



## NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS

**GET YOUR RESEARCH, NEWS, PAPERS, MEDIA RELEASES, RECRUITMENT TRIALS, EVENTS OUT THERE!!**

*Submissions by end March for our next issue out in April*

**Social Media submissions (X, FB AND LINKEDIN):**

*Submissions open anytime*

**Submissions must align with HDA:**

We aim to promote, facilitate and enable multidisciplinary research to advance understanding of healthy development, ensuring the physical, psychological and social health of infants, children and adolescents.

## OUR PARTNERS

### PLATINUM



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**Wellbeing SA**



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### BRONZE



## HDA PARTNER NEWS ROBINSON RESEARCH INSTITUTE



### Top specialist to lead the Robinson Research Institute

A world-renowned reproductive biomedical specialist whose research is helping to improve health outcomes for mothers and babies has been named as the new Director of the Robinson Research Institute (RRI) at the University of Adelaide.

**Professor David MacIntyre** will join the RRI from Imperial College London (UK), where his research has led to new understandings of how microbial communities in the female reproductive tract can increase or reduce the risk of miscarriage, premature rupture of membranes and preterm birth. He also led the development of new technologies for the rapid testing of the vaginal microbiome and treatments designed to improve maternal and neonatal outcomes.

“I’m excited to bring my experience and passion for improving maternal and neonatal health outcomes to this new role at the Robinson Research Institute, which is home to world-class advances in reproduction, pregnancy and child health”. *Professor David MacIntyre*

Building on more than 60 years of pioneering research at the University of Adelaide, the RRI aims to inform clinical care, policy, and practice to progress women’s and children’s health across generations and global communities.

Professor MacIntyre is currently the Professor of Reproductive Systems Medicine, and Section Head of Pregnancy, Parturition and Prematurity at the Institute of Reproductive and Developmental Biology at the Imperial College London. He is also the Scientific Director of the March of Dimes Prematurity Research Centre at the College.

He received his PhD in Reproductive Medicine at the University of Newcastle (Australia), before undertaking postdoctoral training in metabolic profiling at the Centro de Investigacion Principe Felipe in Valencia, Spain where he was awarded the Marie Curie International Incoming Fellowship. He also received the UK’s prestigious Medical Research Council Career Development Award, which enabled him to develop an internationally recognised research program focused on understanding how the vaginal microbiome influences reproductive health outcomes. His research has been awarded grants from major funding bodies including the March of Dimes, UK Medical Research Council, National Institute for Health and Care Research, Gates Foundation, and European Research Council, which supports collaborations in the UK, USA, China, Sweden, France, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, the Zambia and Ghana.

Professor MacIntyre will start as Director of the Robinson Research Institute at the beginning of March.



### Congratulations to Professor Sarah Robertson AO who has been recognised in the 2024 Australia Day honours

Former Director and member of the Robinson Research Institute, Professor Sarah Robertson AO, has been awarded Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for distinguished service to medical research, particularly reproductive biology and immunology and to professional societies.

Professor Robertson’s career spans more than 30 years which she has devoted to biomedical research and the higher education industry, including authoring more than 230 peer-reviewed scientific journal papers. She is a Professor of Reproductive Immunology and is recognised internationally for her innovative research in reproductive health, infertility and pregnancy.

She has served in numerous professional roles for national and international bodies, including the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia.

In addition to a suite of awards during her career, most recently Professor Robertson has been awarded the American Society for Reproductive Immunology’s AJRI Award, the Distinguished Scientist Award from the US Society for Reproductive Investigation and the Mentor Award (Asia-Pacific Region) from the International Society for Immunology of Reproduction, where she has been a council member since 2019.

## WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST HDA AMBASSADOR MIKE SMITHSON



**Mike Smithson** is one of the most experienced reporters and presenters in the Seven Network, having worked as a television journalist and newsreader for 43 years.

He was awarded the prestigious Journalist of the Year in South Australia plus numerous other awards for his work on television and in newspapers for his political commentary and critique, where he's influenced public opinion.

For 25 years Mike was the senior political reporter in Adelaide having covered many changes of government. During his long journalistic career, he's also interviewed every Prime Minister: from Gough Whitlam to Scott Morrison – 10 in all.

Mike is currently Chief Reporter and news presenter with 7NEWS Adelaide. He is a regular political commentator on FIVEaa and ABC Radio. He's a board member of the Channel 7 Children's Research foundation and is married to Fiona with two children and one grandchild.

