

Mental health



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Mental illness and neurodegenerative diseases represent a major challenge in Australia and the world, with devastating impacts on individuals, families, carers and the community at large.

Mental health has been a National Health Priority Area since 1996, and the University of Wollongong also has a long history of work on mental health in three key areas:

- Scientific and social research
- Learning and teaching through our degree courses in Psychology, Nursing, Medicine, Social Work, Education and Health Sciences
- Clinical practice and knowledge translation, through evidence-based health care, at Recovery Camp and Northfields Clinic and other work-integrated learning experiences

The University of Wollongong's research centres that do work in mental health include:

- Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute, which has more than 170 people involved in its research theme on Mental Health and the Ageing Brain
- Illawarra Institute for Mental Health, which uses research into mental health and drug and alcohol issues to inform training and service development
- Brain and Behaviour Research Institute, which researches the physiological and cognitive foundations and applications of behaviour
- Centre for Translational Neuroscience, which has a strong focus on developing a better understanding of the neuropathology of schizophrenia and developing new ways to treat it and allied disorders
- Centre for Health Initiatives, a multidisciplinary centre focused on developing innovative solutions to address contemporary health and social issues
- Centre for Psychophysics, Psychophysiology and Psychopharmacology, which is researching the role that human brain processing plays in attention, sensory perception, cognition, affect and behaviour

- Neural Control of Movement Laboratory, which is involved in neurophysiology - a branch of physiology and neuroscience that focuses on the relationship between the brain and the peripheral nervous system

Northfields Clinic

Northfields Clinic has provided affordable, high-quality psychological services to the Illawarra community for more than 30 years, while also providing a superb training facility for clinical practitioners.

The University of Wollongong's School of Psychology operates the clinic, which was established in 1981 to provide psychological assessment and treatment services to the community and an advanced clinical training setting for post-graduate psychology interns. These interns, who have completed a four-year degree in psychology, work under the supervision of senior clinical psychologists.

Since 1981 around 4500 interns have graduated from Northfields Clinic as clinical psychologists with Masters, Doctorate and PhD qualifications, making it one of the most successful clinical training facilities of its type in Australia. In that time it has treated more than 10,000 children and adults for a range of issues including anxiety and phobias, depression, drug and alcohol problems, obsessive compulsive disorder, stress management, sleeping disorders, assertiveness, self-esteem building, anger management, learning disabilities and child behavioural problems.

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. It includes a research theme on Mental Health and the Ageing Brain, which focuses on the translation of research findings into clinical practice to drive advances and innovation in mental health therapies.

Associate Professor Heath Ecroyd (scientific) and Senior Professor Xu-Feng Huang (clinical) are the leaders of the theme, which brings together more than 170 basic, translational and clinical researchers to explore the mechanisms, causes, prevention and treatment of a wide range of chronic and complex mental illnesses, neurodegenerative diseases and neuro-developmental disorders.

Researchers aligned with this theme are based at IHMRI's headquarters or within various University of Wollongong research centres, public and private health service centres and a wide range of community settings. They bring with them skills and experience in mental health nursing, health promotion, nutrition, counselling, general practice, psychology, psychiatry, pharmacology, neurology, molecular biology, genetics and medicinal chemistry.

Laboratory-based scientists are investigating the molecular, cellular and genetic underpinnings of psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia and neurodegenerative diseases including Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, Huntington's disease and Motor Neurone Disease. They are also seeking to identify molecular and genetic targets for new therapies and treatments.

Psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and mental health nurses are looking at the causes of, and possible treatment and management options for, psychiatric disorders such as personality disorders and schizophrenia as well as neuro-developmental disorders including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Other clinicians associated with the theme bring their experiences delivering front-line services in mental health, drug and alcohol treatment, aged care, dementia management and preventative health.

Award-winning Recovery Camp recoverycamp.com.au

The University of Wollongong's bi-annual Recovery Camp has become an important part of the University's clinical training program while helping people living with mental illness.

The innovative mental health program brings together undergraduate Nursing, Psychology, Exercise Physiology and Dietetics students and people with mental health issues for a week aimed at breaking down communications barriers and promoting an understanding of individual mental health recovery, while also being an immersive learning experience for students.

Through their experience at Recovery Camp, students and people with lived experience realize their personal strengths and their contribution to the mental health recovery of others.

Since its inception, the Recovery Camp team has maintained a focus on research and evaluation, establishing a substantial evidence-base. The dissemination of Recovery Camp research led to national and international awareness of the Recovery Camp program. Increasingly, universities expressed their interest in having their students experience the program, and people with lived experience of mental illness were interested in attending.



Professor of Psychology Professor Brin Grenyere

In 2016, Recovery Camp joined the entrepreneurial start-up program at iAccelerate, UOW. It was the first research program to move from UOW to the iAccelerate Advanced program, evidence of true translation, community engagement and impact. This was done to fully explore the potential of Recovery Camp as an enterprise of social impact. Recovery Camp aims to be the leading provider of evidence-based, experiential learning of mental health recovery for future health staff and people with a lived experience of mental illness.

Mind the GaP

A joint initiative by the University of Wollongong and Shoalhaven Council is tackling the issue of mental health and wellbeing in the Shoalhaven area by establishing an innovative mental health care facility providing patient-centred, holistic care.

The new purpose-built \$2.5 million Mind the GaP facility, to be located at UOW's Shoalhaven Campus in Nowra, will address the high rate of mental health needs in the Shoalhaven community, particularly among younger people, and will focus on improving the prevention, early recognition and treatment of mental health issues, including suicide prevention.

Construction started in mid-2016 and the facility will bring together healthcare professionals, researchers and frontline support services, such as Lifeline, to create an integrated mental health and wellbeing precinct.

The initiative, which is jointly funded by the Commonwealth Government's National Stronger Regions Fund and the University of Wollongong, will be led by Shoalhaven City Council and the University of Wollongong, and delivered in partnership with Lifeline South Coast, Lifeline Australia Research Foundation, Coordinare, Nowra Medicare Local, the Illawarra and Shoalhaven Local Health District, Noah's Shoalhaven, and the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute (IHMRI).

The facility, which is due to open in March 2018, will provide therapeutic spaces for treatment (such as clinical psychology services) as well as a home for community outreach programs such as suicide prevention strategies and whole-of-school-based bullying programs.

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