



# HEALTH RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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ANNUAL REPORT 2025  
RESEARCH IMPACT

# OUR VALUES

## EVERYONE'S INVITED

Celebrate differences and embrace similarities. Value unique contributions and promote accessibility and equity for all.

## WALK TOGETHER

Connect and collaborate with our community, both near and far. Embody the spirit of Canberra as a meeting place of ideas and creativity. Show what we have to offer.

## NARRAGUNNAWALI

Embrace Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing in our work and our culture. Get amongst the conversation. Listen authentically and be a driver of meaningful reconciliation.

## DARE TO BE CURIOUS

Find purpose in learning. Step out of your comfort zone. Be brave, stir curiosity and share ideas and discoveries that shape our future.

## CHANGE THE WORLD

Don't be afraid to have an impact. Do things differently. Inspire each other to be innovative.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The University of Canberra acknowledges the Ngunnawal people, traditional custodians of the lands where Bruce Campus is situated. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of Canberra and the region. We also acknowledge all other First Nations Peoples on whose lands we gather.

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# CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD FROM THE CHANCELLOR</b>	<b>3</b>	Tackling tobacco smoking in Indigenous communities .....	31	Early insights for more resilient communities	46
<b>MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DEAN</b>	<b>5</b>	Childhood developmental vulnerability .....	32	1000 city global challenge .....	48
<b>DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE</b>	<b>6</b>	Connect Up 2617 community-driven project addresses social connection for young people in Belconnen and Bruce .....	34	Transforming schoolyard spaces into places for student wellbeing .....	49
<b>MISSION STATEMENT</b>	<b>7</b>	Men's health — Movember: helping men live happier, healthier, longer lives .....	35	<b>STRENGTHENING HEALTH SYSTEMS, IMPROVING LIVES</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>HRI RESEARCH TO IMPACT PATHWAY</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE FOR A PLANET IN TRANSITION</b>	<b>36</b>	A local navigation tool for Mental Health Care (MChart) .....	51
<b>2025 HIGHLIGHTS</b>	<b>9</b>	Our researchers help deliver landmark environmental report — <i>Global Environmental Outlook (GEO-7) Report 2025</i> .....	38	Better medications management for residential aged care .....	54
<b>OUR PEOPLE</b>	<b>10</b>	Climate change adaptation to smoke haze for improved child health in Southeast Asia ..	39	The wellbeing of carers .....	55
<b>OUR RESEARCH</b>	<b>26</b>	Australia's first climate risk assessment .....	41	<b>OUR NATIONAL AND GLOBAL REACH</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>TOWARDS A HEALTHIER FUTURE: PREVENTING DISEASE AND ADVANCING WELLBEING</b>	<b>26</b>	NHMRC — Targeted call for research into climate-related health impacts and effective interventions to improve health outcomes .....	42	<b>SUPPORTING OUR RESEARCH WITH CUTTING EDGE INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	<b>58</b>
Measure It! Increasing the physical activity levels of people with heart disease .....	28	Building wellbeing into policy and action: Setting Australia's future wellbeing agenda .....	44	Visual & Decision Analytics Lab .....	59
Cardiac Rehabilitation for transient ischaemic Attack and Mild-Stroke (CRAMS): a randomised controlled trial .....	30			The climate and health HEAL Lab .....	60



# 10 YEARS

2025 was the 10th year anniversary of the Health Research Institute.

The Health Research Institute — University of Canberra has been celebrating its 10th birthday throughout 2025.

We are a team of multi-disciplinary researchers bringing about impact for major societal issues aligned to the key Sustainable Development Goals: **Good health & wellbeing**, **Reduced inequalities**, and **Climate action**. We are solution-focused and outcome-orientated.

Our team includes experts in; epidemiology, geography, data science and informatics, machine learning, health promotion, implementation science, economics, statistics, modelling, health policy, social and behavioural science. 2025 was a year to celebrate our journey and the impact we've made together. Here's to the next decade of innovation and collaboration!



Staff at our 2025 retreat at Lake Crackenback NSW.

# FOREWORD FROM THE CHANCELLOR

On behalf of the University of Canberra, I am delighted to present this report showcasing the outstanding achievements of our flagship Health Research Institute.

We are extremely proud of the work of Professor Davey, her team, and their collaborators. Their contributions continue to build on a strong foundation of excellence and impact.

Over the years, the Health Research Institute has undertaken world leading research that is having a profound impact on Canberra, Australia and the world. Quite simply, the Institute's work is making the world healthier. The Institute remains resolute in its commitment to improving equity of access to good health, wellbeing and healthcare for all.

The Institute epitomises the University of Canberra's commitment to applied, mission orientated research that addresses local, national and global challenges aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, including good health and wellbeing, climate action, and reducing inequality.

We are proud to be ranked in the top 10 universities in the world for reducing inequalities (THE Impact Rankings, 2025) and to have held the number one position for two consecutive years. We are also proud to be in the top 10% of universities worldwide for the Sustainable Development Goal on Health and Wellbeing.

The Institute's research is guided by the University's mission, Galambany, and our values, as we work together every day to empower, connect and share knowledge.

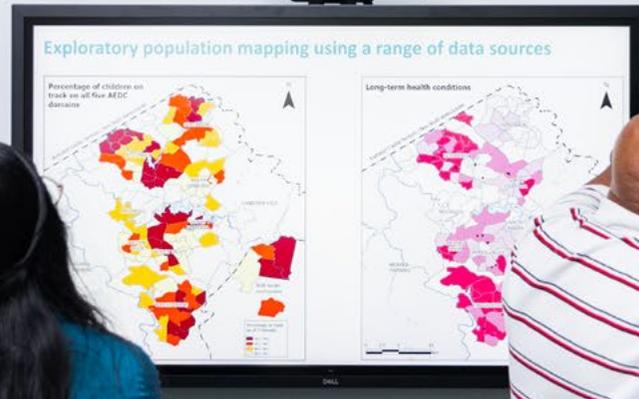
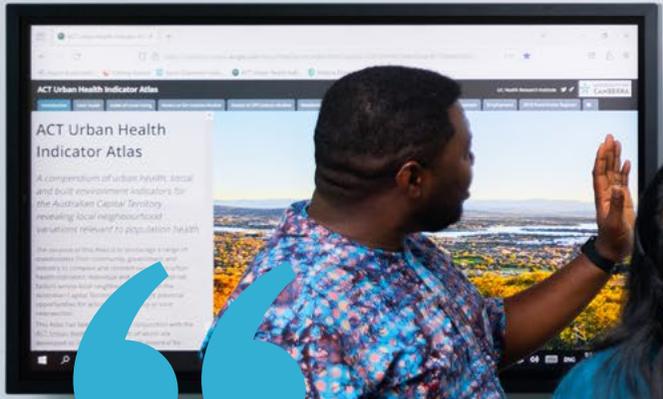
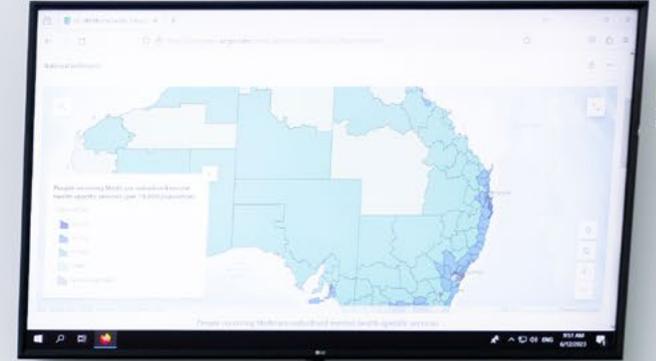
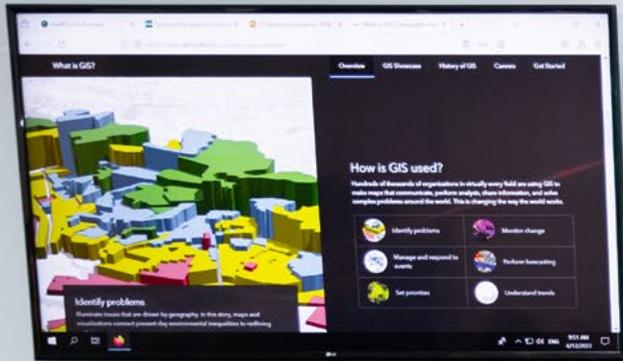
Its way of working—through close collaboration and co design with researchers, government, industry, healthcare providers and consumer is exemplary. This collaborative, interdisciplinary approach has delivered remarkable research success.

**The Institute fosters a workplace that celebrates a diversity of skills, disciplines, perspectives and lived experiences and we are stronger and more vibrant for it.**

I am pleased to present this impressive, inspiring and deeply impactful account of the Institute's achievements.

**Lisa Paul AO PSM**  
*Chancellor*





**A decade of research impact that is unapologetically GLOCAL: locally anchored, globally relevant.**

Rachel Gibson, Executive Dean

# MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DEAN

## A decade of GLOCAL impact

It is my absolute pleasure to introduce the 2025 Annual Report for the Health Research Institute and to celebrate a decade of research impact that is unapologetically GLOCAL: locally anchored, globally relevant.

In 2015 the University of Canberra launched the Health Research Institute with a clear commitment: build foundations, deliver research excellence with impact, and then reach scale and focus in the areas where health equity, systems performance and population resilience are most at stake.

10 years later, HRI has grown into a vibrant research unit delivering research excellence with real world impact and shaping better health, practice and policy for system wide change.