### Celebrating 20 Years in 2024 HDA Scholars - Where are they now?



#### **Dr Leigh Guerin, 2006 1<sup>st</sup> cohort**

Leigh is a Patent Attorney, with the firm Phillips Ormonde Fitzpatrick, who specializes in Biotechnology and assists researchers in protecting their inventions to facilitate the commercialization of their discoveries, enabling the implementation of new medical treatments and diagnostics. Leigh's PhD project focused on studying the role of maternal T regulatory cells in healthy pregnancy, and he was mentored by his supervisors - Professor Sarah Robertson (Robinson Research Institute, University of Adelaide) and Professor John Hayball (UniSA).



#### **Dr Siew Lim, 2006 1<sup>st</sup> cohort**

Siew is a Senior Research Fellow and an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD), from Health Systems and Equity, Monash University, Australia. Siew's PhD project studied the effects of metformin or lifestyle intervention on weight, metabolic, reproductive and psychosocial outcomes in young women. Her supervisors were Professor Manny Noakes, Professor Peter Clifton (CSIRO Human Nutrition) and Professor Robert Norman (Robinson Research Institute, University of Adelaide).



#### **Dr Lisa Akison, 2009 2<sup>nd</sup> cohort**

Lisa is a Senior Lecturer and Higher Education Academy Fellow working in the School of Biomedical Sciences at the University of Queensland, Brisbane. Lisa's PhD project studied the molecular mechanisms regulating ovulation and oviductal function. Her supervisors were Professors' Rebecca Robker, Darryl Russell and Rob Norman (Robinson Research Institute, University of Adelaide).

*We thank the Channel 7 Children's Research Foundation for their financial support for the Scholars program and the PhD Excellence Awards.*

To read more on our Scholars career paths go to: <https://health.adelaide.edu.au/healthy-development-adelaide/our-people/celebrating-20-years-in-2024>

## HDA SCHOOL COMMUNICATOR 2024

### Congratulations to Dr Hayley Leake, our HDA Schools Communicator for 2024



This award is funded by the Channel 7 Children's Research Foundation (CRF).

Hayley is a Research Fellow within the Body in Mind Research Group, IIMPACT in Health at the University of South Australia.

Hayley will be delivering her interactive session on The Mysterious Science of Pain to a number of South Australian schools this year.

Hayley's research focuses on chronic pain management, pain education and digital health, particularly in adolescence. Her work identifies and implements interventions to change individual's misconceptions about pain, to improve active engagement in pain rehabilitation.

"I am honoured to receive the HDA Schools Communicator Award and excited to increase students' understanding of chronic pain including learning about the science of pain, and how they can help support other young people around them challenged by chronic pain", Hayley Leake.

The goal of this award is to help our emerging researchers, like Hayley, to showcase their research to South Australian high school students with the aim of getting them excited about the amazing opportunities open to them in health science or science career pathways.

Science is to obtain new facts, but most importantly, science is to discover new ways of thinking about them. It is, therefore, important to engage students and make them understand the problems of today and tomorrow because students of today are the leaders of tomorrow.

Channel 7 Children's Research Foundation Executive Director, Greg Ward, says the opportunity to fund HDA's Schools Communicator Award provides an inspiring platform for CRF to help foster and support the development of research careers in children's health in South Australia.

"CRF has been a dedicated supporter of HDA since 2007 through its PhD Excellence Awards and now in its fourth year, the Schools Communicator Award," Ward says.

"This opportunity for CRF to inspire young people to consider a career in research, and importantly, in children's health and development is incredibly important to us"

"We congratulate Hayley on receiving the 2024 HDA Schools Communicator Award and encourage her dedication to inspire younger generations to consider a future that will ultimately lead to improving the lives of children."

## HDA Partner News Department for Education

### Funding to support parent engagement to make schools safer

The latest round of successful applicants for Parents in Education funding have been announced for the 2024 school year. More than \$84,000 will be shared across 24 South Australian government schools and preschools to engage parents in their child's learning.

Projects with a focus on violence prevention through strengthening family, community and school partnerships were given priority in this latest round, as an immediate action from the Minister's Roundtable on violence prevention in schools.

