



# AGEING RESEARCH ONLINE NEWS

Volume 5, Issue 4 News and information on ageing policy and research initiatives

January 2009

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## SURVIVAL TIMES IN PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

Results from the Medical Research Council Cognitive Function and Ageing Study  
MRC CFAS UK

Contributed by the MRC CFAS cooperative

Individuals with dementia are at higher risk of death than those without. Predicting how long an individual is likely to live for following a diagnosis of dementia is important for relatives, carers, clinicians and government.

Recently, the Medical Research Council Cognitive Function and Ageing Study (MRC CFAS) undertook analyses to determine the median survival time of individuals following a dementia classification. This work was published in the *British Medical Journal*, originally online on 10 January 2008.

The MRC CFAS is a large multicentre prospective population-based study of 13,004 individuals aged 65 years and older in England and Wales, with baseline in

1991. There have been a number of waves of assessment since, including the whole sample or sub-samples. For the analysis of survival times, assessments until 2003 were included for the classification of dementia. Mortality was tracked until 2005 using the government death registry.

There were 438 cases of incident dementia over the 12 year follow-up, 81% of these individuals died before December 2005. Estimated median survival time from the classification of dementia until death was 4.1 years (IQR 2.5-7.6) for men and 4.6 years (IQR 2.9-7.0) for women.

These estimates varied considerably with age at dementia classification. Those aged between 65 and 69 years at time of dementia classification had a median survival time of 10.7 years (25<sup>th</sup> centile 5.6), compared to 3.8 years for individuals aged 90 years and over.

David Cox's proportional hazards regression models were used to identify predictors of mortality in the demented. It was found that survival was affected by age, sex and disability prior to dementia onset, with those who were older, male and disabled having an increased risk of death. Accommodation type, marital status and self-reported health did not predict mortality.

It is hoped that these results will help relatives, carers and clinicians plan appropriately following the diagnosis of dementia of a family member or patient. Further, it is anticipated that these results will inform future government policies regarding the planning for individuals with dementia. To find out more about the study, please visit the MRC CFAS website at [www.cfas.ac.uk](http://www.cfas.ac.uk).

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## The Judith Jane Mason & Harold Stannett Williams Memorial Foundation

### ★★★Research Grants★★★

*Contributed by Judith Mason*

The Mason Foundation was established in 2003 and was named after benefactor Judith Mason, and in memory of her father, Harold Stannett Williams. Mason says; "I don't believe that many people understand how debilitating Chronic Fatigue Syndrome can be, and as far as Alzheimer's is concerned I cannot think of anything worse. To be alive but not having your brain working, to me this is terrifying. These are the reasons I am supporting medical research into Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Alzheimer's and I hope that my Foundation helps to produce cures".

The research grants are awarded to Australian based organisations only. Grants of up to \$100,000 are available for research into Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Alzheimer's disease. The Mason Foundation will disperse close to \$750,000 each year, with 60% dedicated to Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. Under the perpetual Foundation, should cures for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Alzheimer's disease be found, the Foundation will focus on research into other debilitating diseases.

The Foundation has awarded 11 grants totaling \$724,384 in its third open round of medical and scientific research grants for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Alzheimer's disease research. Researchers from around Australia are invited to apply for the next round of funding by July 2009. Applications are assessed by the ANZ Trustees National Medical Advisory Panel.

More information about The Mason Foundation and its other grants for medical and scientific research and ANZ Trustees can be found at: <http://www.anz.com/aus/fin/Trustees/guFinding.asp> or by contacting 1800 011 047.

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## AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL POLICY CONFERENCE

*8-10 July 2009 - University of New South Wales - Sydney, Australia*

The Social Policy Research Centre invites offers of papers from researchers, teachers, students and practitioners of social policy for presentation at the 2009 Australian Social Policy Conference. Papers can present the results of research, discuss conceptual or theoretical approaches to contemporary social policy, raise issues for debate or discuss questions of methodology.

