



## 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



### GOLD



**University of  
South Australia**



**Flinders  
University**

### SILVER



**Government of South Australia**  
Department for Education



**Government of  
South Australia**

Women's and Children's Health Network



Women and Kids



**Government  
of South Australia**  
Preventive Health SA



**Government  
of South Australia**  
Department for  
Child Protection

Women's  
Children's  
Hospital  
Foundation

### BRONZE



## UPCOMING HDA EVENT

Please join us for the **Healthy Development Adelaide (HDA)** and **SAHMRI Women and Kids** forum on **Current trials and studies in preterm birth and pregnancy complications – better outcomes for mother's, babies and families.**

Wednesday 5 February, 5.30-8.00pm in the Napier 102 lecture theatre, Napier building, 1st floor, University of Adelaide, North Terrace



### OUR SPEAKERS

**Dr Karen Best**, SAHMRI Women and Kids  
**Omega-3 Fatty Acids and the Prevention of Pre-term Birth**

**Professor Tim Green**, Flinders University / SAHMRI Women and Kids

**Optimising Prenatal Folic Acid Supplementation to Promote Best Outcomes for Mum and Child: The Folic Acid in Gestation Trial**

*Funded by the Women & Children's Hospital Foundation.*

**Dr Emily Shepherd**, SAHMRI Women and Kids / Robinson Research Institute, University of Adelaide

**Magnesium sulphate for cerebral palsy prevention**

**Ms Karen Glover** and **Ms Beth Kean**, SAHMRI Women and Kids

**Innovative approaches to supporting Aboriginal families: Insights from Corka Bubs to ICARE**

### OUR CHAIR

**Professor Alice Rumbold**, SAHMRI Women and Kids

#### Other event information:

*Networking and light refreshments will follow the session from 7.00pm.*

*This is a public forum and also open to the community, everyone is welcome to attend.*

*Please share to your colleagues, family, friends and networks*

For the full program and to register please go here: <https://events.humanitix.com/current-trials-and-studies-in-preterm-birth-and-pregnancy-complications-better-outcomes-for-mother-s-babies-and-families>

We look forward to seeing you there!



## HDA MEMBER PROFILE - DR CHRISTOPHER BEAN

### SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE



Christopher Bean is a Senior Lecturer and co-director of the Bachelor of Psychological Science (Honours) program at the University of Adelaide.

In his first few years as a lecturer, Chris worked as part of a small team, led by Dr Lynn Ward, developing the School of Psychology's first fully online programs – the Graduate Diploma in Psychology [Online] and the Graduate Diploma in Psychology (Advanced) [Online].

Chris authored and coordinated four courses in the first program, including *Developmental Psychology*, and guided the development of the follow-up program as program co-director.

Both programs have been recognised with highly positive student feedback and the Executive Dean's Team Prize Award in 2019 and 2023.

Christopher's academic journey began at the University of South Australia, where he completed his Honours degree with a project in the Centre for Sleep Research. This was followed by a combined PhD and Master of Psychology (Health) at the University of Adelaide, supervised by E/Prof Helen Winefield, Prof Amanda Hutchinson (UniSA), and A/Prof Charli Sargent (CQU).

His PhD explored psychosocial work factors and metabolic health outcomes using the Job Demand-Control(-Support) model and data from the North West Adelaide Health Study (NWAHS). Traditional approaches to computing 'job control' involve combining the two subscales – *skill discretion* (i.e., the degree of freedom an employee has in addressing their work tasks) and *decision authority* (i.e., the level of influence and responsibility an employee has within the organisation).

Chris's doctoral work revealed that these subscales of job control may have distinct associations with health indicators. Controlling for sex, age, household income, work hours and job nature (blue vs. white-collar), high levels of '*skill discretion*' were associated with a smaller waist circumference and lower BMI, whereas high levels of '*decision authority*' were associated with the opposite. These differences would have gone unnoticed using traditional approaches.