What defines HRI is not only excellence in research but purpose in research. Research undertaken has enabled policy to be reshaped to help people thrive in a changing world.

**I would like to sincerely acknowledge and congratulate Professor Rachel Davey for her outstanding leadership as Director over the last decade.**

My thanks also to all HRI staff and students both, past and present for the dedication they have shown in making a difference through mission driven research.

**Professor Rachel Gibson**  
*Executive Dean – Faculty of Health*



# DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

**I am very proud to present our 2025 Annual Report and to highlight the research impact we have achieved over the past year.**

2025 also marks an important milestone — the 10th anniversary of the Health Research Institute. Over the past decade, the Institute has grown into a leading centre for mission-oriented and impactful health research. Our 10-year journey reflects the dedication of our people, the strength of our partnerships, and our unwavering commitment to improving health outcomes for communities locally, nationally and globally. This anniversary is an opportunity to celebrate how far we have come, and to reaffirm our vision for the years ahead.

Excellence in mission-oriented research and real-world impact remain at the core of our vision. Our research aligns directly with national health priorities and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals — including; good health and wellbeing, reduced inequalities, and climate action.

In 2025, our leading researchers have strategically partnered with local and national governments, industry, NGOs and community organisations to collaboratively address complex issues related to mental health and wellbeing, community resilience, chronic disease prevention and environmental change at the GLOCAL (local and global) level.

**We are building healthy and sustainable communities through strategic collaborations that are locally focused and globally relevant.**

As we celebrate 10 years of the Health Research Institute, I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank all HRI staff, alumni, graduates and current students for their dedication and commitment to making a real difference through impactful research. Your contributions continue to advance better health and care for all, and I look forward to building on this strong foundation as we enter the next phase of innovation, collaboration and impact.

**Professor Rachel Davey**  
*Director*



# MISSION STATEMENT

**Our mission is to undertake research with impact for better health, practice and policy and for system-wide changes for improved wellbeing for all.**

Our research directly aligns with national health priorities and international global Sustainable Development Goals: good health and wellbeing, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities and climate action.

**3** GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



**10** REDUCED INEQUALITIES

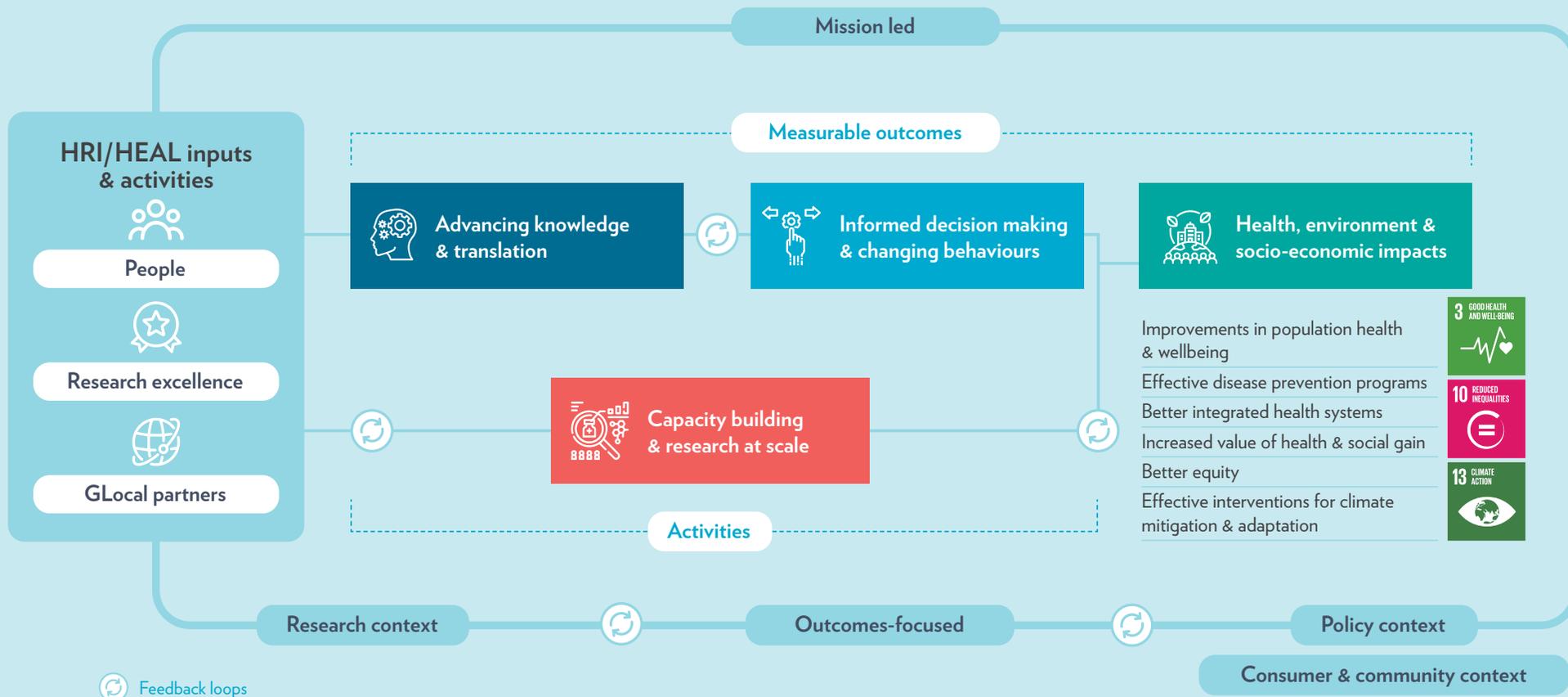


**13** CLIMATE ACTION



**Mission orientated research for outcomes driven impact.**

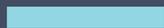
# HRI RESEARCH TO IMPACT PATHWAY



# 2025 HIGHLIGHTS



**51**  
Staff



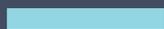
Over **80%** of our research publications are published in the top 10% journals for the disciplines of Public Health and Health Services Research.



Global research projects in **>50 countries**.



**20**  
Adjuncts



Partnership and engagement with **>100 local communities** across Australia with impact on regional and national policy.



Impact ranking in the **top 10%** for Good Health and Wellbeing in 2025 from the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings that assess universities against the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.



**27**  
PhD students



Ranked **10th** internationally for reduced inequalities.



# OUR PEOPLE



## Prof Rachel Davey

**Director, Health Research Institute**

Rachel is the Foundation Director of the Health Research Institute. Rachel has focused on the use and development of ecological models that emphasise multiple levels of influence on health.

Her research takes an integrated urban ecosystem approach to evaluating the influences of the built, natural and social environments on wellbeing and health.



## Prof Luis Salvador-Carulla

**Deputy Director, Health Research Institute**

Luis is professor of mental health and the Deputy Director of the Health Research Institute. His main field of interest is decision support tools for the analysis of complex health systems and policy in public health with a special focus on mental health, ageing, disability and intellectual developmental disorders.

He has been advisor to the Government of Catalonia and the Government of Andalusia (Spain), the Spanish Ministry of Health, the European Commission (EC) and the World Health Organisation (WHO).



## Prof Sotiris Vardoulakis

**Director, HEAL Global Research Centre**

Professor of Environmental Public Health and Director of HEAL Centre.

Sotiris has advised national and local governments and international organisations, such as the WHO, the United Nations Environment Programme, the European Parliament, the Pacific Community, and the UK and Australian Governments on the health effects of climate change, air pollution and extreme events, and sustainable development, health impact assessment, risk communication, and public health.



Some of our HRI staff at the University campus in Canberra.

# CELEBRATING RESEARCH EXCELLENCE AND IMPACT

## University 2025 Research Excellence Awards

The Research Excellence Awards recognise outstanding achievements in areas of research, Higher Degree by Research supervision, engagement, and impact. They are a celebration of the important roles contributing to the excellence of the University's research activities and outputs. These awards were presented by Professor Michelle Lincoln, Deputy Vice-Chancellor.



UC Research Award presentations 2025.



## Excellence in Engagement and Impact

### **WINNER: Healthy Lives an environment Global Research Centre (HEAL)**

HEAL GRC exemplifies the University's Research Impact Framework through mission-driven, partnered, and applied research that addresses urgent climate-health challenges.

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## Outstanding Team Achievement in Research or Enterprise

### **WINNER: Mental Health Policy Unit**

The team has extensive local, national and international collaborations that are impacting the lives and accessibility of services for people living with mental health challenges.



## Early Career Researcher Excellence

### WINNER: Dr Kimberly Brown, Faculty of Health

Dr Brown's area of research focuses on the health and wellbeing of people living in rural and regional Australia. She has been exploring and developing novel resilience indicators for communities impacted by natural disasters, and how these can be made accessible to service providers on the ground.



### ARC Discovery Early Career Researcher Award

Dr Zelalem Mengesha received a prestigious ARC Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) worth \$517,746 for his project: *Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health Equity for Multicultural Men*. This three-year study will inform culturally responsive policies and interventions that advance men's health equity in Australia and globally, reinforcing UC's leadership in health equity research.

### Research Excellence Faculty Awards 2025

HRI Faculty of Health awardees (L-R): Excellence in Learning and Teaching (Individual)

**Dr Zelalem Mengesha**

Outstanding Early Career Researcher **Dr Gweneth Leigh**

Research Excellence **Prof Nicole Freene**

Research Excellence (Highly Commended) **Dr Kinley Wangdi**

PhD Student Award for Excellence **Dr Sunil George**

Sessional Staff Excellence — Learning and Teaching **Dr Tapas Mazumder**



# THE NEXT GENERATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

In recent years, we have faced unprecedented public health challenges such as the Covid pandemic, social unrest, environmental crisis and economic challenges.