Keynote speakers at the conference will include Naomi Eisenstadt, UK Social Exclusion Task Force, Tom Calma, Australian Human Rights Commission and Ann Orloff, Northwestern University.

The over-arching theme of the conference will be "An Inclusive Society? - Practicalities and Possibilities". However, as in the previous conferences, discussion will cover a wide range of social policy topics, including:

- Labour market participation and welfare reform;
- Social exclusion and economic inequalities;
- Retirement and ageing;
- Children, young people and families;
- Identity, diversity and citizenship;
- Housing, place and the environment;
- Organisation and delivery of human services;
- Community, social participation and care;
- Chinese social policy; and
- An open strand for papers on other subjects of interest and importance outside the main themes.

### KEY DATES:

Special session proposal: 19 Dec 08  
Refereed paper submission: 13 Feb 09  
Non-refereed abstract proposal: 09 Apr 09

### ENQUIRIES AND SUBMISSIONS

[ASPC2009@unsw.edu.au](mailto:ASPC2009@unsw.edu.au)



## 2008 ACT INTERGENERATIONAL FORUM Ageing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Contributed by Chris Hatley from AAG Student Group

On 30 October, around 100 people gathered at Old Canberra House on the grounds of The Australian National University to take part in a one-day discussion forum on current research and issues in ageing. Following on from the successful inaugural event held in 2007, this year's forum was organised by ACT student members of the Australian Association of Gerontology, and featured six presentations from postgraduate students. Topics ranged from the links between physical activity and depression in later life, to the role of MRI imaging in mapping age-related brain changes, to new technologies to assist older drivers with hazard detection.

The program also featured a keynote presentation by Emeritus Professor Sol Encel from the University of NSW on the sociology of later life, and the way in which social perceptions and attitudes towards old age have changed and continue to change from generation to generation. Finally, the audience engaged with expert panels in two discussion forums on the topics of memory and ageing, and community participation and healthy ageing. Participants included academics, representatives from the government, industry and community sectors, and many interested members of the public.

The organisers thank the Department of Health and Ageing's Office for an Ageing Australia, The ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, the Illawarra Retirement Trust, and the ARC/NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well for supporting the event and enabling them to keep registration free of charge.

For more information on the program, or to download audio recordings of the different presentations, go to [www.intergenerationalforum.org](http://www.intergenerationalforum.org). The event will be held in Canberra again in late 2009. Details of the event will be on the ARO website early 2009.

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## The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health REPORT UPDATE

Contributed by Jo Schell from the Department of Health and Ageing

The Department of Health and Ageing commissioned the University of Queensland to undertake research on employed carers in the mid-aged cohort, based on the results of the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH). The '*Changes in the Caring Roles and Employment in Mid-life: Findings from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health*' report, July 2007 (the ALSWH report) offers an in depth analysis of the changes in caring roles, health status, health service use and employment for women in the mid-aged group.

The ALSWH report suggested that while most women who identified carer status were more likely to be caring for someone living elsewhere, those carers who provided live-in support were more likely to experience negative outcomes in terms of mental health, and were more likely to have significant physical health issues.

The research confirmed that carers had less involvement in the workforce. Carers, in particular live-in carers were more likely not to work, or to work part time compared to non-carers who were more likely to be in management or professional roles.

This emphasises the continuing importance of respite care and other services, such as counselling, to support and maintain carers in their role. Flexible working arrangements such as part-time work and greater access to carers leave (similar to provisions for maternity leave) would also enhance carers' ability to maintain their involvement in the workforce. The Department will use the findings from the ALSWH Report to support future policy development and service delivery, while guiding further research to increase the evidence base on carer support.

**The Changes in Caring Roles and Employment in Mid-Life: Findings from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health report is available at:**  
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-publicat-caring-midlife.htm>

# WORLD-FIRST TRIAL PROVES EXERCISE HELPS MEMORY

Contributed by Christianne White from WACHA

West Australian health experts are urging older people to get active after proving for the first time that just 20 minutes of activity each day can prevent memory deterioration.