Find out more here: <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/department/media-centre/our-news/funding-to-support-parent-engagement-to-make-schools-safer>

# HDA PUBLICATION AWARD WINNERS 2023

## Congratulations to our HDA Publication Award winners for 2023

This award recognises and promotes research publications of our PhD students, early career researcher (ECR) and mid career researcher (MCR) members. Each awardee receives \$500 for their winning publication.

**Dr Clare van Eyk (MCR category)**, Hospital Research Foundation Fellow, The Australian Collaborative Cerebral Palsy and Neurogenetics Research Groups, Adelaide Medical School, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, University of Adelaide

### **Redefining cerebral palsies as a diverse group of neurodevelopmental disorders with genetic aetiology**

Clare L. van Eyk, Michael C. Fahey & Jozef Gecz

Nature Reviews Neurology

View paper here: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41582-023-00847-6>

Cerebral palsy is a clinical descriptor covering a diverse group of permanent, non-degenerative disorders of motor function. Around one-third of cases have now been shown to have an underlying genetic aetiology, with the genetic landscape overlapping with those of neurodevelopmental disorders including intellectual disability, epilepsy, speech and language disorders and autism. Here we review the current state of genomic testing in cerebral palsy, highlighting the benefits for personalized medicine and the imperative to consider aetiology during clinical diagnosis. With earlier clinical diagnosis now possible, we emphasize the opportunity for comprehensive and early genomic testing as a crucial component of the routine diagnostic work-up in people with cerebral palsy.

**Dr Amanda Machell (ECR category)**, Research Fellow in Public Health, College of Medicine & Public Health, Flinders University, Healthy Communities, Flinders Health & Medical Research Institute, Adjunct Research Fellow - UniSA Allied Health & Human Performance

### **Children's activity and diet behaviours in the summer holidays versus school year \***

Amanda Watson, Carol Maher, Rebecca Golley, Dot Dumuid, Alexandra Manson, Grant Tomkinson, Francois Frayssse, Tim Olds

Paediatric Obesity

View paper here: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijpo.13029>

\* This paper was from a NHMRC funded study completed at UniSA.

A growing body of evidence indicates that more weight is gained during the summer holidays, compared with the school year. This weight gain may be due to engagement in relatively more obesogenic behaviours (e.g., low levels of physical activity, high levels of screen time and poorer diet) during the summer holidays. A recent meta-analysis of 296 studies of obesogenic behaviours on school days versus non-school days (i.e., weekends of summer holidays) found that adolescents (12–19 years) engaged in lower levels of physical activity and more screen time on less structured days. Sleep timing and diet quality were also less healthy on less structured days.

**Meredith Smith (PhD category)**, Lecturer Physiotherapy, School of Allied Health Science and Practice, University of Adelaide

### **Chronic pain interference assessment tools for children and adults who are unable to self-report: A systematic review of psychometric properties**

Meredith G. Smith, Lucy C. Farrar, Rachel J. Gibson, Remo N. Russo, Adrienne R. Harvey

Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology

View paper here: <https://doi.org/10.1111/dmcrn.15535>

Chronic pain is a common condition worldwide, with prevalence estimated to be between 11% and 38% in children and adolescents and 11% to 20% in adults. The prevalence of chronic pain is even higher in populations of individuals with disability, such as cerebral palsy, intellectual or developmental disability, and dementia, although pain assessment is often overlooked or misunderstood in this population. Despite the higher prevalence of pain, there are far fewer published studies on chronic pain management in these populations. This systematic review focuses on pain interference assessment tools currently available for children, adolescents, and adults with chronic pain and the inability to self-report in any setting.

## HDA TRAVEL AND DEVELOPMENT GRANT RECIPIENTS ROUND 1, 2024

Congratulations to our following members who will each receive funding towards their conference travel and development, January-July.

**Dr Amy Bromley**, School of Social Work, Flinders University - Association of Children's Welfare Agencies Conference 2024, Sydney, Australia.

**Dr Brittany Johnson**, Caring Futures Institute, Flinders University - International Congress of Nutrition and Dietetics, Canada.

**Dr Amanda Machell**, College of Medicine and Public Health, Flinders University - Preventative Health Conference 2024, Darwin, Australia.

**Dr Georgia Middleton**, Caring Futures Institute, Flinders University - International Congress of Nutrition and Dietetics, Canada.

**Dr Bing Wang**, Adelaide Medical School, University of Adelaide - Communicable Diseases and Immunisation Conference, Brisbane, Australia.

