more effective diagnosis, therapeutic intervention, care or treatment of Alzheimer's disease. In assessing projects, the Foundation will favourably consider applications for emerging research concepts requiring seed funding or young investigators being established. Projects will be funded for one year only. Individual grants of up to \$50,000 will be considered.

For further information phone 1800 808 910 or visit www.anz.com/aus/fin/Trustees/guNamed.asp#Judit.

Applications close 1 July 2007.

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF GERONTOLOGY CONFERENCE

Contributed by the Australian Association of Gerontology

The Australian Association of Gerontology Conference held in Sydney in November was a resounding success. Attendance was very high with almost 500 delegates, a 40% increase on earlier years. Participant comments included “fantastic”, “wonderful”, “stimulating”, with most noting the breadth of the topics covered and the networking as key positives of the conference.

The focus on Day 1 of the conference was on social aspects of ageing with Professor Chris Phillipson from the University of Keele giving fascinating perspectives on the impact of globalisation on ageing and inequality. Professor Peter Saunders of the NSW Social Policy Research Centre focussed policy makers’ attention on issues of living standards and inequality, noting that older people have and will have votes - lots of them. Professor Sarah Harper from Oxford University, speaking on ageing, migration and workforces, was also extremely well received by the audience. Ms Pat Anderson and Mr Ken Wyatt were refreshing in offering solutions and positive stories about indigenous health.

The David Wallace Address was given by Professor Susan Kurlle, and focussed on medication as an agent of abuse for older people. This proved to be a major drawcard, not just to conference attendees but to the media. Her poignant descriptions of the misuse of medications was a timely wake-up call to all those interacting with older people to think outside the box and especially to consider the needs, skills and stresses placed on carers and the implications for the older person. While some cases appeared criminal, most were cries for help from overstressed carers.

The final day of the conference had a strongly medical flavour with Professor Henry Brodaty speaking on what can happen after a stroke, and a number of key issues including Parkinson’s Disease and incontinence being specifically addressed.

There was a focus on cultural diversity and the specific issues facing groups such as refugees and those from the gay and lesbian community. The fact that much of the material was new and little understood proved a bonus for researchers, opening up many new opportunities and directions for future work.

It was clear also that the new generation of researchers is emerging with the AAG student group playing an important and prominent role. Getting into the mood, the students outdid themselves by dressing in multicultural clothes for the conference dinner and were a major force and presence at the AAG stand.

For most of the participants, the conference was a very positive experience and they look forward to 2007 in Adelaide.



Professors Peter Saunders, Tony Broe and Chris Phillipson



Senator the Hon Santo Santoro



Ms Sallyanne Atkinson and Mrs Felicity Barr

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES AND IT FOR MANAGING HEALTH AND DISEASE IN AGEING COMMUNITIES – SOCIO-ECONOMIC, PUBLIC HEALTH AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Contributed by the ARC/NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well

100 key researchers, policy makers, IT industry representatives and ageing constituencies attended a forum in Canberra on 26 October 2006 which was auspiced by the ARC/NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well. The forum was convened by Professors Branko Celler (University of NSW) and Marc Budge (Australian National University) and was an outcome of the Building Ageing Research Capacity (BARC) Policy and Practice Colloquium in July 2006 where the need for technological innovations in aged care was identified as a key issue.

The forum was opened by Mr David de Carvalho, Chief of Staff, Office of Senator the Hon Santo Santoro, Federal Minister for Ageing, and included an overview of the need for change in the healthcare agenda by Professor Budge, as well as developments in the United States by the Center for Aging Services Technologies (CAST) and the Continua Alliance. Ms Deidre Sorensen, Head, Health Insight, Policy and Strategy Directorate, UK Department of Health, gave an overview of the UK perspective while Professor Celler and others gave an overview of the Australian setting. The forum concluded with a discussion of research-informed policy and industry actions which identified the following key areas:

1. The need for clear and consistent evidence-based recommendations on technological solutions
2. The productivity and economic benefits to individuals, their families and carers, and to the nation that will flow on from the broader roll out of assistive technologies
3. The need for research on factors to do with the uptake of assistive technologies in relation to individuals and to the healthcare system
4. The need for research on how to better evaluate the outcomes of technological solutions and the need to incorporate evaluation as a central component of future research activities
5. The need for integration between technological systems (e.g. between general practitioners, community health, hospital, and social support services).

A more detailed summary of the forum has been posted on the ARC/NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well website (http://www.ageingwell.edu.au/links_resources.htm), along with copies of the presentations and the background materials provided to forum participants.