These have highlighted the need to focus our efforts to reduce health inequities and the need to train the next generation of public health professionals to address future global health challenges.



Research at UC is ranked #1 in Australia for industry collaboration

Source: The Australian, 2022



Well above world standard in public health and health services research

Source: ERA, 2018



Ranked in the top 11% for contribution to global sustainable development

Source: The Impact Rankings, 2024

## 2025 Professorial Lectures

### Professor Bagheri

We proudly celebrated Professor Nasser Bagheri, a valued member of the HRI team, as he delivered his Professorial Lecture. Nasser shared a deeply engaging and thought-provoking presentation, reflecting on his journey from Iran to Australia and the experiences that have shaped his academic and professional life. His work in spatial epidemiology and public health continues to make a significant impact, and today's lecture was a powerful reminder of the passion and dedication he brings to the field.



### Professor Nicole Freene

Professor Nicole Freene shared her journey from “Nicole Follett from Benington Station” to becoming a physiotherapist, researcher, and professor. She reflected on why physical inactivity is a leading risk factor for chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, and mental health disorders, and how her research focuses on increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary behaviour in adults — both healthy populations and those living with cardiovascular disease.



Professor Nicole Freene delivered an inspiring Professorial Lecture: *Walking the Talk – Reflections on a Career in Physical Activity.*

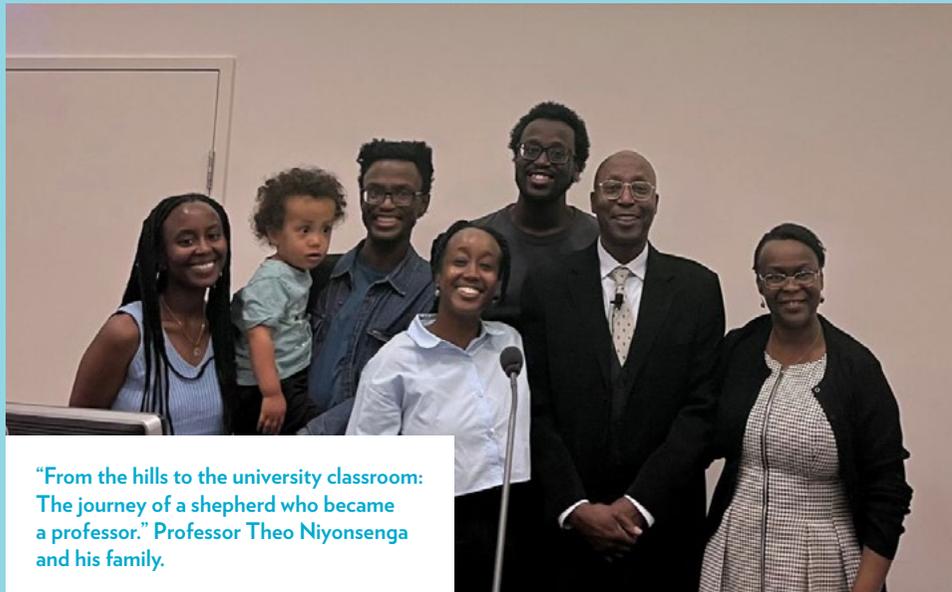
Nicole also spoke about the role of health professionals in promoting physical activity and reminded us that your dream is never too big. She expressed heartfelt thanks to her family, colleagues, mentors, and collaborators, noting how relationships and teamwork have been central to her success and impact throughout her career.

Congratulations, Nicole, on this incredible milestone and for delivering such an engaging and thought-provoking lecture that highlights the value of collaboration, relationships, and the importance of movement for better health.

## Professor Niyonsenga

We had the privilege of hearing from Theo Niyonsenga, PhD, Professor of Biostatistics & Epidemiology, in an inspiring HRI Professorial Lecture. Theo shared his journey through diverse cultures, projects, and collaborations, illustrating how these experiences have shaped his career and enriched his contributions to research.

As he put it: “My journey as a Statistician: A spatio-Temporal Heterogeneity and Diversity of Cultures, Projects, and People for Enriched Output. The output (me) is much better over time (I believe), and the spatio-temporal effects are permanent and statistically significant.”



“From the hills to the university classroom: The journey of a shepherd who became a professor.” Professor Theo Niyonsenga and his family.

**Greta Amorsen** joined the team in 2022 after completing her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at The University of Melbourne and Bachelor of Science in Psychology (Honours) at the University of Canberra.

**Ingrid Amorsen** has a background in psychology with a research interest in the mental health and wellbeing of minority groups.

**Nasser Bagheri** is Professor of Epidemiology and leads the Geo-Health and Visualisation and Decision Analytics Lab.

**Dr Kimberly Brown’s** research focuses on the health and wellbeing of people living in rural and regional Australia.

**Dr Michael Dale** has a background in the sports and exercise sciences.

**Dr Manoj Dissanayake** is a Visiting Medical Practitioner specialising in health informatics.

**Dr Sally Fitzpatrick** is a Senior Research Fellow with over thirty years of experience working in crisis intervention, mental health and suicide prevention.

**Prof Nicole Freene** has been practising as a physiotherapist for more than 25 years, working in hospital settings and primary health care, with a strong interest in the primary and secondary prevention of chronic disease.

**Dr Mary Anne Furst** co-ordinates the Global and Local Observation and mapping of CAre Levels (GLOCAL) projects.

**Andrea Gledhill** has a background in health promotion and health services management.

**Dr Nigel Goodman** is a Senior Research Fellow with research expertise in air quality and health.

**Dr Susan Hartono** is a biostatistician with a psychology, epidemiology and business management background.

**Assoc Prof Cathy Hope** is the Founder/Coordinator of Play Activation Network ACT.

**Dr Kim Houghton** is an economist whose research focuses on regional economic development issues.

**Dr Gopika Indu** is a Research Fellow in Climate Change, Air Quality and Health.

**Dr Luise Kazda** is a Senior Research Fellow in Health Systems Sustainability.

**Dr Antonia Kish** is a health, family and child psychology researcher. Her research interests centre around families, child development and wellbeing and the early years.

**“We are committed to providing an environment where everyone feels they belong and can bring their whole selves to work.”**

**Dr Jane Koerner** has an academic background in health promotion and epidemiology. She has worked in women's domestic violence and youth homeless services.

**Vincent Learnihan** has a broad research interest in the social determinants of health and promotion of healthy and sustainable communities and provides technical support to the Geo-spatial/VIDEA and environmental labs.

**Dr Gweneth Leigh** has a background in landscape architecture and research interests in how the design of our built environment affects community health.

**Dr Amanda Lonn** is a Swedish Heart-Lung Foundation Post-doctoral Fellow (Abroad) from the Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences.

**Assoc Prof Sue Lukersmith's** research focuses on two related streams: implementation research and impact analysis of health services, and best practice person-centred, integrated care (including case management and care coordination) for people with disability or chronic conditions.

**Dr Claire Manning's** research and project work includes education, arts, disability, Indigenous health and supporting older Australians.

**Dr Soumya Mazumdar** is a health geographer with research interests in two

broad domains. The first domain is the built environment and health where he has interests in greenspace, transportation and in social capital. The second domain is health services and the geography of health services.

**Assoc Prof Itismita Mohanty** focuses on Health Economics, econometric and advanced statistical modelling in health services research, health economics evaluation and policy/program evaluation.

**Dr Mel Mylek** focuses on the health and wellbeing of different groups of Australians, wellbeing and resilience in relation to experience of challenging times such as disasters and social dimensions of natural resource management in Australia.

**Nakul Nambiar** is a Software Developer specialising in programming, database management and cloud infrastructure.

**Prof Theo Niyonsenga** specialises in multivariate data analysis methods such as structural equations modelling, longitudinal and multi-level data analysis and spatial statistics with application to spatial epidemiology.

**Dr Enembe Okokon** is a Research Fellow in Environmental and Occupational Health.

**Dr Thrishila Parshu Ram** is a research fellow for the National Best Practice Unit Tackling Indigenous Smoking (NBPU TIS).

**Hannah Richardson** Hannah's research relates to landscape architecture and currently working on the Schoolyard Greenprint Project.

**Assoc Prof Sebastian Rosenberg's** expertise is in mental health policy at the University of Canberra and the Economics and Systems Science stream at the Brain and Mind Centre at Sydney University.

**Prof Jacki Schirmer** leads the Regional Wellbeing Survey, an annual survey in Australia examining the views of rural and regional Australians about the liveability and resilience of their community, and their own wellbeing and resilience. Jacki has a joint position with the Institute and is also Director for the Centre for Environmental Governance.

**Dr Jingyi Shao** is a Research Fellow in Environmental Health and Climate Risk Assessment.

**Assoc Prof Julie Smith** is also an Honorary Associate Professor at the ANU Crawford School of Public Policy. Her research applies feminist economics and focuses on measuring the economic value of breastfeeding and regulation of markets in mother's milk. Currently her research at HRI focusses on the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative.

**Dr Jennifer Sonter** is the Research Project Manager for the OPTIMISER study (on-site pharmacists in residential aged care homes).

**Bella St Clair** is a Senior Research Fellow for the OPTIMISER study (on-site pharmacists in residential aged care homes).

**Dr Anna Syme** is a data visualisation specialist aiming to increase actionable insights and clarity through clear and informative visualisations and interactive dashboards.