In a world-first, a team from the WA Centre for Health and Ageing (WACHA) based at the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR) has shown that regular physical activity can lead to a lasting improvement in memory function. The WA-based trial results were published in the prestigious *Journal of the American Medical Association* on 3 September 2008.

WACHA director Professor Leon Flicker said people over the age of 50 could pro-actively prevent memory deterioration by joining in simple and easy exercises each day.

“What our trial tells us is that older people who take up some form of aerobic exercise for as little as 20 minutes a day will be more likely to remember things like shopping lists, family birthdays and friend’s names,” he said.

“People don’t have to run a marathon to get the benefits – it’s as simple as doing some forms of simple activity like walking or dancing, every day for around 20 minutes”.

“The results of this trial are very encouraging and a great step forward in helping older people improve their memory and potentially delay the progression of dementia which can eventually lead to Alzheimer’s disease.”

Today, almost 190,000 Australians live with dementia\*, a number that is expected to increase with an ageing population, and one in four for people over the age of 85 have moderate to severe dementia.

“What’s interesting about this study is that physical activity doesn’t just have benefits for memory and preventing Alzheimer’s disease, it highlights the importance of exercise to boost overall wellbeing and mental health,” Professor Flicker said.

“We all know that exercise can help ward off physical conditions like heart disease and obesity and assist in overall wellbeing and fitness but this study adds another compelling reason to that list.”

During the trial, 170 volunteers aged 50 years and over were divided into two groups, a control and a group which undertook to achieve a 150 minutes of activity each week, ranging from walking, ballroom dancing, and swimming, for a six month period. Participant cognition was tested during intervals over an 18 month period – those who took part in physical activity continually out-scored the control group, which actually reported an overall decline in cognition.

WAIMR director Professor Peter Klinken praised Professor Flicker’s team and said the trial was a great example of how medical research could have a positive effect in the community.

“This trial really shows us how medical research can offer benefits to the WA community right now as well as future generations, and I’d urge all older West Australians to take note of these important findings.” he said.

For more information about the study please contact Sarah Hayward, WAIMR Media Consultant on: (08) 9388 9280 or visit: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/age/dandad/dandad.pdf>

\*Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007

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# Self Neglect and Squalor in Older People: Ethical and Practical Dilemmas

*Contributed by Shannon McDermott from UNSW*

The term self neglect is used in international literature to refer to older people who refuse or are unable to perform essential self care tasks, such as providing adequate food, shelter or medical care for themselves.

Shannon McDermott's PhD research critically analysed the concept of self neglect among older people in the Australian context and explored the ethical dilemmas that can arise in these situations.

The qualitative study revealed that Australian participants conceptualised self neglect differently than is done in the international literature by separating out self neglect, or lack of self care, from squalor and hoarding, which were used to refer to varying degrees of extreme environmental neglect.

Perhaps more importantly, the research uncovered that situations of self neglect, squalor and hoarding can pose difficult practical and ethical dilemmas for professionals working in the community.

For example, one participant shared a story in which an older woman kept 500 pigeons inside her home. The birds were noisy and their faeces had an extremely strong odour, which prompted complaints from the neighbours.

The woman refused assistance and was determined by local authorities to be legally capable of making decisions; this meant that professionals were bound to respect her decision to refuse assistance. Eventually the local council became involved because they believed that the situation threatened public health.

The council spent thousands of dollars to remove the birds but, because the woman refused to stop leaving food out, the birds quickly moved back in.

This situation highlights some of the intractable problems that can arise when older people self neglect, hoard or live in squalor.

Resolving these situations required that professionals strike a balance between the duties of autonomy, beneficence and justice with a wider organisational context which required that they also manage risk and provide services in an increasingly efficient and effective manner.

The research found that a pluralistic approach to decision-making, along with formal and informal support from their colleagues, was important to ensure consistency between ethical approaches and to accept that not all difficult situations could be resolved.