Researchers interested in being involved in future discussions can join the Network's "Ageing and Technology" Special Interest Group by contacting Professor Branko Celler (b.celler@unsw.edu.au). In addition to looking at chronic disease, this group will pursue a broader research agenda on the role of technology in ageing including the use of low tech solutions and the wider incorporation of technologies into the built environment.

Research recently entered on the ARO

Factoring the cost of aged care into retirement planning

Dr David Cullen's research addresses one of the information lacunae that employees face as they plan for their retirement, namely the likely aged care costs that they can expect to face in retirement. It derives lower bounds on the private aged care costs that several representative individuals can expect to face in retirement by estimating their lifetime risk of entry to permanent residential aged care, the most expensive form of aged care, and their expected length of stay in permanent residential aged care (given that they enter).

Almost half of women and a third of men aged sixty-five will enter permanent residential aged care at some time in their remaining life. Of those who do enter permanent residential aged care, women stay for 3.5 years, on average, while men stay for 2.3 years, on average. The total private cost, and hence economic impact, of residential care depends on a care recipient's income and assets as well as their length of stay.

For further information email: david.cullen@health.gov.au



3RD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
**HEALTHY AGEING
AND LONGEVITY**
Melbourne | October 13th 14th 15th
Convention Centre | Australia 2006

Contributed by the International Research Centre for Healthy Ageing and Longevity

An unprecedented number of the world's leading experts, including Senator the Hon Santo Santoro, Federal Minister for Ageing, and Dr Alexandre Kalache, chief of the World Health Organization (WHO) Ageing and Health Programme, converged on Melbourne in October for the 3rd International Conference on Healthy Ageing and Longevity.

The Conference was co-sponsored by the WHO, endorsed by the United Nations Focal Point on Ageing and the Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon John Howard MP, and supported by the State Government of Victoria.

This international event has grown dramatically, with this year's programme boasting in excess of 100 world-class speakers and 60 poster presenters showcasing their research from over 20 countries worldwide. With so many of the very top people in the world present, the Conference presented an extremely valuable opportunity for Conference delegates to network, exchange views with people from different fields, and learn from one another in a way that is rarely available.

The primary aim of this Conference and future Conferences is to stimulate discussion, debate, collaboration and the exchange of ideas to create fertile ground for forward thinking and decision making as the baby-boom generation progresses through the age structure.

The Conference provided a platform for showcasing the latest cutting-edge biological research toward understanding ageing processes and age-associated diseases and disabilities; practical solutions to the prevention, early detection and treatment of age-associated disease across the lifespan; and the delivery of optimal care to ageing individuals and societies.

ERA 2006 A GREAT SUCCESS

Contributed by Dr Chris Shanley

The 5th National Emerging Researchers in Ageing (ERA) Conference was held at Darling Harbour in Sydney on 21 November 2006. This was the first time the conference had been held outside Brisbane and was organised by the University of Sydney, in association with the University of Queensland.

78 presentations were made by doctoral students from a range of academic disciplines and interests. The breadth of topics was a wonderful reflection of how ageing is becoming an increasingly accepted area of research beyond its traditionally narrow base. This included presentations on lifelong learning, indigenous research partnerships, economic policy, the role of the landscape in healthy ageing and gender-related issues in ageing. There was also a very

strong focus on the experiences of older persons themselves with projects looking at retirement, identity, the roles of clubs and social support networks, exercise, involvement in social policy processes and other areas.

The development of ageing research was also reflected in the fact that presenters came from 21 Australian universities as well as two from New Zealand. The major sponsor of the conference was the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. Other sponsors included the Australian Association of Gerontology, NSW Office for Science and Medical Research and NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. The ERA conference is also strongly supported by the ARC/NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well.

AIHW NEWS

Contributed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

In the last few months, the AIHW has released a number of reports of relevance to the health and welfare of older Australians. All these reports are available from the AIHW's website –

www.aihw.gov.au.



National evaluation of the Aged Care Innovative Pool Disability Aged Care Interface Pilot

Nine projects were established under the Aged Care Innovative Pool Disability Aged Care Interface Pilot to trial new approaches to community-based aged care for people with

disabilities who experience an increased need for support due to ageing. The projects have targeted eligible people living in supported accommodation facilities funded under the Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement. Throughout 2004 and 2005, the AIHW evaluated the projects in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania. The evaluation gathered information about the ageing-related needs of Pilot clients, the service activity profiles of projects, and evidence on individual outcomes and care experiences. This information is made available to inform policy discussions concerning the interface between national disability support and aged care programs.

Life expectancy and disability in Australia 1988 to 2003

Life expectancy has increased markedly over the last century.

This has given rise to the question - *has the number of years lived with illness or disability fallen or risen as overall life expectancy has lengthened?* This report explores

this question, focusing on years lived with disability. The report updates previous estimates of 'health expectancies' in Australia and examines the changes over a period of 15 years, from 1988 to 2003.



Asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease among older people in Australia: deaths and hospitalisations

Asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) can together be described as obstructive lung disease. This report, authored by the Australian Centre for Asthma Monitoring, examines recent data on deaths and hospitalisations among people aged 55 years and over when asthma or COPD are recorded as one of multiple causes of death or hospital diagnoses. The aim is to describe the extent of obstructive lung disease among older Australians, to assess the possibility of misclassification between asthma and COPD and to investigate the association between these diseases and other conditions.

Hip fracture injuries

The incidence of hip fractures is rising and projected to further increase in Australia due to the population growth in the oldest age groups, where hip fractures are the most common form of fracture. Hip fractures result in a large economic burden due to health expenditure in most industrialised countries and, hence, understanding the nature of hip fracture related hospitalisations and deaths is important.

Chronic diseases and associated risk factors in Australia 2006

This publication presents updated statistics on chronic diseases and their associated risk factors in Australia.

Chronic diseases are conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes and arthritis

(to name a few), that tend to be long-lasting and persistent in their symptoms or development. More than 15 million Australians are directly affected by at least one chronic disease. This report builds on the AIHW's 2001 report, and focuses on patterns of disease across the age groups, the prevalence of risk factors and their trends, the effects of chronic diseases on health services in Australia, and the differences in chronic diseases and their risk factors across geographical areas, socioeconomic status and Indigenous status. This report is a vital resource for policy makers, researchers and others interested in chronic diseases and their associated risk factors.



CONTACT US

Should you have any queries about this newsletter or the ARO, please contact the ARO Site Administrator by emailing siteadmin@aro.gov.au, or phoning 02 6289 5584.

PROGRAM TO TACKLE SOCIAL ISOLATION FOR SENIORS

Novartis Pharmaceuticals Australia has turned one of the recommendations from its 2005 "Diversity and the Baby Boomers" report into an innovative program to address social isolation for older people living in the community. The Neighbourhood Contact Program was designed to pair-up volunteer employees from the company with members of the Macquarie Branch of the National Seniors Association for a three-month trial. Over that period, volunteers in the program spent time getting to know each other and organising outings together, while documenting their progress and attitudes to the program through surveys. This feedback will form the basis of a detailed evaluation report to explain the concept, and provide recommendations on how this kind of program could be rolled out by government, businesses and community organisations.

The Neighbourhood Contact Program is similar in approach to the Community Visitors Scheme that currently provides volunteer visitors for older people in residential aged care. The key difference is that this program provides regular social contact for older people living outside of residential aged care facilities. As more older people choose to live in their own homes for longer, the need for this kind of program in the community is expected to grow.

Ultimately, the concept of The Neighbourhood Contact Program seeks to address social isolation for older people. More generally though, the program is capable of contributing to a more cohesive, intergenerational connectivity for people of all ages. These themes, program outcomes and recommendations will be explored in the final evaluation report, expected on the ARO website in early 2007.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Improving the Delivery of Palliative Care for Older People

Sydney, NSW
15-16 March
www.changechampions.com.au

Redesigning Healthcare for the Ageing Population Summit 2007

Sydney, NSW
27-28 March
www.iqpc.com.au

ACROD 2007 Ageing and Disability Conference

Adelaide, SA
3-4 April
www.acrod.org.au/conferences

2007 Alzheimer's Australia Conference

Perth, WA
29 May – 1 June
www.alzheimers2007conference.com.au

National Conference on Depression in the Elderly

Sydney, NSW
28-29 June
www.hammond.com.au

Cognitive Ageing Conference - Down Under

Adelaide, SA
12-15 July
www.cos.gatech.edu/cac

International Academy of Nutrition and Aging 4th International Conference

Adelaide, SA
5-8 September
www.healthandage.com

2nd National Men's Shed Conference

Manly, NSW
13-14 September
www.mensshed.org

ACSA 20th National Conference and Trade Exhibition

Melbourne, Victoria
16-19 September
www.agedcare.org.au

Evidence in practice: Leading the way in aged care

Bundoora, Victoria
26-27 September
www.scsHosting.com.au/acebac/

INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

Pan American Congress on Geriatrics and Gerontology

Puebla, Mexico
20-24 May
geriatrics.uthscsa.edu/puebla2007

Festival of International Conferences on Caregiving, Disability, Ageing and Technology

Toronto, Canada
16-19 June
www.ficcdat.ca

International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics VI European Congress

St Petersburg, Russia
5-8 July
www.onlinereg.ru/gerontology

8th Asia-Oceania IAGG Regional Congress of Gerontology

Beijing, China
22-25 October
www.aog2007.org