After completing his PhD, Chris was awarded a postdoctoral fellowship at Uppsala University, Sweden, where he worked with Professor Anne Hammarström and longitudinal data from the Northern Swedish Cohort (NoSCo). This unique dataset includes all students ( $n = 1083$ ) who completed their final year of compulsory schooling in Luleå, Sweden, in 1981 (age 16), with follow-ups at ages 30 and 43. A remarkably low attrition rate (94% participation at the age 43 follow-up) allowed him to explore life-course influences on mental health. This included investigating the potential long-term impact of poor peer relationships in adolescence on mental health in later adulthood, highlighting the importance of fostering supportive social environments during formative years.

Christopher's current research interests include the ethical and practical implications of emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), in workplaces, educational settings, and mental health care. He is particularly focused on the potential of AI to improve accessibility to services while addressing concerns related to privacy, security, and equity.

Alongside his research, Chris coordinates undergraduate and postgraduate courses, including *Technology in Psychological Research and Practice*, *Honours Thesis in Psychology*, and *Professional and Interpersonal Skills in Psychology*.

Through his teaching, he encourages students to critically engage with the intersection of psychology and technology, equipping them with the skills to navigate and innovate in an increasingly digital world.

## HDA MEMBER NEWS

### Congratulations to our members for their successful NHMRC Ideas Grants 2025!

**Dr Dorothea Dumuid, Prof Timothy Olds, A/Prof Ashleigh Smith, Dr Ty Ferguson**

UniSA Allied Health & Human Performance (\$1,378,364)

*Not everyone has the same 24 hours in a day: Addressing time inequality through AI-based personalised time-use interventions*

**Dr Lisa Nicholas**

Robinson Research Institute, University of Adelaide (\$952,936)

*Revealing the yolk sac as an essential source of insulin for fetal development*

**Prof Jillian Carr**

Flinders University (\$1,323,095):

*Defining interactions of complement to uncover pan-therapeutic targets for diverse neuroinflammatory disorders*

**Dr Tanja Jankovic-Karasoulos A/Prof Luke Grzeskowiak, Prof Gustaaf Dekker, Dr Anya Arthurs**

Flinders University (\$1,173,926)

*Too much of a good thing? Examining the Impacts of Folic Acid Supplementation After the First Trimester on Placental Endocrine Function and Insulin Resistance During Pregnancy*

**A/Prof Kathryn Gatford, Prof Janna Morrison, A/Prof Michael Stark, Dr Mitchell Lock**

University of Adelaide (\$2,308,299)

*Maturing the preterm lung without damaging the brain*

**Dr Jodie Avery, Prof Louise Hull, Ms Alison Deslandes**

Robinson Research Institute, University of Adelaide (\$1,978, 271)

*Enhanced Outcomes for young people with endometriosis through diagnostic delay reduction*

### 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
- 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

**If you are not involved in research or are part of the general community not to worry as we also welcome your membership and support. We would love to have you be a part of our network!**

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

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

## HDA PARTNER NEWS WCH FOUNDATION



**In December 2024, we welcomed Verity Gobbett as the new CEO of the WCH Foundation as we farewelled Jane Scotcher, who now heads into retirement.**

Verity has been instrumental in shaping the WCH Foundation in her position as Head of Mission, and is now poised to lead the organisation into an exciting new chapter driving even greater impact for women and children's health in South Australia.

Verity has been a senior leader in the children's health charity space for over ten years, and since joining the WCH Foundation in 2021 has completed a Masters of Business Administration. [Meet our new CEO, Verity Gobbett | Women's & Children's Hospital Foundation](#)

**The Women's & Children's Hospital Foundation is thrilled to announce that it will lead a new major project delivering a transformative Community Health and Wellbeing Hub, serving families in the North.**

The visionary project which aims to address vital needs in the community has been made possible thanks to the funding announced today as part of the Australian Government's urban Precincts and Partnerships Program (uPPP).