More research is needed on older people who self neglect and live in squalor to determine the ways in which living conditions impact on the opportunity to age in place.

Please contact Shannon McDermott at [s.mcdermott@unsw.edu.au](mailto:s.mcdermott@unsw.edu.au) with any questions or comments on this research.



# Ashby Memory Method

## Cognitive Retention Therapy Program Overview

Contributed by Joan Crockett from All, Canada

The Ashby Memory Method (AMM - formerly known as Cognitive Retention Therapy) is a brain exercise program specifically designed by the Alzheimer's Innovation Institute's (All) research team to slow decline in brain function among people with Alzheimer's disease and to improve Alzheimer's related symptoms, such as agitation, anxiety, and depression, while delivering measurable improvements in participants' memories.

All's work stems from its unique perspective that Alzheimer's disease is a "slowly evolving brain injury". The resulting hypothesis - that the ageing brain can be retrained to regain lost functionality - has been proven in AMM field trials involving 50 participants over a one year period. The program uses an individualised person-centred, pen and paper format which is effective and easily accepted among seniors. Its design is 'user-friendly' to empower family members and/or caregivers.

Data from field trials completed in 2007 shows cognitive test score improvements using the Mini Mental State exam (MMSE) - in 50 participants with Alzheimer's of an average of 9% or +1.9 points on the MMSE over a one year period. Sequential MMSE scores were recorded every three months during the test period.

All's field trial data notes heightened participation in Activities of Daily Living (ADLs). Observations were made regarding patient improvement in the areas of self-care, increased socialisation, a reduction in anxiety; and positive mood changes. Field researchers also observed that participants became less isolated and caregivers' stress and burden notably improved.

***Alzheimer's Innovation Institute's work stems from its unique perspective that Alzheimer's disease is a "slowly evolving brain injury".***

Findings suggest that this targeted intervention program has the potential to maintain people's functional abilities much longer. Participants on the AMM program have continued to show MMSE improvements up to 2 years. This suggests AMM can extend participants' independence and may delay the move to institutional care by several years. In conclusion, the AMM may be one of the important therapeutic breakthroughs to emerge in the field of Alzheimer's treatment in recent years. For more information please visit: <http://alzinnovation.com/program>

### **Older Women, Informal Support and Identity: Re-Contextualising Current Understandings**

This research highlights some of the ways in which informal support networks and the ability to continue living in their own homes influences the wellbeing of older women. The findings also indicate the importance of reciprocity as a dynamic of an older women's informal support relationships and suggests that an older women's ability to contribute to society is an integral component of their identity.

There are two separate, but interdependent, parts to the study. Firstly, a critical discourse analysis of ageing related Australian policies was undertaken. This assisted in establishing the rationale for the subsequent interviews and also in exploring the ways in which some of the concepts that were central to this investigation were framed in political discourse. The second component utilised an interpretive approach to explore the perceptions of ten older women and six people who were involved in their informal support networks through in-depth interviews.

**For more information visit the ARO: [www.aro.gov.au](http://www.aro.gov.au) or contact: [toni.delany@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:toni.delany@adelaide.edu.au)**

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## E-Health Workshop



*Contributed by Maree Magafas from AIPAR*

The Australian Institute for Population Ageing Research (AIPAR), a research centre of the University of New South Wales (UNSW) hosted a National E-Health and Ageing Workshop on Friday the 3rd October 2008. The workshop attracted more than 80 participants and speakers from the medical, technological and business fields. Bringing together experts in the technology of E-Health with users and clinicians, it was designed to raise awareness of new development of this technology, and to more fully explore potential applications.

Technology on E-Health is moving ahead rapidly, but support for major infrastructure development is restricting development in Australia relative to many other nations, and health and aged care delivery systems are less attuned than they might be to the potential value of E-delivery.