**Ria Aiyar**, School of Psychology, University of Adelaide - Perinatal Society of Australia and New Zealand Congress (PSANZ), New Zealand.

**Michelle Clarke**, Department of Paediatrics, Vaccines and Infectious Diseases Group, University of Adelaide - International Society of Pneumonia and Pneumococcal Diseases, Cape Town, South Africa.

**Kylie Dankiw**, Allied Health and Human Performance, University of South Australia - Professionals And Researchers In Early Childhood Intervention (PRECI) Conference, Queensland, Australia.

**Sarah Hammond**, Clinical and Health Sciences, University of South Australia - Fetal & Neonatal Physiological Society (FNPS) Annual Meeting 2024, UK.

**Jun Ho**, Quality Use of Medicines and Pharmacy Research Centre, Clinical Health and Sciences, University of South Australia - Research Placement at the Medicines Intelligence Centre of Research Excellence (MI-CRE), University of New South Wales.

### HDA Member News

Congratulations to our members who have been awarded NHMRC INVESTIGATOR GRANTS:

**Professor Tracey Wade** (\$2.95 million), Flinders Institute for Mental Health and Wellbeing Director and Matthew Flinders Distinguished Professor, College of Education, Psychology and Social Work, Flinders University

Revolutionising early intervention outcomes for youth with emerging eating disorders

**Professor Elina Hypponen** (\$2.9 million), Director, Australian Centre for Precision Health, University of South Australia

Transforming nutritional epidemiology research: A fresh look on diet and brain health

Congratulations to our members who have been awarded NHMRC IDEAS GRANTS:

**Professor Hannah Keage** (\$1.22 million), Professor of Psychology, University of South Australia  
Predicting delirium vulnerability from pre-surgery neurophysiological measures

**Dr Sophie Wiszniak** (\$724,147), Research Fellow, Centre for Cancer Biology, University of South Australia

Neural crest cells as modulators of Wnt signalling in heart development and congenital cardiac outflow tract defects

Congratulations to **Professor Katharina Richter**, Biomedical Research Fellow, University of Adelaide and Head of Richter Lab, Basil Hetzel Institute for Translational Health Research for winning the Medical Technology Association of Australia (MTAA) Women in MedTech Champion Award 2023.

## HDA MEMBER PROFILE

### DR BRITTANY JOHNSON, FLINDERS UNIVERSITY



Dr Brittany Johnson is a Senior Research Fellow in the Flinders University, Caring Futures Institute, and a Hospital Research Foundation Group Early-Mid Career Research Fellow.

Britt's research aims to equip families with practical strategies to ensure children eat well, move more, and get enough sleep, to support health, development, and growth. She has expertise in applying behaviour change theory to understand current behaviours and how we can positively shift behaviours. Britt leads research programs in supporting children's health behaviours in under 5-year-olds and building the evidence for school-provided meals in Australia.

She obtained a PhD in Public Health (Flinders University) which identified intervention content to support parents to reduce provision of unhealthy foods to their young children, during the transition from pre-school to school.

Britt's current projects include leading TOPCHILD-Policy, which is the translation of the TOPCHILD Collaboration evidence synthesis into policy and practice settings, using an integrated knowledge translation approach. The TOPCHILD Collaboration ([www.topchildcollaboration.org](http://www.topchildcollaboration.org)) is an international project that brings together researchers from over 20 countries to transform early childhood obesity prevention, by exploring past, ongoing and planned parent-focused behavioural interventions to understand how they work, and for whom.

Britt is the Stream 1 lead of the NHMRC EPOCH-Translate Centre for Research Excellence, Translating Early Prevention of Obesity in Childhood (<https://earlychildhoodobesity.com/>), which includes development of a Core Outcome Measures Set for early obesity prevention interventions. These projects involve working closely with parents/caregivers, practitioners, decision makers and researchers trialling interventions.

For more information on Britt's research visit: <https://researchnow.flinders.edu.au/en/persons/brittany-johnson> or Email: [brittany.johnson@flinders.edu.au](mailto:brittany.johnson@flinders.edu.au)

## BECOME A HDA MEMBER TODAY ...

Join us in fostering South Australian multidisciplinary research, policy and practice at basic, clinical, social and population levels to enhance the healthy development and wellbeing of Australia's future generations.

HDA membership is open to researchers, PhD students and professionals working in areas relevant to HDA's research.