The WCH Foundation secured land within Adelaide's Northern Health and Wellbeing Precinct thanks to a generous philanthropic donor with a desire to build capacity for people of the North. The WCH Foundation, working with values-aligned partners across sectors, has developed the vision for the Community Health and Wellbeing Hub which will positively impact the health outcomes of families in Adelaide's northern region. The project will strengthen and extend our support of the Women's and Children's Health Network's statewide reach, with the aligned goal of delivering care "closer to home".

Key features include a student-led allied health clinic offering affordable care, facilities for trialing new models of care, and sleep rooms to support parents of babies in LMH's Special Care Baby Unit. Additionally, parents will have the opportunity to engage in programs designed to build valuable lifelong skills.

The project represents a collaborative effort to address vital needs in the community, particularly for families in the formative first five years of a child's life.

Read more here: <https://wchfoundation.org.au/funding-secured-for-community-health-and-wellbeing-hub-in-the-north-2/>

**We are proud to support Dance Movement Therapy for mothers at Helen Mayo House, a Women's and Children's Health Network facility that provides inpatient services for parents who have significant mental health problems in the postnatal period.**

Mothers experiencing mental health problems can experience difficulties in bonding with their babies and regulating both their own, and their baby's, emotions.

Dance Movement Therapy is evidence-based, trauma-informed and strengths-focused. The psychosomatic therapy uses creative movement and arts-based therapeutic interventions for regulation and expression of emotions through motion.

Mums can engage in joyful, spontaneous play, making sessions a powerful tool to get to the heart of issues in a simple and direct way, as well as being accessible even for those who are struggling to engage in talk therapy.

For the full story and more information visit <https://wchfoundation.org.au/dance-movement-therapy/>

## HDA PARTNER NEWS

### CH 7 CHILDREN'S RESEARCH FOUNDATION

#### VR headsets could be life changing for people with intellectual disability

Immersive virtual reality could open up a whole new world for people with intellectual disability, enabling them to learn practical life skills much faster without relying on caregivers, according to a new study.

Australian researchers compared the effectiveness of immersive VR headsets and non-immersive virtual environments to teach 36 adults with an intellectual disability how to separate general waste from recycling, garden, and food organics.

The study, undertaken by University of South Australia and UNSW Sydney researchers, involved 12 virtual training sessions. The VR group using the immersive head-mounted displays scored significantly better in real life than those who used a tablet device for training.

The findings have been published in the *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*. UniSA A/Prof Tobias Loetscher says people with intellectual disability need additional time to grasp and visualise concepts, and VR headsets enabled participants to experience realistic worlds and learn from hands-on experience.

"Research shows that 'learning by doing', otherwise known as experiential learning, seems more effective for this group compared to passive methods of learning," A/Prof Loetscher says.

"In our study, the VR group not only demonstrated real-world improvements in correctly sorting waste immediately after the VR training; they were able to sustain this improvement up to a week afterwards, in comparison to the non-immersive group."

Read more here: <https://www.crf.org.au/vr-headsets-could-be-life-changing-for-people-with-intellectual-disability/>

## HDA Partner News

### Department of Human Services

#### Therapy dog Jada brings comfort and healing



Vulnerable young people in custody at Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre are being supported to heal from trauma thanks to a visit from Jada, a six-year-old pet therapy dog who stops by once a week.

For young people in the youth justice system, who often come from a background of disadvantage and abuse, her visits are a highlight and a source of comfort.

The initiative is part of a wider therapeutic and trauma-informed approach to support young people to find a path away from reoffending.

Read more here: <https://dhs.sa.gov.au/news/2024/therapy-dog-jada-brings-comfort-and-healing>

#### Social Impact Grants deliver \$1m to empower South Australian communities

The Department's commitment to fostering strong, inclusive communities has been bolstered with the announcement of over \$1 million in funding awarded to community groups and organisations across the state through the Grants SA 2024-25 Social Impact Grants program.