**Dr Hossein Tabatabaei Jafari** Hossein is a dedicated professional with a diverse background spanning medicine, cognitive neuroscience and mental health research.

**Assoc Prof Penney Upton** is a social scientist whose work focuses on the improvement of health and wellbeing across the lifespan. Her work has had significant influence on local and national policy and strategy in both Australia and the UK.

**Dr Kinley Wangdi** is an NHMRC Fellow and Senior Research Fellow and a medically trained spatial epidemiologist with clinical practice experience and public health and infectious disease.

**Dr Cindy Woods** focuses on impact analysis, public health, Indigenous health, mental health, trauma and resilience.

**Assoc Prof Barbara Walsh** Barbara is an academic with research interests in communication and engagement with a long and varied experience in professional communication and higher education management.

## Public health discipline

Dr Sunil George is Discipline Lead in Public Health. Sunil is a public health academic with over eighteen years of experience working as a public health practitioner, researcher and teacher in higher education in various settings in India, Kenya, South Africa and Australia.

Assoc Prof Ro McFarlane focuses on evidence synthesis for policy, education and addressing barriers to implementation of place-based solutions. Current activities include coordinating Health within the Nexus Assessment for the

Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

Dr Zelalem Mengesha is a DECRA Fellow and public health lecturer and an expert in mixed methods and Q methodological research as well as sexual and reproductive health care.

**“We are connected by purpose and enriched by diversity.”**



Some of our researchers who teach the Masters of Public Health (MPH).



Remy Morris with artwork 'Helping Hand'.

## Health Research Institute Narragunnawali Working Group

No matter where you come from — the mountains with goannas, the bush with snakes and kangaroos, or the rivers and seas with dingos and spears, and everywhere in between — you bring your knowledge along with you.

The Narragunnawali group is the 'Helping Hand', bringing together knowledge and new learnings to unite us all, while spreading culturally safe practices. We sit by the campfire, learn from each other. With these learnings, you plant the seeds of your learnings to others, grow as allies and advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## Administration team

**Daniela Espinoza Oyarce**

Senior Project Coordinator (research), supporting the HEAL Global Research Centre at the HRI.

**Mriganka Iyer**

Administration Assistant (research), supporting the HEAL Global Research Centre at the HRI.

**Lindsay Morgan**

HEAL Communications and Knowledge Exchange Coordinator.

**Nathasha Munasinghe**

Nathasha is an administration officer (research), supporting the HEAL Global Research Centre at the HRI.

**Dr Dharani Sabba**

HEAL Senior Centre Coordinator.

**Greeshma Sunil**

Mental Health Policy Unit Administration Officer.

**Jonathan Ward**

Jonathan is the Business and Project Manager for the HRI.

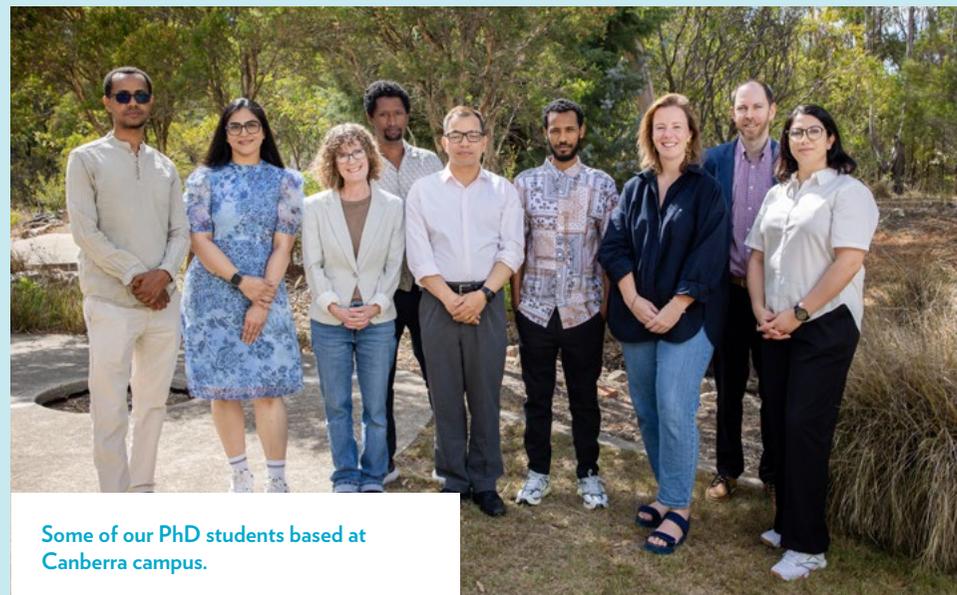
## Current PhD students

**Abebaw Yeshambel Alemu** Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) implementation in Ethiopia.

**Adugnaw Alem** Timeliness of aggressive non-Hodgkin lymphoma care and treatment outcomes.

**Faten Alharbi** Adopting a balanced diet of traditional foods as a pathway to healthy and sustainable food choices.

**Joseph Anumba** Investigating the relationships between built environment features and adults' subjective wellbeing in the Australian Capital Territory.



Some of our PhD students based at Canberra campus.

**Pratika Chawala** Health impacts of particulate matter: an individual exposome approach using wearable devices.

**Poulomi Chowdhury** Profiles of health issues, healthcare utilisation and its cost: a study of older workforce by type of economic activities in India.

**Wegayehu Enbeyle** Common mental disorders and healthcare service utilisation among Australian men: variations across space and time.

**Misganaw Gebrie Worku** Nutritional status and infectious disease among children.

**Saba Ghasvand** Social and environmental determinants of dementia.

**Ibrahim Haider** Medication management in aged care.

**Shushmita Katuri** Geographic variation in mental ill-health and cardiometabolic health in young people in Australia.

**Vincent Learnihan** Neighbourhood risk conditions for mental health and wellbeing: a case study of mid to older aged Australians.

**Xi Li** Socioeconomic disparities in multimorbidity, healthcare utilisation and catastrophic health expenditure in China.

**Enock Marita** Unravelling the effects of specialised oncology nurses on cancer patient outcomes in Kenya.

**Edmore Mazani** Addressing vaping among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth.

**Tapas Mazumder** Neonatal mortality in Bangladesh.

**Jeff Mitshabu** Dietary and lifestyle transitions in multi-generational Congolese Australians: effects on cardiometabolic risk factors.

**Sundus Nizamani** It takes two to tango: a couples-based intervention to reduce metabolic risk in parents and offspring.

**Jess Seymour** Investigating the effectiveness and implementation of a very brief physical activity intervention for cardiac rehabilitation participants with coronary heart disease.

**Samjhana Shrestha** Assessing the role of potential mediators in understanding the relationship between the social and built environment and adult obesity.

**Swati Singh** Acculturation, dietary behaviour and body weight status of Indian immigrants in the Australian Capital Territory.

**Alex Tanfield** Impact on changing nature of social capital in response to compound disasters.

**Gobezie Tegegne** Social and environmental determinants of polypharmacy among individuals with mental health disorders.

**Mel Triantafyllou** Relationships between local residential and within home physical and social environments and wellbeing from birth to early adulthood.

**Thomas Vasey** Children's active school travel: building a toolkit to assist the design, implementation and evaluation of safe routes to school programs.

**Lucy Walton** Cardiac rehabilitation for transient ischemic attack and mild stroke — implementation and effectiveness.

**Allison Wood** Eating with impact — a sustainable, healthy diet intervention for young Australian adults.

**Misganaw Gebrie Worku** Nutritional status and infectious diseases among children <5yrs old.

**“We take pride in our excellence in research training and our graduates are equipped with skills for their future in academia, government or industry.”**

## Adjunct honorary staff

### Dr Danish Ahmad

Trained in clinical medicine from the University of Delhi and public health from the University of Oxford and the University of Canberra, Danish has a career interest in improving the design, delivery and evaluation of health systems to improve population health and wellbeing.

### Assoc Prof Amir Aryani

Amir is the Head of the Social Data Analytics (SoDA) Lab in the Social Innovation Research Institute. The Lab applies contemporary and emerging co-op data analytics techniques to provide insight into health and social problems.

### Prof Charles Claudianos

Charles is a trained health researcher and medical scientist and an expert across multiple disciplines including mental and public health, neuroscience, molecular science and genomics. More recently his research focuses on neuropsychiatric disorders, neuroscience and mental health.

### Dr Hazel Dalton

Hazel is Research Leader and Senior Research Fellow at the University of Newcastle's Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health (CRRMH) in Orange.

### Assoc Prof Anindita Das

Anindita has over twenty years of clinical and research experience in diagnostics, antimicrobial stewardship, infection control, infectious serology and infectious diseases molecular diagnostics both in India and Australia. Dr Das's research at The Canberra Hospital include antimicrobial resistance, laboratory diagnostics, hospital acquired infections and infection control.

### Prof Paresh Dawda

Paresh is a General Medical Practitioner, academic and researcher with expertise in clinical leadership, quality and patient safety improvement. His clinical interests include the management of chronic conditions and those with complex needs e.g. frail elderly. This has led to a practice with a strong focus on aged care and palliative care. His non-clinical interests include research, education and training. He also works as an independent consultant advising organisations on developing high-performance health systems.

### Dr Diego Diaz-Milanes

Diego is currently working at the Universidad Loyola Andalucía (Spain) and his area of research focuses on improving mental health care provision by using decision support systems.

#### Prof Carlos Garcia-Alonso

Carlos is the Acting Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research at the Universidad engineering.