### Membership benefits

- Access to travel grants (PhD students and early career researchers)
- Access to PhD scholarships
- Eligibility to apply for HDA awards
- Free HDA event attendance certificates towards your continuing professional development points
- Build relationships with people working in areas relevant to the health and development of young children and adolescents
- Contribute your knowledge and expertise to make a difference
- Support HDA into the future

1 year for \$30 or 3 years for \$60 (excluding GST).

<https://health.adelaide.edu.au/healthy-development-adelaide/get-involved>

# Are you a mother of young children who has reached out for professional support?



**Our research** explores mothers' past experiences of seeking professional support for challenges such as feeling overwhelmed, financial/housing issues or family violence.

We are **interviewing** mothers (online) with these experiences during pregnancy or with young children (<5 yrs) to learn about their needs.

For details, please contact:

**Lauren Lines**

[lauren.lines@flinders.edu.au](mailto:lauren.lines@flinders.edu.au)

(08) 8201 7661



Ethical Approval 6535

## HDA Partner News Department of Human Services

### New inclusion grants to empower more South Australians into work

Projects and programs that help South Australians who face barriers to employment to build confidence, practical skills and opportunities for employment or volunteering can apply for up to \$50,000 funding under a new State Government grant round.

"The Strengthening Inclusive Pathways to Employment grant round will support community organisations to implement projects that provide practical supports to build home-grown talent and provide improved employment outcomes. This grant will increase the capacity of the sector to work with community members to increase their skills and confidence to take on paid work or volunteering," says Ruth Ambler, Deputy Chief Executive of DHS.

Grant applications close at 3pm on 3 April 2024.

Find out more here: <https://dhs.sa.gov.au/news/2024/new-inclusion-grants-to-empower-more-south-australians-into-work>



# Young Australians are still struggling

Media release - 7 February, University of Adelaide



A new report into the mental wellbeing of Australia's youth, written by the University of Adelaide, has shown young people across the country are struggling with their resilience and mental health.

The finding was published in the 2023 *State of the Nation Report*, with data collected from the annual Resilient Youth Australia Resilience Survey of around 140,000 students in Grades 3-12, across every state and territory.

Responses showed 27.4 per cent of primary school students and 35.9 per cent of secondary school students report high levels of anxiety, depression, or both.

Worryingly, the 2023 report did not show improvement in the wellbeing of young people compared with data captured during the disrupted pandemic years.

"Our data compares current wellbeing reports with 2022 and 2021, and for the most part shows no improvement over this time," said Dr Mark Kohler of the University of Adelaide's Wellbeing in Learning & Development (WiLD) Laboratory, which released the report.

"It's clearly not just a simple matter of 'coming out of Covid' or things going back to normal. When it comes to the wellbeing of our youth, the data doesn't paint a pretty picture."

Between 40-50 per cent of students reported high levels of disengagement and falling levels of hope, across all ages and genders. Among grade 7-10 students, 5 per cent reported frequent use of vapes and alcohol consumption, rising to 11 and 15 per cent among grade 11 and 12 students, respectively.

Dr Kohler said more research and investment in school-based programs is needed immediately.

"Families have declining resources, and often parents need to manage their own wellbeing in addition to that of their children," said Dr Kohler.

"One-on-one consultations with a psychologist or counsellor, while excellent, are no longer practicable to address the levels of problems amongst our children and youth in Australia.

"A broad scale school-based program is not only effective but also has the efficiency and reach to address the problems at a whole-population level."

The *State of the Nation Report* makes three urgent recommendations to address Australian youth's poor mental health:

- As students largely consider schools as safe, supportive and positive places to be, they should be used to address the wellbeing of young Australians by using proactive, evidence-based programs that are continuously measured.
- Schools should be empowered with knowledge and context-specific student mental health data to inform their approach.
- Wellbeing should be prioritised as a way of influencing academic outcomes, given the evidence showing a strong correlation linking good mental health and academic success.

The Resilience Project (TRP) is an organisation which uses the Resilience Survey data to help people build the happiness and resilience of students.

It uses a whole-school approach to proactively build and maintain collective social and emotional skills and instill an inclusive and supportive school environment.

Phoenix P-12 Community College in Ballarat began working with TRP in 2021 and are reporting improvements in hope, emotional literacy, and overall student life satisfaction.

"Implementing the TRP program has guided us in embedding a consistent language and whole-school approach to wellbeing at our school," says Phoenix's Principal, Karen Snibson.