This funding supports 54 innovative projects aimed at creating positive social change, enhancing community spaces, and advancing wellbeing for South Australians, particularly those experiencing socio-economic challenges or vulnerabilities.

Read more here: [https://dhs.sa.gov.au/news/2024/social-impact-grants-deliver-\\$1m-to-empower-south-australian-communities](https://dhs.sa.gov.au/news/2024/social-impact-grants-deliver-$1m-to-empower-south-australian-communities)



## HDA PARTNER NEWS DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION

### \$50 million investment in education infrastructure



More than \$50 million will be invested in priority infrastructure at schools across the state, addressing urgent upgrades and expansions to help with capacity.

Multi-million dollar improvements will be made at Fairview Park Primary School, Fulham Gardens Primary School and Taparra Primary School.

Located in Adelaide's north-eastern suburbs, Fairview Park Primary School will receive \$10 million to replace outdated buildings with new modern facilities.

Fairview Park Primary School Principal Becky Jones said, this is wonderful news for our whole school community and everyone will be beyond excited.

"Fairview Park is blessed to have beautiful surroundings, and our school has worked hard to make the best of our aging infrastructure, but there is only so much that can be done".

"This school is 50 years old next year, and having new buildings and teaching spaces for our students and staff will be the best possible birthday present", Jones said.

In regional South Australia, Fraser Park Primary School in Murray Bridge will receive \$10 million that will go towards demolishing old transportable buildings and replacing the preschool.

There will also be a further \$5 million for Mount Barker High School to support upgrades to help with capacity and new physical education and food technology areas.

The funding will allow the Department for Education to progress urgent upgrades at some of the highest priority sites. Funding has been allocated to upgrade and improve existing assets as well as replacing assets that have reached the end of their serviceable life.

Oakbank School has also received \$15.9 million, as part of the release of the 20-Year Infrastructure Plan for Public Education and Care, to rejuvenate and update the site's facilities. Planning is underway with each of the schools to develop building plans to meet their education and capacity requirements.

## HDA Partner News Department for Child Protection

### South Australia leads the way in finding stable homes for young people

South Australia is the nation's best at finding stable permanent homes for children leaving out of home care, a new report has revealed.

The 2023-24 Report on Government Services (RoGS) released today also shows that slowing the growth of children coming into out of home care, investigating more notifications and providing greater stability for children in out of home care are among the key improvements for South Australia's child protection and family support system.

The positive indicators highlighted in the report reflect the Malinauskas Labor Government's significant investment of \$580 million into services and programs that support and empower children and young people and that work to transform the child protection and family support system is beginning to show results.

The RoGS report shows that during 2023-24, the overall net growth of children coming into care has dramatically slowed and now sits at 706 children, a 9.3 per cent reduction on the previous year and the lowest number of children entering care since 2017-18.

Read more here: <https://www.childprotection.sa.gov.au/news-and-events/news-and-media-releases/dcp-news/south-australia-leads-the-way-in-finding-stable-homes-for-young-people>

## HDA PARTNER NEWS

### WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S HEALTH NETWORK

**Pregnancy and the transition to parenthood can be an exciting and overwhelming time, so it's important to know when and where to seek help if you are struggling with your mental health.**

#### **Signs and Symptoms to Watch For**

Every parent's experience is unique, but some signs of perinatal and postnatal anxiety or depression to look out for include:

- Persistent low mood or feelings of anxiety that affect your day-to-day life.
- Low appetite or difficulty sleeping, even when the baby is resting.
- Excessive worry, often starting with "But what if...?"
- Avoidance behaviours, such as not allowing baby to play on the floor due to fear of germs.
- Difficulty bonding with your baby or a lack of enthusiasm for things you used to enjoy.