#### Assoc Prof James Gillespie

James is Hon Associate Professor in Health Policy in the Menzies Centre for Health Policy and the Sydney School of Public Health, University of Sydney. He has a PhD from the University of Cambridge. His research has covered the history and politics of global health organisation, comparative public policy and of the Australian health care system.

#### Assoc Prof John Goss

John has worked as a health economist for over 30 years. For many years he was Principal Economist at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare where he and his team produced the Health Accounts for Australia. These Health Accounts included a disease dimension and separately estimated health expenditure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. John continues to collaborate with the AIHW on Disease Expenditure.

#### Dr David Hardman

David is an Australian-based health professional. He is trained as a vascular surgeon and practices in Deakin.

#### Prof Richard Madden

Richard is the Head of Classifications at the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Strengthening Rehabilitation Capacity in Health Systems.

#### Prof Michael Moore

Michael was previously the CEO of the Public Health Association of Australia and the Vice President/President Elect of the World Federation of Public Health Associations. Michael is a former Minister of Health and Community Care and was an independent member of the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly for four terms from 1989 to 2001. In his retirement he is also a political and social columnist.

#### Dr Rajeev Pathak

Rajeev is a clinical academic and lead of cardiac electrophysiology at The Canberra Hospital. He is the head for the Heart Rhythm Disorders research group at The Australian National University. He has established the Electrophysiology services at The Canberra Hospital to provide specialised care for Cardiac arrhythmias. Dr Pathak's interests are in Clinical Cardiology and Cardiac arrhythmias.

#### Adjunct Assoc Prof Nalini Pati

Nalini is a Senior Staff Specialist at the Department of Haematology at The Canberra Hospital and is an honorary academic haematologist at the ANU Medical school.

#### Prof David Perkins

David is the Director and Professor of Rural Health Research, Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health at the University of Newcastle. David has extensive research experience in Mental Health Services, Rural Suicide Prevention, Public Health, Rural Health and Primary Health Care. His career spans senior management and health service research roles in both the UK and Australia.

#### Prof Daniel Rock

Daniel is a psychiatrist by training and epidemiologist with a PhD from the University of Western Australia. He is also a Fellow of the Royal Society for Public Health and an Adjunct Professor at the UC Health Research Institute and at the School of Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences, University of Western Australia.

#### Assoc Prof Jose Salinas-Perez

Jose is an Associate Professor at the Department Quantitative Methods, Loyola University in Spain. He is a geographer specialised in Health Geography.

#### Prof Annette Schmiede

Annette is a well-established leader within Australia's health and aged care sectors through her leadership and governance roles across public and private healthcare, industry, education and health and medical research entities. Currently Annette is the Chief Executive Officer of the \$220million the Digital Health CRC which brings together a unique, multidisciplinary, collaborative taskforce of research, clinical, industry, government and educational organisations.





HRI staff with The Honourable Bill Shorten and the Executive Dean of Health Rachel Gibson.

## Celebrating diversity and embracing all cultures

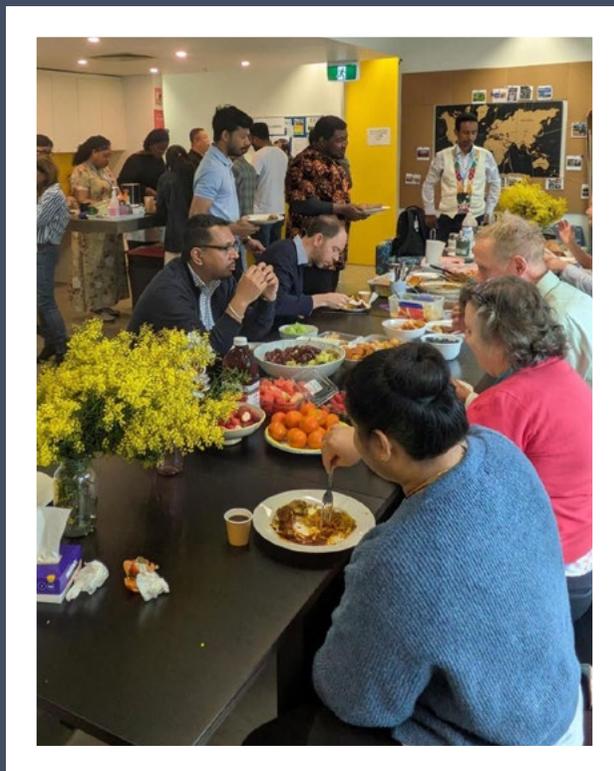
We value and embrace the rich diversity of our staff and students, recognising the many cultures and perspectives that strengthen our workplace. Each month, we come together for a morning tea where we celebrate and learn from one another's cultural traditions, foods and practices.

### Celebrating Ethiopian New Year

A colourful Africa Day and Ethiopian New Year (Enkutatash) celebration alongside 30+ staff and students from diverse backgrounds. Through traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremonies, storytelling, and shared joy, we honoured African heritage and strengthened our commitment to belonging, unity, and inclusion.

### Celebrating Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving in the United States is a holiday centred on gratitude, community, and sharing. It originated as a harvest celebration and has evolved into a time for families and friends to come together, reflect on their blessings, and enjoy a meal together. Beyond the turkey and traditions, it's a reminder of the value of thankfulness and connection.



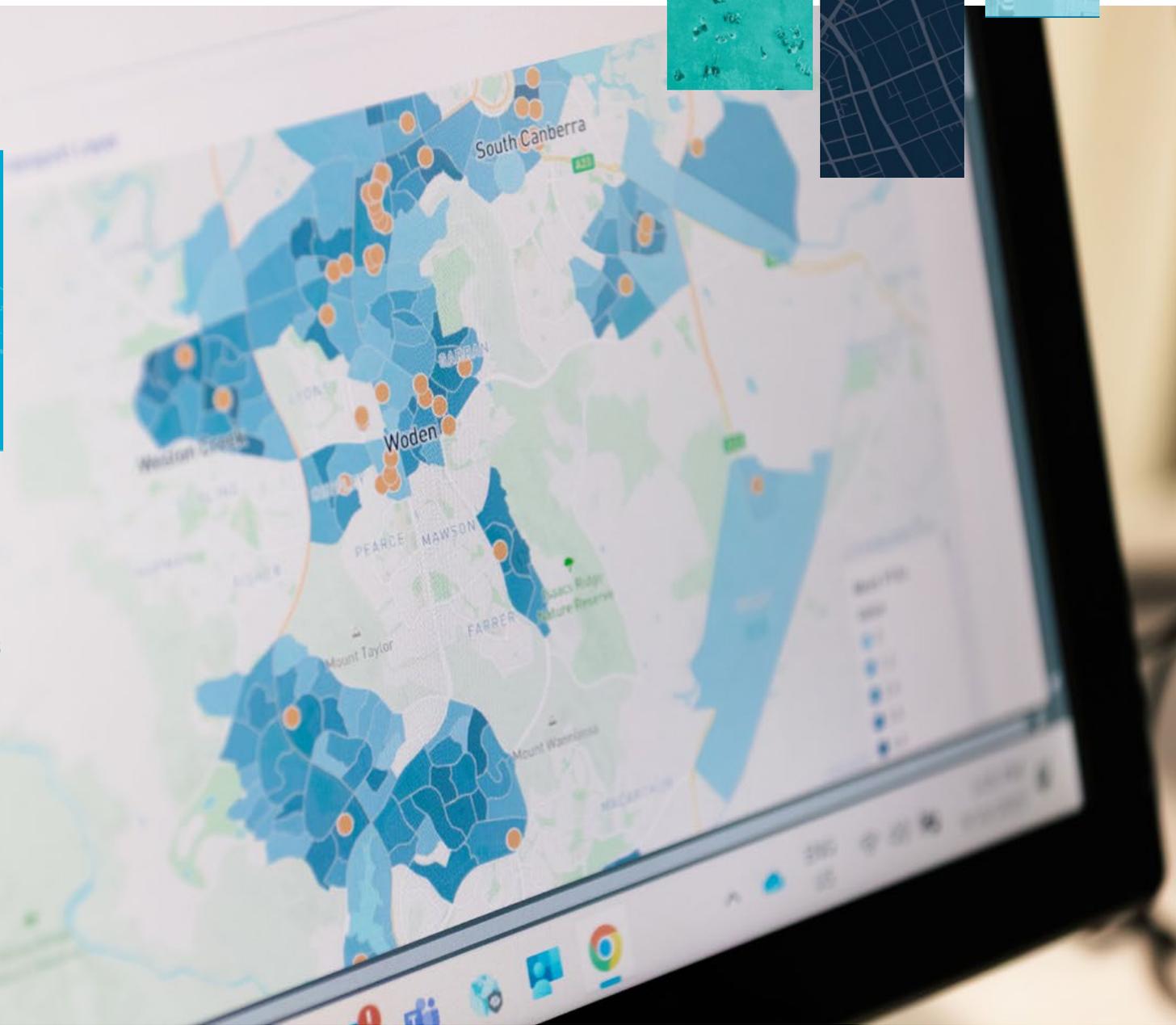


# OUR RESEARCH

## Towards a healthier future: preventing disease and advancing wellbeing

Chronic diseases remain the leading causes of death globally, accounting for approximately 41 million deaths each year, which is equivalent to 74% of all deaths. **Rising Premature Deaths:** Premature deaths from NCDs (such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer) are increasing, driven by population growth and aging, and now account for most deaths among people under the age of 70 worldwide<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. (2025). World health statistics 2025: Monitoring health for the SDGs, sustainable development goals. Geneva: World Health Organization.