"Staff are committed to the program, expanding the mental health literacy of our school community. The most notable shifts we have observed are students becoming increasingly grateful, resilient, and having a more positive outlook."

Dr Kohler said it is imperative that Australia's education sector is supported to address the mental health crisis in our youth.

Continued next page.....

## Unpacking school lunchbox costs

Media Release - 31 January, Flinders University



A new study shows the pinch families can face when packing a school lunchbox, finding families are spending about \$25 per child per week.

New analysis by Flinders University, University of Newcastle and Hunter New England Population Health Service experts in NSW has unpacked the average cost of a school lunchbox – noting that healthy options offer lower costs.

Flinders University PhD candidate and dietitian Alexandra Manson says eating well at school is key for children's growth, learning and development, with school-time food consumption making up one-third of dietary intake. The new study unpacked the lunchbox contents of more than 1000 children aged 4-12 years in NSW, finding most families spend between \$3 and \$6 per child per. Lower cost came from lunchboxes filled with healthy options.

"We know families face a lot of challenges when packing lunchboxes. Trying to provide affordable, healthy, convenient, enjoyable goods that comply with the school rules, can be time consuming," says Ms Manson, from the Healthy Start to Life research group at the Flinders University Caring Futures Institute.

"Some families are spending more for convenience choices, while others are struggling to afford lunchbox foods with the rising costs of living.

Children eat 2400 lunches at school over their education, providing lots of opportunities for learning about food and developing references, say the research team, which is also researching the potential for school provided meals in Australia.

"There's more we can do to make sure the system is supporting all families. Ensuring tasty healthy, affordable choices are readily available in and around schools would be a great start."

Flinders University co-author Dr Brittany Johnson adds: "We need to start thinking about how we can best support families to ease the lunchbox burden and ensure all children have access to healthy food every day at school.

"Currently, one in two children around the world receive school provided meals. Our research is currently exploring parent and stakeholder interest in school provided meals, and understanding what different families might need in such a model."

Key points:

- Food and beverage costs have risen more than 20% since 2017. This is contributing to the cost-of-living pressures on families, which also includes increases in other household bills, school fees and uniforms.
- This study found the cost of providing basic lunchbox meals was on average \$25 a week per child.
- Researchers say school provided meals have the potential to support families and provide a safety net for all.

The article, Unpacking the cost of the lunchbox for Australian families: a secondary analysis (2024) by Alexandra C Manson, Brittany J Johnson, Luke Wolfenden, Rachel Sutherland and Rebecca K Golley has been published in *Health Promotion International* (Oxford) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daad194>

Continued from previous page (Young Australians are still struggling) .... "Australia now stands at a crossroads in its commitment to the wellbeing of its youth," he said.

"Our youth have shown incredible resilience over the last few years, but just like a rubber band you can only stretch it so many times before something gives."

Dr Kohler's call for action is in line with [the Australian Government National Mental Health Commission's admission](#) that "a national approach to mental health and suicide prevention could not be achieved without ensuring the mental health and wellbeing needs of our children".

"The dataset we have collected is confronting but there is an opportunity to rally as a nation, supporting our students to ensure their resilience and mental health are top priorities," Dr Kohler added.

"Together, through informed action and collective effort, we can rewrite the story of our youth – a story filled with hope, resilience, and limitless potential."

The *Resilient Youth: 2023 State of the Nation Report*, is available at the WILD website here <https://wildlabadelaide.org/reports>

# Supporting young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men through social media

Media release - 1 February, Flinders University

Harnessing the positivity of social media and private forums may help young Aboriginal and Torres Strait men explore their mental health and develop skills and strategies to help them cope during challenging times.

A new Flinders-led project will explore whether social media can help improve the mental wellbeing of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men by offering them a culturally safe space to discuss sensitive topics and help relieve feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveals that the suicide rate among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males is twice that of non-Indigenous people, and it is widely acknowledged that such health disparities are fuelled by systemic inequities, including educational disadvantage and cultural dislocation.

“Few digital health promotion programs are tailored towards the unique health, social and cultural needs of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males – despite their disproportionate experience of mental health concerns, suicide ideation and suicide,” says lead researcher Professor James Smith, Deputy Dean Rural and Remote Health NT, College of Medicine and Public Health.

A new program, Young Black Men in the Northern Territory, (YBMenNT) has received valuable funding support from Movember to design and trial an online social and emotional wellbeing health promotion program in collaboration with young Indigenous men.