These feelings can also affect partners. Up to 5% of men experience postnatal depression, which can often go unnoticed

#### **Taking the First Step**

If you notice worrying signs in yourself or a loved one, it's important to seek help early.

Our Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS) offers a range of support services, including early interventions and tailored guidance for families during pregnancy and after the birth of their child.

Speaking with a CaFHS nurse, contacting ForWhen, the Parent Helpline, or reaching out to support organisations like PANDA or Beyond Blue could be what makes all the difference.

One of the best ways to support your mental health during this time is to talk about your feelings, ask for help, and remember you're not alone. Sharing your concerns is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Help is just a call away:

- **CaFHS Parent Helpline:** 1300 364 100
- **ForWhen:** 1300 242 322
- **PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia):** 1300 726 306
- **Beyond Blue:** 1300 224 636

## **EMPOWERED VOICES, SHAPING A YOUTHFUL FUTURE!**

### **COME JOIN THE ADOLESCENTS' AND YOUTH ADVISORY GROUP**

Are you aged between 18 and 24 years ?  
Residing in Adelaide for more than 6 months?  
if yes, then come join our advisory group!

This group will meet quarterly/bi-annually to:

- **Shape Research:** Contribute to research initiatives to ensure relevance and alignment with youth needs.
- **Discuss Progress:** Engage in discussions, providing feedback to guide meaningful research directions.
- **Community Engagement:** Share findings with youth, fostering empowerment and informed participation.

#### **Come join our advisory group!**

If you are interested in joining the Adolescent and Youth Advisory Group, please email to:  
zahraali.padhani@adelaide.edu.au

**Your time will be compensated!!**





## PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

### Relationship Satisfaction in Women from Migrant and Refugee Backgrounds



- Do you possess experience or expertise in offering sexual and reproductive healthcare services to women from migrant and refugee backgrounds?
- Whether you're a gynecologist, general practitioner, sexual health specialist, nurse, midwife or hold any other relevant role, we extend an invitation for you to join us.
- We welcome healthcare providers practicing in Adelaide, South Australia.

The healthcare provider will receive \$100 compensation for their participation in the study.

To take part, email  
[negin.mirzaeidamabi@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:negin.mirzaeidamabi@adelaide.edu.au)  
or  
For more information click [HERE](#) or scan  
the QR code



The project has been approved by the University of Adelaide's Human Research Ethics Committee  
(Ethics approval number: H-2024-011)

# IVF pregnancies at greater risk of exposures to medicines that can harm the fetus

Media release - 16 January, UniSA



A new Australian study has revealed a potential reason why some pregnancies achieved through assisted reproductive technology (ART) may result in birth defects in comparison to naturally conceived pregnancies.

Researchers found that in vitro fertilisation (IVF) and intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI) pregnancies had the highest exposure to teratogenic medicines that potentially can harm the fetus during the first trimester of pregnancy.

These are listed as Category D and X medicines by Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). The risk associated with the use of Category D medicines in pregnancy may be outweighed by the clinical benefit in individual cases such as management of mental health disorders or epilepsy. Category X medicines on the other hand are strongly discouraged during pregnancy due to the high risk of fetal harm.

Researchers from the University of South Australia (UniSA), The University of Western Australia (UWA) and The Kids Research Institute Australia analysed more than 57,000 pregnancies in four conception groups over a two-year period. The groups comprised women using ART (2041); those taking medication to induce ovulation (590); untreated sub-fertile women (2063); and naturally fertile pregnancies (52,987).

ART pregnancies had the highest exposure to Category D medications taken in the first trimester. The study found that 4.9% of the ART pregnancies were exposed, compared to only 0.6% of naturally conceived pregnancies.

In later trimesters, the trend persisted, with 3.4% of ART pregnancies exposed to Category D medications versus 0.6% of naturally conceived pregnancies. Exposure to Category X medications (causing the most harm during pregnancy) was low across all groups and trimesters, at less than 0.5% of pregnancies.