At the University of Canberra Health Research Institute, we focus on preventing disease through innovative research and community programs. Our work spans digital health solutions, lifestyle interventions, and culturally tailored initiatives to reduce chronic disease risks. From wearable technology trials and cardiac rehabilitation programs to national efforts tackling Indigenous smoking, we aim to empower individuals and improve population health. By combining evidence-based strategies with real-world impact, we help create healthier communities for the future.

Healthy people — healthy populations.



**2 in 5**

Australians surveyed (39%)  
live with **3 or more chronic conditions<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup> PaRIS Health Survey Report 2025



## PROJECT

### Measure It! Increasing the physical activity levels of people with heart disease

A collaboration between the University of Canberra, Queensland University of Technology, the Australian National University, the University of Sydney and Monash University, the Measure It! trial led by Associate Professor Nicole Freene, has been awarded a \$510,070 grant under the 2021 Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) Cardiovascular Health Mission scheme.

Trial partners include the Australian Cardiovascular Health and Rehabilitation Association, Calvary Public Hospital Bruce, Southern NSW Local Health District, Healthscope Ltd and the Macquarie Health Corporation.

'Measure It!' is a very brief intervention, taking clinicians less than 5 minutes to complete. It includes a self-report and objective measure of physical activity (wearable activity tracker steps) plus physical activity advice.



The trial will test two frequencies of physical activity measurement (2 and 5 measurements in total) by cardiac rehabilitation clinicians over 24-weeks. This hybrid effectiveness-implementation trial will recruit 190 insufficiently active cardiac rehabilitation attendees from 5 cardiac rehabilitation programs in the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales. Daily minutes of accelerometer moderate-to-vigorous physical activity will be the primary effectiveness outcome. Implementation outcomes will include acceptability, appropriateness, adoption, costs and sustainability.

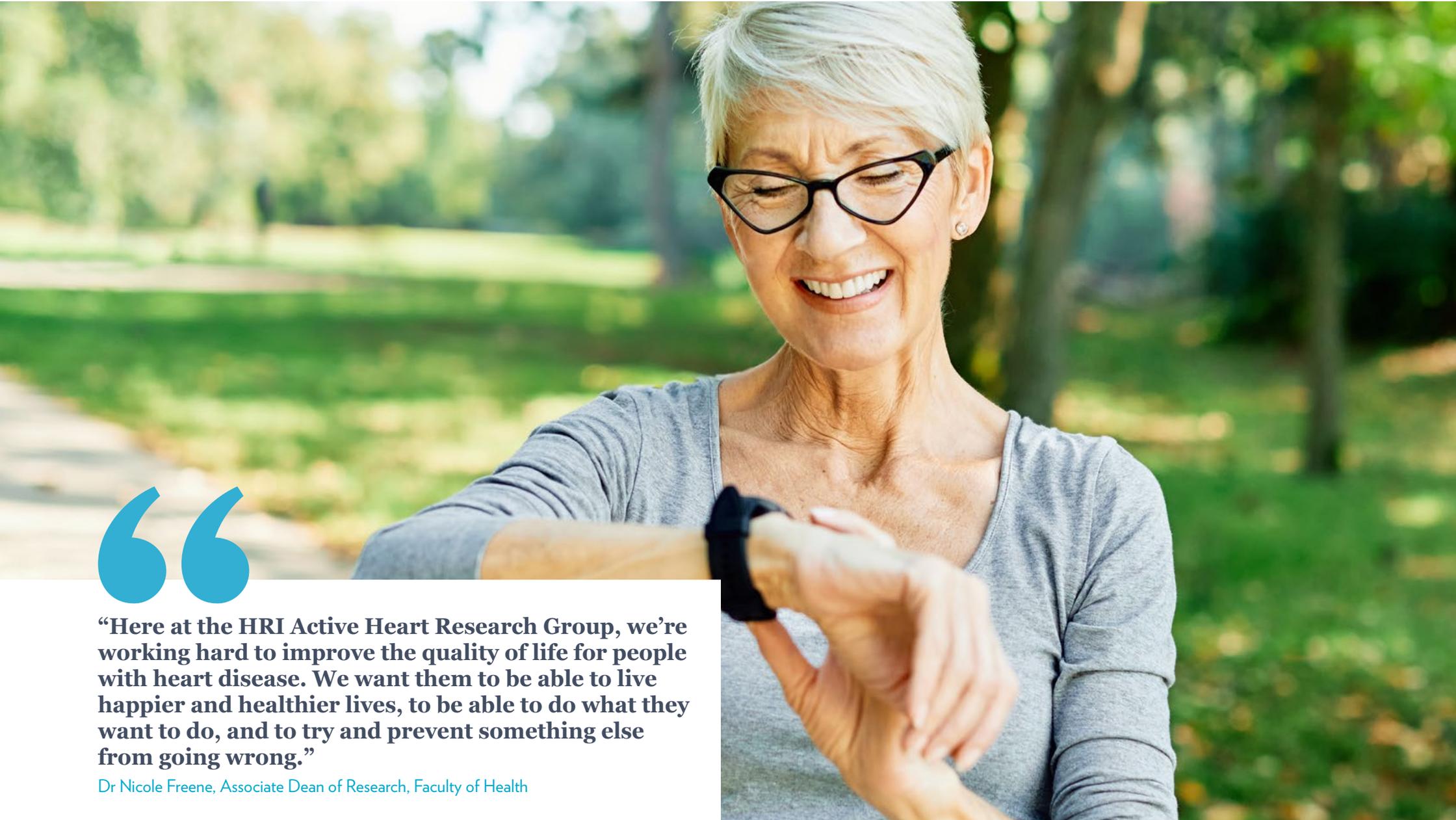
Only 15% of cardiac rehabilitation attendees are achieving the physical activity guidelines.

[Learn more](#)

#### Research team

- › Prof Walter Abhayaratna
- › Prof Rachel Davey
- › **Prof Nicole Freene**
- › Prof Robyn Gallagher
- › Prof Richard Keegan
- › Dr Breanne Kunstler
- › Prof Steven McPhail
- › Prof Theo Niyonsenga
- › Assoc Prof Zephania Tyack
- › Dr Christian Verdicchio

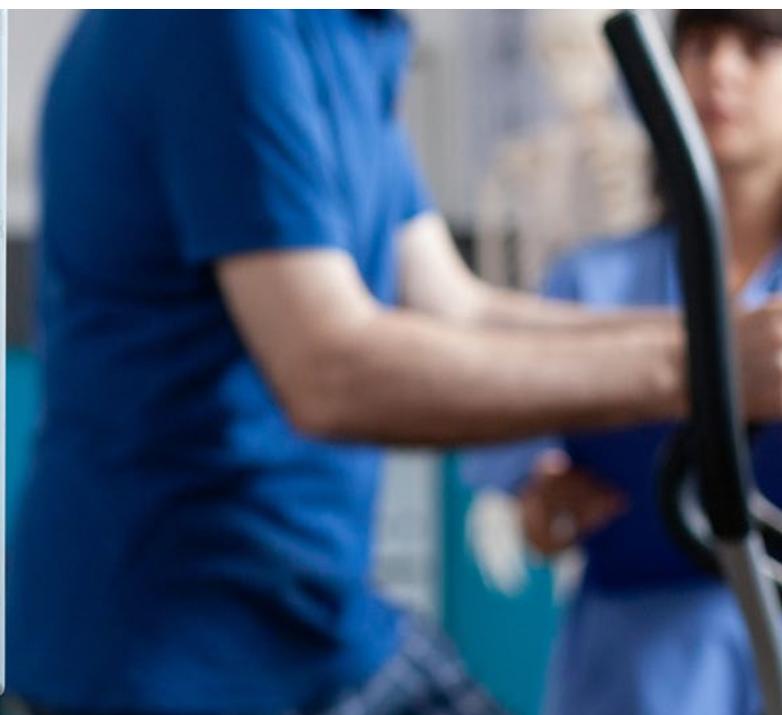
Funded by the Medical Research Future Fund



“

**“Here at the HRI Active Heart Research Group, we’re working hard to improve the quality of life for people with heart disease. We want them to be able to live happier and healthier lives, to be able to do what they want to do, and to try and prevent something else from going wrong.”**

*Dr Nicole Freene, Associate Dean of Research, Faculty of Health*



### Research team

- › Shahlia Cowans
- › Prof Rachel Davey
- › Dr Allyson Flynn
- › **Prof Nicole Freene**
- › Dr Christian Lueck
- › Assoc Prof Itismita Mohanty
- › Prof Theo Niyonsenga
- › Assoc Prof Elisabeth Preston

Funded by Australian Capital Territory Health Research and Innovation Fund Grant

## PROJECT

### Cardiac Rehabilitation for transient ischaemic Attack and Mild-Stroke (CRAMS): a randomised controlled trial

Associate Professor Nicole Freene and her research team from the Health Research Institute have partnered with Canberra Health Services and Calvary Public Hospital, supported by the Stroke Foundation and the Heart Foundation, to investigate the effectiveness of a 6-week integrated (transient ischaemic attack (TIA), mild-stroke, heart disease) exercise-based cardiac rehabilitation program (Cardiovascular Rehabilitation, CVR) at the UC Health Clinics.