The workshop was chaired by AIPAR Director, Professor John Piggott who welcomed presenters from Australian National University (ANU), Osaka University, University of New South Wales (UNSW) and from Health care IT, Singapore. This diversity provided an in-depth view of the issues surrounding E-Health in Australia and in the International arena.

The workshop was a successful networking opportunity for experts in this field and AIPAR hopes to run another in 2009. The papers presented at the workshop can be found on AIPAR's website: [www.aipar.unsw.edu.au](http://www.aipar.unsw.edu.au)

For additional information on this workshop and additional AIPAR activities, please contact Maree Magafas at [m.magafas@unsw.edu.au](mailto:m.magafas@unsw.edu.au)



ARC/NHMRC Research  
Network in Ageing Well

## International Travel Bursaries The Research Network in Ageing Well Population and Research Strategies Theme



Contributed by Matthew Carroll from ARC/NHMRC

The Population and Research Strategies Theme of the Research Network in Ageing Well (RNAW) will be opening up applications for travel bursaries to postdoctoral members of the RNAW. The funds will be allocated for eligible members of the network to be used for travel to international conferences.

Applicants must have completed their PhD within the last five years and be conducting research that is relevant to the Population and Research strategies theme, for example, in epidemiology, population based studies, demography etc. Applications will be accepted with abstracts submitted, however approval will be finalised upon abstracts being accepted.

- **Five bursaries of up to \$2000 will be available for travel to international conferences**
- **Preference will be given to applicants with part funding from elsewhere**
- **Application must have signed approval from Supervisor or Department Head**

To submit an application, or enquire about the application process contact: [Mark.Petricevic@anu.edu.au](mailto:Mark.Petricevic@anu.edu.au).

For further information about the travel bursaries please visit the website <http://www.ageingwell.edu.au>.

**Applications Close 20<sup>th</sup> March 2009. All funds to be expended by October 2009.**

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# AN UPDATE ON THE DYNOPTA PROJECT

*Contributed by Kaarin Anstey*

## **The DYNOPTA project**

The Dynamic Analysis to Optimise Ageing (DYNOPTA) project is funded under the NHMRC Ageing Well Ageing Productively Scheme and involves combining nine Australian longitudinal studies of ageing.

The aim of this collaborative, multidisciplinary project is to use this rich source of data to answer key questions about the compression of morbidity in late life. Pooling of datasets will allow for more information on low prevalence disorders, or low prevalence groups (e.g. the oldest old) and also provide a greater geographical representation of the Australian population.

DYNOPTA focuses on four key health outcomes that constitute a large burden of disease among older Australians. These include: cognition and dementia, sensory function, mental health, mobility. Mortality/longevity and successful ageing are two additional research themes and the dataset contains information on various health, psycho-social and demographic characteristics.

The project commenced in July 2007 and so is now almost 18 months into the 5-year plan. Part of the project plan is the development of a microsimulation model by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) at the University of Canberra.

This will use the information derived from the DYNOPTA dataset, to model the estimated prevalence and burden of disease in the outcome areas, and provide estimates of future estimates of health care costs.

## **The DYNOPTA dataset**

The dataset has been compiled at the Australian National University, where the research team have harmonized more than 400 variables. The first version of the DYNOPTA dataset was released to the study investigators on November 5, 2008. It includes 50655 cases and over 800 million datapoints. Study weights are being developed by Professor Steel and Dr Birrel at the University of Wollongong.

The ANU team are now conducting the final harmonization of cognitive and some other variables and the IADLs and ADLs are being harmonized at the University of Newcastle. We expect that there may be problems yet to be identified within the dataset because it is so large. Therefore, the project is very much still in a pilot phase while the researchers learn to use and manage the data and continue checking it.

Several manuscripts are currently in progress and several conference abstracts have been accepted for presentation. This early work focuses on describing the project, the harmonization methodology, and methodological issues in combining data. Once the population weights become available prevalence estimates for the various key health outcomes and risk factors will be reported, followed by longitudinal analyses or risk factors and socio-demographic transitions.