"These differences in exposure are primarily linked to medications used as additional treatment following ART to prevent repeat miscarriages or failed implantation, rather than medications to treat underlying chronic conditions," says UniSA researcher Dr Anna Kemp-Casey, who led the study.

"For example, ART pregnancies, during the study period were more often exposed to progestogens like medroxyprogesterone acetate, which may have been used to treat threatened or recurrent miscarriages," Dr Kemp says.

The five most frequently used Category D/X medications across all pregnancies regardless of conception status were paroxetine, lamotrigine, valproic acid, carbamazepine, and nicotine dependence treatments.

UWA co-researcher Professor Roger Hart, also a practising IVF clinician and the national medical director of City Fertility, says the higher exposure to Category D and X medicines in ART pregnancies during the first trimester may contribute to the higher rate of birth defects observed in ART babies.

"Although ART pregnancies are carefully planned, medications taken during fertility treatments may inadvertently increase exposure to birth defect risks, particularly during critical periods of fetal development," Prof Hart says.

Researchers say the findings demonstrate that the vast majority of IVF babies are healthy, and do not suggest that ART pregnancies are unsafe, but they underscore the importance of personalised medical care for women undergoing ART treatment and close monitoring for women in early pregnancy.

Prof Hart says more research is needed to examine Category D and X medicines exposure in pregnancy as well as underlying maternal medical conditions and their contribution to birth defect risk in ART babies.

**Women don't have a 'surge' in fertility before menopause – but surprise pregnancies can happen, even after 45**

**The Conversation, 30 January**

So, what do we know about the chance of conceiving naturally after age 45? And what are the risks?

Read the full article at: <https://theconversation.com/au/health>

## Gaps in pre-pregnancy health initiatives need filling

Media Release - 22 January, Robinson Research Institute, University of Adelaide



University of Adelaide A/Professor Zohra Lassi (right) talks with a young person about the research into preconception health initiatives.

Adolescents and young adults are being missed when it comes to pre-pregnancy health initiatives that could have a long-term impact on maternal, perinatal, and child health outcomes, according to a review by researchers from the University of Adelaide's Robinson Research Institute and School of Public Health.

The findings, published in *Public Health*, identify gaps around mental health, domestic and sexual abuse, substance use, sex education, nutrition education, lifestyle modification, and family planning messaging, as well as other areas for young people aged 10 to 25 years old.

The evidence gap map, created using data from 2010 to 2023, found health initiatives were more likely in high and upper-middle income countries and an overwhelming majority focused solely on females (88 per cent).

"It wasn't surprising to see limited evidence of health initiatives for men, but we were surprised to see limited focus on interventions like prevention of substance and tobacco use, improving lifestyle behaviours and nutrition and the prevention of violence, especially considering its impact on their pregnancy and child health," senior author A/Professor Zohra Lassi says.

"More research needs to be done to overcome the challenge by conducting long-term follow-up studies with adolescents to better understand how preconception interventions affect their future pregnancies and the health of their children.

"There's a pressing need to address the gap in research on young men's preconception health – these interventions are critical for breaking the cycles of poor health outcomes."

The review, which examined 18 studies (124 research papers), also found behavioural interventions were limited, with most of the evidence in relation to the monitoring of adverse events of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination.

"Early intervention not only contributes to the wellbeing of adolescents but also has long-term implications for their overall health trajectory and the prevention of potential pre-conception-related challenges," says Ms Padhani.

While most preconception-related education is targeted at women of reproductive age, Ms Padhani said messaging should have a broader focus.

"Given that many adverse maternal, perinatal and child health outcomes are preventable, interventions during adolescence can have long-lasting impacts on both individual health and population-level outcomes," says Ms Padhani.

"Risk assessments and health education during the preconception period are crucial for addressing potential risk factors and improving outcomes long term."

A/Professor Lassi said the study highlighted the importance of targeting the right age groups with initiatives, like education and vaccinations, particularly in areas with limited evidence and infrastructure.