The hybrid effectiveness-implementation trial is being conducted over 2-years, recruiting 140 adults living in Canberra who have had a TIA or mild-stroke within the last 12-months. The study commenced in April 2022, and we have currently recruited 48 people. Participants are being randomised to the intervention (CVR) or 6-month wait-list control group. Functional exercise capacity (distance completed in the 6-minute walk test) is the primary outcome.

[Learn more](#)

## PROJECT

### Tackling tobacco smoking in Indigenous communities

Smoking is the leading preventable cause of the significant health gap and shorter life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, driving high rates of cancer, heart, and respiratory diseases.

Addressing smoking offers immense health and social gains by improving quality of life, increasing life expectancy, and empowering communities through culturally relevant, Indigenous-led programs that tackle historical trauma, socioeconomic factors, and promote smoke-free living.

**Funded by the Federal Government Department of Health and Ageing, the TIS program has proven to be one of the most effective packages provided under the Closing the Gap strategy.**



UC HRI is one of three partners who together form the National Best Practice Unit Tackling Indigenous Smoking (NBPU TIS). This consortium is led by **Ninti One Ltd** an Indigenous not-for-profit organisation and also includes Edith Cowan University's **Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet**. NBPU TIS is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care (Preventive Health and Communicable Disease Section, First Nations Health) as part of the successful Tackling Indigenous Smoking (TIS) program.

This Australia-wide program aims to improve the health and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by reducing the prevalence of tobacco use through population health promotion activities.

[Learn more](#)

#### Research team

- › Molly Dean
- › Remi Morris
- › Dr Trish Parshu Ram
- › Assoc Prof Penney Upton

Funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health & Ageing

L-R: Assoc Prof Raglan Maddox, Molly Dean, Assoc Prof Penney Upton, Prof Tom Calma AO, Dr Thrishila Parshu Ram and Remy Morris at the 2025 PHAA Australian Public Health Conference on Dharawal Country (Wollongong).

## PROJECT

# Childhood developmental vulnerability

In 2024, 30.1% of Belconnen children were developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains. This is a small improvement from 30.5% in 2021; however, the rate remains higher than both the ACT (28.1%) and national (23.5%) results.

The proportion of Belconnen children developmentally vulnerable on 2 or more domains was 15.6%, a small improvement from 16.7% in 2021. The rate also remains above ACT (14.9%) and national (12.5%) results.

In 2024, 40.2% of Belconnen children were developmentally on track across all 5 domains, remaining one of the lowest of the ACT regions. This figure is below the ACT average of 43.8% and well below the national average of 52.9%.

The results suggest Belconnen faces ongoing developmental challenges, reinforcing the need for coordinated, place-based strategies to support children's wellbeing and early learning across the community.



## Bringing about positive change

The 'Good Start in Life for Young Children' research project (2019-2023) was run by researchers at the Health Research Institute, funded by the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF). This project aimed to develop a program of support and connection for children (from birth to 5 years) and their families in the Belconnen community to address early childhood development.

Using the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data and trends from 2015 to 2018, the project identified 9 suburbs in the Belconnen District where early childhood development risk was highest (Aranda, Bruce, Charnwood, Evatt, Fraser, Hawker, Latham, McKellar and Scullin). These 9 'intervention' suburbs were matched in a quasi-study design with comparator 'control' suburbs in Tuggeranong where there was also an increase in childhood developmental vulnerability over this time.

## Research team

- › Prof Rachel Davey
- › Susie Giugni
- › Assoc Prof Jane Herbert
- › Dr Cate Hilly
- › Dr Antonia Kish
- › Prof Michelle Lincoln
- › Dr Jacqueline McKechnie
- › Prof Anthony Okely
- › Prof Christine Phillips
- › Dr Jonathan Ramke
- › Vivian Yu

Funded by the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF)

From 2019 to 2023 the Health Research Institute delivered and evaluated an Allied Health Outreach childhood development service (speech pathology and occupational therapy) across the 9 intervention suburbs for children from birth to 5 years. The service was delivered in a range of settings including community playgroups, public places such as the local Belconnen Westfield Shopping Centre, parks, early childhood education centres (ECECs), and school-based preschools. The Allied Health Outreach service focused on the early detection of child developmental issues, family liaison and signposting and referral to appropriate supports. The service included inter-professional training to build capability of childhood educators to identify and address developmental needs.

## Achievements

The project delivered 7,273 occasions of service across 13 ECECs, 5 school-based preschools and 12 community locations (e.g., playgroups). This equates to around 1,649 hours of support and services. The Allied Health Outreach service was delivered to approximately 55% of the target population from 2019 to 2023 (note that the program was paused for 12 months during COVID 2020–21).

AEDC census results from 2018 to 2024 shows a statistically significant improvement in child development outcomes in the Belconnen intervention suburbs. There was a 7.0% reduction in children identified as developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains, dropping from 36.8% in 2018 to 29.8% in 2024. There was also a 4.6% reduction in children in the Belconnen intervention suburbs identified as developmentally vulnerable on 2 or more domains, dropping from 21.1% in 2018 to 16.6% in 2024.

## Looking ahead

Findings from the Allied Health Outreach service suggest this model of embedded and ongoing support and capacity building for educators, children and families is an effective strategy for mitigating the risk of developmental vulnerability in preschool aged children.

The study highlights the critical role of collaborative partnerships, led by Allied Health services, that deliver intervention services that enhance educational practices and support child development within early childhood settings. This approach helped increase early childhood educator skills and knowledge, enhance children's language, increase parents' knowledge of service providers and supports, and promote inclusive educational practices in the community.

Looking ahead, sustained efforts in research, advocacy, early childhood educator coaching, and community stakeholder engagement are essential to maximise the impact of integrated allied health outreach services in promoting equitable developmental outcomes for all children.

[Learn more](#)



**7,273**

service occasions across 13 ECECs, 5 preschools, and 12 community sites



**~1,649**

hours of allied health support delivered to 55% of target population (2019–23)

## PROJECT

### Connect Up 2617 community-driven project addresses social connection for young people in Belconnen and Bruce

Over 250 people had attended at least two or more Connect Up 2617 activities ranging from badminton to crocheting, social board games to trivia, with most saying they felt less lonely, more socially connected and had a greater sense of local belonging due to the project.

Some 15 participants were also signed up or already in the role of volunteers, involved in many aspects of Connect Up from running crochet groups to helping facilitate activities.

**“Loneliness poses health risks as deadly as smoking up to 15 cigarettes daily.”**

*US Surgeon General's Report 2023*

[Learn more](#)



#### Research team

› Prof Rachel Davey

› Assoc Prof Barbara Walsh

Funded by the Medical Research Future Fund

#### AS A RESULT OF CONNECT UP 2617\*:

Respondents reported statistically significant positive changes in their feelings about lacking companionship, feeling isolated and feeling left out before and after Connect Up 2617.

OVER

**70%**

HAD MORE FRIENDS THEY CONNECT WITH MONTHLY

ALMOST

**50%**

HAD MORE FRIENDS THEY COULD RELY ON FOR HELP

OVER

**75%**

FELT PART OF A LIKE-MINDED GROUP

NEARLY

**90%**

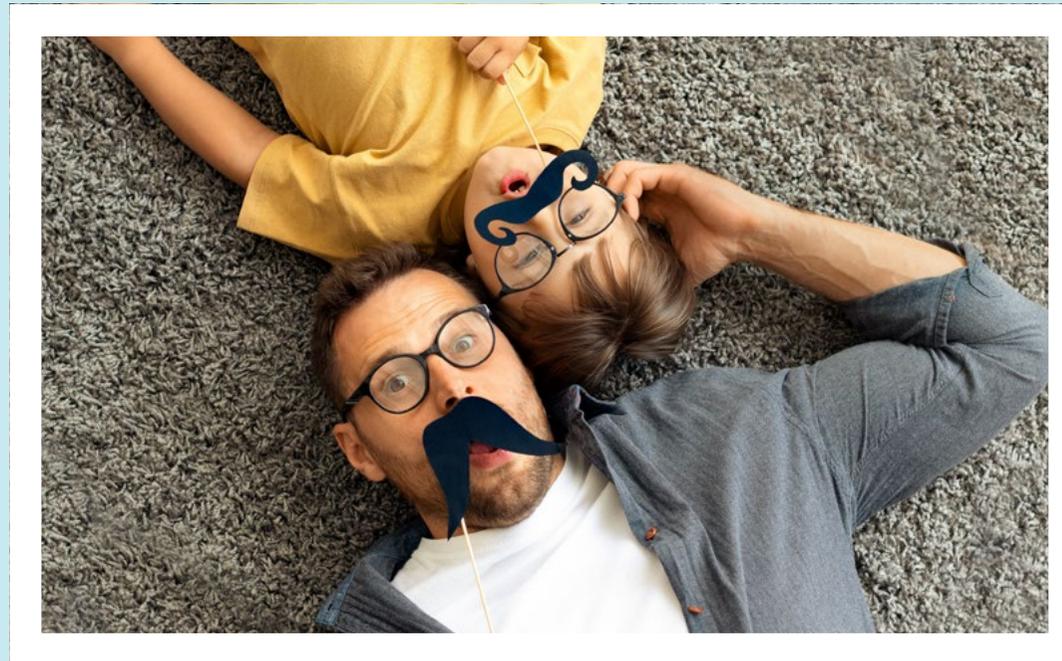
REPORTED IMPROVED BELONGING THROUGH CONNECT UP 2617

## PROJECT

# Men's health – Movember: helping men live happier, healthier, longer lives

Indigenous boys and men experience disproportionate rates of psychological distress, suicide, and chronic disease. Movember is funding innovative, community-led programs to strengthen the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous boys, men, and their communities across Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, and North America (comprising Canada and the United States of America).