“It’s acknowledged that mental health is a tough subject for a lot of men to talk about,” says Mr Jason Bonson, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Male Health and Wellbeing.

“We want to provide an online program for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men that can be delivered through a private social media group such as Facebook or Instagram that aims to encourage positive and open discussions about mental health, cultural identity and progressive concepts of manhood and masculinities,” says Mr Bonson.

“By using a private forum on social media, we can offer a space where young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men can talk in comfort and confidence about issues that they might not feel comfortable discussing anywhere, or to anyone, else,” he says.

YBMenNT has been adapted for young men in the Northern Territory from the YBMen project, which was originally developed in the US to transform gender norms, enrich mental health and engage in social support for young Black men.

“By collaborating with community-led organisations, we have created a program that is socially relevant and relatable in order to engage young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men in discussions about mental health literacy, help-seeking, progressive concepts of manhood and masculinities and their emerging cultural identities,” he says.

“We believe in investing in programs that tackle unique issues through innovative approaches, particularly those that demonstrate that they work and can be scaled for broader impact. Movember continues to focus on the importance of building and strengthening relationships and feelings of belongingness to address the adverse effects of social isolation and loneliness on mental health,” says Ivy Lim-Carter, Director, Social Innovation, Mental Health & Suicide Prevention Program, Movember.

“YBMenNT’s aim to foster social connection and interaction that can greatly improve mental health and well-being outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and their communities fits directly with the goals of the Social Connections program,” Ms Lim-Carter adds.

The adapted program will facilitate online discussions that are culturally sensitive, age-appropriate and gender-specific using YouTube videos, song lyrics, and current news headlines. Group members can use the private forum to respond with their ideas, thoughts, perceptions, and challenges related to mental health, manhood, and social support.

The program will be delivered to young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men (15-25 years) in the Greater Darwin area of the Northern Territory through weekly one-hour sessions across six consecutive weeks starting in February 2024.

“The outcomes of our project will help us to identify the best approaches to sustainably maintain and potentially scale up the YBMenNT program over the longer-term,” says Professor Smith.

“Our approach has significant potential to enhance the health and educational outcomes of young Indigenous males both nationally and globally. It will also provide world-first comparative data with other diverse groups of young men of colour,” he adds.

## AIFS Conference 2024

AIFS Conference 2024 will be an experience that showcases important research, is a catalyst for national conversations, and charts a new course for the wellbeing of all kinds of families across Australia.

The theme for the 2024 AIFS Conference is: **Families Thriving? Asking big questions. Influencing change.**

**Learn** from the expert and foster conversations on the big challenges and emerging issues for families.  
**Explore** how policies and practices need to change so that families can flourish in a rapidly changing world.  
**Connect** with like-minded individuals.

11-14 June, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre

Find out more here: <https://www.aifskonference.com.au>

## How to support positive peer relationships among young people in online spaces

### How to support positive peer relationships among young people in online spaces

Webinar (online): 21 February, 1:00 - 2:00 pm (AEDT)

Presenters: Hue Dwyer, Casey Thorpe, Riley Scott, Mandy Truong

This webinar will interest general family and child services practitioners working in areas including child and family services, parenting and relationship services, health and education.

Find out more here: <https://aifs.gov.au/webinars/how-support-positive-peer-relationships-among-young-people-online-spaces>

## Supporting family and child mental health in the face of severe weather events and disasters

### Supporting family and child mental health in the face of severe weather events and disasters

Webinar: 28 February, 12.30 - 1.30pm (ACDT)

Presenters: Bron Sparkes, Dr Andrea Baldwin, Sarah Eagland and Ben Rogers

This webinar will draw on practice and lived experience to explore how to support child and family mental health in the face of severe weather events and disasters. Partner: Emerging Minds

Find out more here: <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/7381954379850940252>

## Wardliparingga Aboriginal Health Equity, SAHMRI Introduction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Health Research

The Masterclass will be held on Monday 12 and Tuesday 13 February at the SAHMRI Auditorium.

A fantastic opportunity to hear and learn from our Aboriginal leaders within Wardliparingga Aboriginal Health Equity covering topics concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research such as:

- Introduction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches in research
- Ethical considerations for effective research
- Indigenous research methodologies and utilising research
- Partnerships and collaboration in the research process

Find out more and register here: <https://events.humanitix.com/aboriginal-health-research>