"Integrating a HPV vaccination into national immunisation plans, especially in lower-middle income countries, clearly reduces cervical cancer risk and may, as future longitudinal large-scale studies suggest, also lower adverse pregnancy outcomes," she said.

**How can you tell if your child is ready for a smartphone? What are the alternatives?**

**The Conversation, 30 January**

The start of the school year means some parents will be asking a big question: is it time for a child's first phone?

Read the full article at: <https://theconversation.com/au/education>



## Dating apps and body image risks

Media release - 9 January, Flinders University

Dating apps have become the go-to for starting a romance but new research reveals they may harm Australian's body image, mental health and overall wellbeing, as anxiety about achieving beach bodies returns this summer.

Australians are turning to online dating in record numbers, but Flinders University researchers have reviewed data from 45 studies between 2016 and 2023 to reveal the negative impact dating apps have on users' mental health and wellbeing.

Led by PhD candidate Zac Bowman in the College of Education, Psychology and Social Work, the analysis shows over 85% of the studies identified a significant connection between using dating apps and poor body image, and nearly 50% of the studies linked the apps with negative mental health outcomes.

"Our review shows that dating apps can undeniably harm users' body image, mental health, and wellbeing, highlighting the need for protections to reduce its negative impact on young Australians that regularly use apps in search of a partner," he said.

"These negative outcomes include disordered eating, unhealthy weight control behaviours such as steroid use, induced vomiting and laxative use.

Using dating apps was also linked to poorer self-esteem and higher depression and anxiety."

Body image refers to the perceptions or feelings that one has towards their own appearance, often revolving around body size, shape, and attractiveness

The researchers say dating apps have 337 million users globally and the primary target demographic

are people aged 18–29.

"Poor body image outcomes make it clear that developers need to introduce strategies that educate the public on the potential risks of using dating apps which will be critical to safeguarding young people's wellbeing," Mr Bowman said.

Between 2016 and 2023, 48.9% of studies focused on body image outcomes and over 60% on mental health and wellbeing.

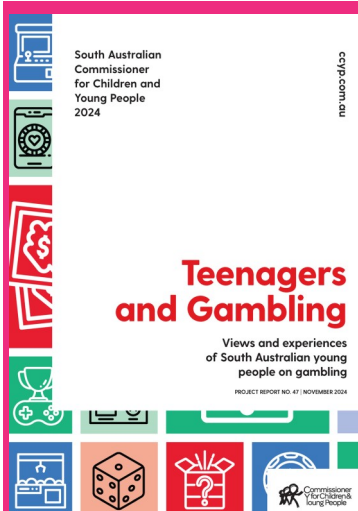
Over 85% of these studies found significant negative impacts of dating app use on body image, and almost half reported negative effects on mental health and wellbeing.

Senior author, Professor Murray Drummond says younger adults are more likely to be using dating apps as well as battling with mental health and wellbeing concerns, so protecting them through regulation should be a policy priority.

"Regulations on dating apps, including introducing usage restrictions and daily time limits are needed to protect users from these concerning negative impacts."

"Developers should be looking at ways to decrease the serious implications attributed to app dating. For example, by decreasing the importance and prevalence of visual content on user profiles, addressing discrimination and abuse and promoting active use rather than passive."

Dating apps and their relationship with body image, mental health and wellbeing: A systematic review, by Zac Bowman, Murray Drummond, Julia Church, James Kay and Jasmine Petersen was published in *Computers in Human Behaviour*. DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2024.108515



## South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People

### Report: Teenagers and Gambling

The pervasiveness and risks associated with gambling and the ease with which people of all ages can access and participate in gambling throughout Australian society is gaining greater awareness. However, little attention is being given to the views and experiences that children and young people, and in particular teenagers, have in relation to gambling.

Read more here: <https://www.cyp.com.au/publications/teenagers-and-gambling/>