

MEDIA RELEASE



Six more ground-breaking dementia research grants to support people living with dementia and their caregivers

The Dementia Centre for Research Collaboration (DCRC) is pleased to announce six more successful applicants in the latest round of DCRC pilot grants. These six projects join seven other projects recently announced.

Each of these pilot projects will receive \$75,000 to conduct ground-breaking dementia research.

The DCRC pilot grants have been awarded to Dr Andrew Stafford, Dr Nadeeka Dissanayaka, Dr Erin Conway, Dr Angel Lee, Dr Luise Lago and Dr Samantha Loi.

These grants are highly competitive and sought after in the research sector, and provide vital insights into reducing dementia risk, improving accurate and timely diagnoses and establishing treatment and care options for people who live with dementia.

In making this announcement, DCRC Directors, Professors Kaarin Anstey, Elizabeth Beattie and Henry Brodaty congratulate the recipients on their outstanding proposals and thank all applicants.



Dr Andrew Stafford is a senior lecturer at Curtin Medical School with experience working in community pharmacy and aged care. His research explores ways to optimise medication use, particularly in older people, with a focus on quality of life and patient-centred care.

“For many people who live with dementia, managing their daily medicines is a complex and difficult task. Incorrect use of medicines can have unintended consequences that range from minor symptoms to serious events that require hospitalisation,” said Dr Stafford.

“Every year, 250 000 Australians are hospitalised due to problems with their medicines, and a disproportionate number of these people are living with dementia.”

“Our project, *Dementia MedsChecks* will develop an in-pharmacy service to meet the specific needs of people living with dementia (and their family carers if appropriate), so that any medicine-related issues can be identified and overcome in collaboration with the person’s doctor.”

The project will improve medicine safety for Australians living with dementia.



Dr Angel Lee is a Research Fellow in the RAIL (Rehabilitation, Ageing and Independent Living) research centre and the School of Primary and Allied Health Care of Monash University.

“Over 90,000 older Australians who receive home support have cognitive impairment associated with dementia or other conditions. Amongst his population we see lower levels of physical activity and people fall 50% more frequently than similar older adults who do not use home support,” said Dr Lee.

“Low physical activity level and falls can have a dramatic negative impact on their independence, mobility, and quality of life but by capitalising on an existing system and workforce, this research aims to co-design a physical activity program with consumers, and training support workers to deliver exercise to older people with dementia.”

“This research will improve physical activity, reduce risk factors of falls and enhance health outcomes for home care clients with dementia.”



Anxiety accelerates cognitive decline and contributes to an overall reduction in quality of life. The prevalence of anxiety is five times higher in people living with dementia compared to older people in general.

“As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns and continuous social isolation, an increase in anxiety has been observed in people living with dementia, in particularly those living in aged care, but there are inadequate anxiety treatment options available for people with dementia,” said **Dr Nadeeka Dissanayaka**.

“Our project will develop and pilot test a robust, and accessible telehealth option to deliver a new Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Tele-CBT) program to reduce anxiety in people living with dementia.

“The ultimate goal is to develop and implement a robust, widely accessible and tailored psychotherapy program delivered via telehealth to reduce anxiety in people living with dementia.”

Dr Nadeeka Dissanayaka is a NHMRC Boosting Dementia Research leadership fellow, director of the Dementia & Neuro Mental Health Research Unit at the University of Queensland and co-chair of DCRC’s Anxiety & Depression in Dementia Research (ADDR Network).



Dr Samantha Loi is a neuropsychiatrist and senior research fellow at the Royal Melbourne Hospital and University of Melbourne who specialises in the assessment, treatment and management of people with neuropsychiatric conditions, including people living with younger-onset dementia such as Alzheimer’s disease, frontotemporal dementia and Huntington’s disease.

“Neuropsychiatric symptoms (NPS) or non-cognitive symptoms related to dementia include symptoms such as anxiety, depression, apathy and irritability, and for people with younger-onset dementia (ie. symptoms onset at or below the age of 65), these are often more difficult to manage than the cognitive symptoms themselves.”

“These symptoms have been linked with worse disease outcomes, higher rates of hospitalisation, and greater distress and burden in family caregivers.”

“Medications as treatments of these symptoms often cause side effects and may not always decrease their frequency and severity. For this reason, we propose a novel non-pharmacological approach targeting these symptoms utilising technology.”

“We will design, develop and pilot a mobile application-based psychological intervention that combines elements of two treatment approaches: cognitive training - addressing deficits such as memory and attention, and meta-cognitive training - attitudes and beliefs. Both of these have been shown to produce benefits in people with cognitive and psychological symptoms and we believe that by combining both strategies can reduce the frequency and severity of NPS, and thus the associated caregiver burden.”



Dr Erin Conway's pilot project explores social connection and communication and its fundamental role in pursuit of a meaningful life.

“Our ability to communicate is vital to social connection. Many people with dementia will experience increasing difficulty with communication over time - both with talking and understanding others,” said Dr Conway.

“For people with dementia, reablement helps them to maintain their relationships and their access to community and social connection but reablement of communication function is not currently well understood or prioritised, particularly in aged care.”

This project works with people living with dementia, their families, speech pathologists and other health professionals to find out about the importance each place on communication, their priorities for communication reablement therapy, and experiences accessing therapy.

“We will use this information to develop recommendations for speech pathologists about what people with dementia want from communication reablement, support meaningful communication and social engagement and improve access to speech pathology services for people with dementia.”

Dr Erin Conway is a Speech Pathologist and a Senior Lecturer in Speech Pathology at the Australian Catholic University, Brisbane. She is also the Coordinator for the Speech Pathology Course and the Assistant Deputy Head of School for the School of Allied Health, Queensland Campus.



Dr Luise Lago is Senior Research Fellow (Applied Statistics), from the University of Wollongong and her research aims to improve access to community and non-admitted health care services for people living with dementia.

“People living with dementia experience considerable challenges in meeting their health care needs. The healthcare system can be difficult to understand, there can long waits for community and non-admitted services, and the benefits of this care may not be well understood by the person or their carer.”

“Community and non-admitted care are critical for keeping people healthy and out of hospital, and linking acute and primary care. For people to live well with dementia, they need to be able to access timely and appropriate care to help them manage dementia symptoms and other health conditions which can cause unplanned hospital visits.”

Funded by the Australian government, the DCRC's primary research foci within the broader topic of dementia research are prevention, assessment and diagnosis, intervention and treatment, living with dementia and care, with a particular investment in translation of knowledge into care and practice.

To get in touch with any of the grant recipients, please contact Alex McTavish, Media Communications Coordinator at DCRC: alex.mctavish@qut.edu.au or 0406 858 882.