



The University of Wollongong has a strong focus on research, learning and teaching and knowledge translation that has been built up to assist Australia's rapidly ageing population live full and productive lives well into their senior years.

The University of Wollongong (UOW) is home to Dementia Training Australia and the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Centre (IHMRI), which has a dedicated research theme on Ageing and Chronic Diseases. The University also has a number of other research centres that have programs devoted to ageing, ranging from pure scientific research into neurological disease through to biomechanical developments, dietetics, food security for older people and social research.

For example, Associate Professor Victoria Traynor is leading a project that facilitates people with dementia to decide when to cease driving, Dr Karen Mickle from the Biomechanics Research Laboratory is leading research into foot structure and footwear design to develop strategies to reduce falls among older people and Dr Karen Walton is examining food packing and how many products are simply unable to be opened by older people who can then end up with dehydration and malnutrition.

Global Challenges: Living Well, Longer

The University of Wollongong has identified Living Well, Longer as one of three Global Challenges that underpin the University's research focus by concentrating multidisciplinary expertise in areas where there is a universal need.

The Living Well, Longer Global Challenge looks at all aspects of life so that longevity is not only medically possible, but enjoyable. The Challenge, which covers health, housing, medical care, relationships, transport, services, sustainability and finances, is led by Professor of Mental Health, Dr Lorna Moxham.

Projects range from developing preventative care measures for health issues such as diabetes, hypertension and musculoskeletal

problems to working with partner organisations like Alzheimer's Australia on a pioneering program to develop dementia-friendly communities to make it easier for people with dementia to interact with their social, cultural and physical environments. A pilot project is currently underway to turn the NSW South Coast town of Kiama into a dementia-friendly community.

In addition, UOW staff contribute to the Age Friendly Illawarra Alliance. This partnership recognises that city centric solutions do not always transpose to a regional context. The Age Friendly Illawarra Alliance was formed and now, after months of enquiry and research, the AFIA Steering Group includes the Joint Organisation of Councils, Healthy Cities Illawarra, Family and Community Services and the University of Wollongong Living Well Longer Global Challenges). The Alliance is committed to the vision that people in the Illawarra aged over 65 years are enabled to lead active, engaged lives and contribute positively to our community.

Courses

The University of Wollongong offers a number of degrees that train people to work in aged care settings, including Medicine, Nursing, Psychology, Nutrition, Public Health, Social Work, Exercise Science and Rehabilitation.

Many of these courses include subjects dedicated to the care of older Australians, while clinical placements in aged care facilities are a feature of a number of the courses (and compulsory in Nursing).

The University of Wollongong has a dedicated Professor of Ageing, Associate Professor Victoria Traynor, who leads a program of multi-disciplinary postgraduate studies in aged and dementia care for Graduate Certificates and Masters of Science in Gerontology and Rehabilitation Studies and Dementia Care. Professor Traynor's experience combines research, education, and clinical experience in aged and dementia care. The focus of her work is on improving dementia care services using qualitative research and practice development techniques across care settings with multidisciplinary teams.

Dementia Training Australia

The University of Wollongong is home to Dementia Training Australia. Funded by the Australian Government, Dementia Training Australia offers a national approach to accredited education, upskilling, and professional development for the workforce providing care to people living with dementia. Led by the University of Wollongong, Dementia Training Australia is a consortium bringing together leading dementia educators and trainers from 5 universities and Alzheimer's Australia.

Dementia Training Australia collaborates with its partners to provide professionals with evidence-based information for the care of people with dementia. This is achieved through curriculum development, clinical placements, professional development, online learning, workshops and on-site consultancy.

For example, the Centre collaborated with NSW Justice Health to develop algorithms to assist nurses assess patients for dementia in forensic settings, such as prisons. It is also working with Alzheimers Australia on the development of an assessment tool that will be used to identify the 'dementia friendliness' of shopping malls and other public buildings to help with the creation of dementia friendly communities.

In 2013 the Federal Department of Health and Ageing funded the national centre to provide the first national education and training service on making acute care hospital environments more supportive of people with dementia.

International dementia expert Professor Richard Fleming is the Director of Dementia Training Australia, which is hosted by the University's School of Nursing and Midwifery within the Faculty of Science, Medicine and Health.

Dementia- friendly communities

The South Coast town of Kiama is the pilot site for a bold new project aimed at creating dementia-friendly communities throughout Australia.

The wider research project, led by UOW, aims to change the way people with dementia interact with their social and physical environments and boost their quality of life.

Part of UOW's Global Challenges, Dementia-Friendly Communities is in direct response to the growing number of

Australians who are expected to be diagnosed with dementia in the coming decades, a figure set to rise from the current 32,000 to approximately one million in 2050.

The multidisciplinary initiative has also seen the development of Our Place – an interactive website that enables users to map dementia-friendly places in their area.

The site encourages people with dementia and their supporters to share local knowledge about places in their neighbourhood that are dementia-friendly and also allows users to share ideas about places that could be improved. While the maps currently focus on Kiama and Darwin, it is hoped to be expanded to other communities.

Our Place is funded by the Alzheimer's Australia Dementia Research Foundation and is part of the Dementia Friendly Kiama and Dementia Friendly Darwin initiatives.

Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute

The Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute, a partnership between the University of Wollongong and the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District, has a broad research agenda that encompasses diseases, medical conditions and health issues. Within that agenda it has a research theme on Ageing and Chronic Conditions.

The Ageing and Chronic Conditions theme brings more than 250 academic and clinician researchers together to explore the causal mechanisms, treatment, management and prevention of these common diseases.

A group of laboratory-based scientists is investigating molecular, cellular and genetic mechanisms underlying the ageing process as well as age-related chronic conditions. Many are also aligned with the Neuroscience and Mental Health theme and are committed to understanding the causes of neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, Huntington's disease and Motor Neurone Disease. Dr Justin Yerbury and research Assistant Natalie Farrowell from the Illawarra health and Medical Research institute at the University of Wollongong are researching Motor Neurone Disease.

Clinician researchers with skills and experience in nutrition, health literacy, gerontology and aged care, exercise science, molecular biology, chronic disease management and clinical service delivery are focused on understanding and improving the treatment of chronic diseases and how lifestyle factors might prevent disease and extend healthy ageing.

These researchers are also working with secondary, primary and aged care providers to develop strategies and interventions to improve and extend cognitive function, enhance mobility and physical function and improve the wellbeing of older people in care and in the community.



Dr Justin Yerbury and research Assistant Natalie Farrowell from the Illawarra Health and Medical Research institute at UOW are researching Motor Neurone Disease.

Contact:

Judy Raper

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)
University of Wollongong

Ph: +61 2 4221 3915
E: judy_raper@uow.edu.au
uow.edu.au