DYNOPTA CIs include: Kaarin Anstey, Heather Booth, Laurie Brown, Colette Browning, Julie Byles, Peter Butterworth, Bob Cumming, Ann Harding, Mary Luszcz, Paul Mitchell, and David Steel. For more information, please see our website at [www.dynopta.anu.edu.au](http://www.dynopta.anu.edu.au) or contact [Kaarin.anstey@anu.edu.au](mailto:Kaarin.anstey@anu.edu.au)

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## **LAUNCH OF THE "RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE" BRIEFINGS**

The Research into Practice briefings are an initiative of The Benevolent Society in partnership with the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of NSW, as a resource for community aged care workers and managers. Each briefing draws on the existing research about a certain topic, with a strong focus on what the research says about the value of existing practices and suggestions for improving practice. This first briefing is based on research undertaken by Assoc. Prof. Jane Mears with The Benevolent Society's community aged care teams. It draws on Australian and international research to examine the day-to-day working practices of paid community care workers with a focus on how care workers and managers can best support and enable good care of older people living in their own homes.

**A copy of the first briefing with a full reference list is at:**

**[www.bensoc.org.au/uploads/documents/references-research-to-practice-briefing1-nov2008.pdf](http://www.bensoc.org.au/uploads/documents/references-research-to-practice-briefing1-nov2008.pdf).**

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### **An Introduction to Medistore**

Sydney NSW

12 December 2008

<http://www.medistore.com.au/>

### **National Conference on Caring**

Gold Coast, QLD

9-10 March 2009

<http://www.astmanagement.com.au/carers9/>

### **National Telemedicine Summit**

Sydney, NSW

16-17 March 2009

[http://www.iir.com.au/iiroz/marlin/system/render.jsp?siteid=20001002361&marketingid=20001734040&MarlinViewType=MARKT\\_EFFORT](http://www.iir.com.au/iiroz/marlin/system/render.jsp?siteid=20001002361&marketingid=20001734040&MarlinViewType=MARKT_EFFORT)

### **Transitional Care Seminar**

Sydney NSW

26-27 March 2009

<http://www.changechampions.com.au/>

### **AAG (NSW) Rural Ageing Conference**

Broken Hill, NSW

1-3 April 2009

[http://www.aag.asn.au/nsw\\_events.php](http://www.aag.asn.au/nsw_events.php)

### **International Breast Cancer Support Conference**

Brisbane, QLD

13-15 May, 2009

<http://www.reachtorecovery2009.org/>

### **Heart Foundation Conference**

Brisbane, QLD

14-16 May, 2009

<http://www.heartfoundation2009.com/>

### **Managing Challenging Behaviours in Older People with Cognitive Impairment Seminar**

Melbourne, VIC

28-29 May, 2009

<http://www.changechampions.com.au/upcoming-seminars>

### **2009 Alzheimer's Australia Conference**

Adelaide, SA

2-5 June, 2009

<http://www.alzheimers.org.au/content.cfm?infopageid=4939>

### **Australian Social Policy Conference**

Sydney, NSW

8-10 July 2009

[ASPC2009@unsw.edu.au](mailto:ASPC2009@unsw.edu.au)

### **2009 HILDA Survey Research Conference**

Melbourne, VIC

16-17 July 2009

<http://events.unimelb.edu.au/event/5037/>

<http://www.continence.org.au>

## INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

### **American Society on Aging/National Council on Aging - Joint Conference**

Las Vegas, Nevada

15-19 March 2009

<http://www.agingconference.org/asav2/conf/jc09/index2.cfm>

### **IAGG World Congress of Gerontology and Geriatrics**

Paris, France

5-9 July 2009

<http://www.gerontologyparis2009.com/site/view8.php>

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*HOPE YOU ENJOYED THE HOLIDAY PERIOD AND HERES TO A SAFE AND HAPPY 2009*



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If you would like to contact the ARO website administrator, please email: [siteadmin@aro.gov.au](mailto:siteadmin@aro.gov.au)