Our team in the Mental Health Policy Unit (MHPU) are working with Movember to understand how to successfully support social and emotional wellbeing in individuals, communities and systems. One of the primary tasks being undertaken is shaping an overarching cross-country Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework that can be used by local implementation and evaluation teams in each country. There is currently no global MEL framework specifically for Indigenous projects in different countries.



We have engaged Indigenous research partners in each country to lead us through the process of drafting tools which designed to map and track learnings coming projects in each country. The Movember funded teams in each region will then test these tools and provide feedback on their utility, strengths and areas to be changed.

We are privileged to be guided by our Indigenous research partners in this project. Our partners are passionate about Indigenous people developing, implementing and evaluating programs for local communities. Our Indigenous researchers, and ourselves, are also excited by the prospect that

learnings from local communities may be shared within and across countries, and that these learnings will strengthen the focus on further funding and commitment to the wellbeing of Indigenous boys and men, and their communities.

Contact Dr Sally Fitzpatrick ([sally.fitzpatrick@canberra.edu.au](mailto:sally.fitzpatrick@canberra.edu.au)) for more information about this project or if you are an Indigenous student interested in pursuing a PhD in this area.

[Learn more](#)

### Research team

University of Canberra  
(Mental Health Policy Unit)

- › Dr Caroline Bec
- › Prof Luis Salvador-Carulla
- › Dr Sally Fitzpatrick
- › Assoc Prof Sue Lukersmith
- › Dr Cindy Woods

### Specialist Indigenous Implementation Partners (SIIPs)

- › Dr Ainsleigh Cribb-Su'a, Aotearoa New Zealand
- › Dr Siale Foliaki, Aotearoa New Zealand
- › Prof Janya McCalman, Australia
- › Greg Pratt, Australia
- › Dr Lauren White, USA
- › Gregory White, Canada

### Funded by Movember



## Catalysts for change for a planet in transition

Driven by human-caused greenhouse gas emissions, climate change is increasingly claiming lives and harming people's health worldwide. Mean annual temperatures exceeded 1.5°C above those of pre-industrial times for the first time in 2024. Despite ever more urgent calls to tackle climate change, greenhouse gas emissions rose to record levels that same year. Climate change is increasingly destabilising the planetary systems and environmental conditions on which human life depends.

2025 report of the *Lancet* Countdown on health and climate change.





**The vision of the HEAL Global Research Centre is to catalyse environmental, climate and health research, knowledge exchange and translation into policy and practice that will bring measurable improvements to global health, health systems and the environment.**

HEAL Team at the ACT Annual Conference 2025.

## PROJECT

### Our researchers help deliver landmark environmental report — *Global Environmental Outlook (GEO-7) Report 2025*

Co-author Professor Sotiris Vardoulakis said: “The report assesses not just the state of the environment, but also the trends we are seeing across the globe and how we can address the Triple Planetary Crisis.”

“When we talk about that crisis it means climate change, environmental pollution, biodiversity loss and land degradation. So, it is a complex and multidimensional crisis that has serious implications for human health and well-being. It impacts everybody.”

The report was created by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and is released every five years. Almost 300 experts from 82 countries have provided their insights to create this latest version — 800 reviewers also assisted with getting the study ready for publication.

[Learn more](#)



[Download now](#)



## PROJECT

# Climate change adaptation to smoke haze for improved child health in Southeast Asia

UC's HEAL Global Research Centre receives \$5 million funding boost from Wellcome for developing climate and health tools to communicate the impacts of bushfire smoke.

The University of Canberra's (UC) Global Research Centre for Healthy Environments and Lives (HEAL) has received a \$5 million funding boost from Wellcome to develop climate and health impact assessment tools through the new project, Climate Attribution of Wildfire Smoke Impacts on Priority Population Health in Southeast Asia and Australia (CANBREATHE).

The new project will effectively engage, educate and empower priority groups, such as Indigenous peoples, pregnant women and children in Southeast Asia and Australia on the health impacts of bushfires and associated smoke haze in a changing global environment.



HEAL Global Research Centre Team.

In a warming climate, the frequency, intensity and duration of extreme wildfires and smoke haze pollution in Southeast Asia and Australia are increasing — and subsequently, cardiovascular and respiratory illnesses such as asthma in sensitive populations could worsen over the years.

Professor Sotiris Vardoulakis, Director of the HEAL Global Research Centre argues that vulnerable populations may be missing out on these vitally important health messages.

The CANBREATHE project aims to bridge these communication gaps.

“The CANBREATHE project will combine climate modelling, health data and lived experience to communicate the long-term effects of bushfires and smoke haze pollution exposure. People are starting to understand the health impacts posed by wildfire smoke, however, they do not clearly link it to climate or environmental change,” he said.

### Research team

- › Dr Timothy Chaston
- › Dr Nigel Goodman
- › Dr Gopika Indu
- › Lindsay Morgan
- › Nathasha Munasinghe
- › Nakul Nambiar
- › Dr Enembe Okokon
- › Dr Dharani Sabba
- › Dr Paire Somboonsin
- › **Prof Sotiris Vardoulakis**

### Collaborators

- › Prof Nasser Bagheri
- › Prof Luis Salvador Carulla
- › Prof Uwe Dulleck
- › Assoc Prof Itismita Mohanty
- › Dr Elise Remling
- › Prof Rebekah Russell-Bennett
- › Anna Sym

### Funded by the Wellcome Trust UK

“With Indigenous people, pregnant women and children being disproportionately affected by climate change in Australia and Asia, it is important to develop data-driven communication tools that are both accessible and easy to understand by priority populations. The knowledge generated and then translated into practical solutions will not only improve our health today but for future generations to come.”

Funded by Wellcome over three years commencing in 2025, researchers from the Australian HEAL Network and Southeast Asia will focus on populations in four countries — Australia, Thailand, Laos and Indonesia — due to their lived experiences of suffering extreme or recurrent wildfires.

Distinguished Professor Kim Oanh from the Asia Institute of Technology in Thailand said, “air pollution from forest and agricultural fires is a major public health concern in Southeast Asia.”

“These seasonal fires cause deforestation and smoke haze across the region, disproportionately impacting poorer people, especially children. Climate change increases the risk of fires making things worse.”

Associate Professor Veronica Matthews, the HEAL Network’s Indigenous Knowledge Systems Lead sees the project as an exciting opportunity to build on the HEAL Network’s momentum of linking climate, environmental and health data with cultural knowledge.

**“This project will engage Indigenous peoples and communities, citizen scientists, policymakers and artists to co-design communication tools to educate and empower those communities who are already feeling the impact of climate change.”**

Associate Professor [Veronica Matthews](#)

Currently funded through the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Special Initiative in Human Health and Environmental Change, the HEAL Network brings together Indigenous knowledge, sustainable development, environmental epidemiology and data science and communication to address climate change and its impacts on health.

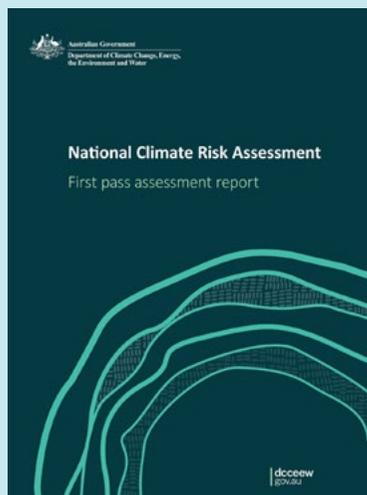
[Learn more](#)



## PROJECT

# Australia's first climate risk assessment

Australia's first *National Climate Risk Assessment* provides the country's first nationally consistent evaluation of climate related threats across people, ecosystems, infrastructure and the economy. The assessment aims to guide national adaptation planning by identifying the most significant risks posed by a warming climate.



 [Download now](#)

The assessment establishes a national evidence base to inform Australia's adaptation strategy. It identifies **56 nationally significant climate risks**, and highlights **11 priority risks** requiring deeper analysis in subsequent assessment phases.

It uses new nationally consistent data to evaluate climate vulnerabilities across **eight key systems** and **11 geographic regions**, including communities, natural environment, health, economy, infrastructure, primary industries, defence, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## Key findings

### 1. Climate hazards are intensifying

Across all plausible future climate scenarios, hazards such as heatwaves, drought, bushfires, storms, flooding and ocean warming are projected to worsen throughout the 21st century.

The assessment highlights that extreme weather events are already becoming more frequent and severe, affecting all parts of society.

### 2. Impacts across society and the economy

Climate change is expected to:

- Increase economic costs and disrupt critical infrastructure and supply chains.
- Threaten health and wellbeing through heat stress, disease and disaster exposure.
- Harm ecosystems and biodiversity, including culturally significant environments for First Nations communities.

### 3. Vulnerable populations face greatest risk

Groups at highest risk include:

- Children and the elderly.
- People with existing health conditions.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Coastal, northern and remote communities.

These communities face heightened exposure to hazards such as sea level rise, extreme heat, and ecosystem decline.

### 4. Cascading and compounding risks

The report emphasises that many impacts occur simultaneously or cascade across systems — for example, heatwaves affecting infrastructure, health services, productivity and food systems all at once.

### 5. Need for coordinated national action

The assessment stresses the importance of:

- Regular national climate risk assessments.
- Integration of climate risk into national planning, budgeting and infrastructure design.
- A comprehensive National Adaptation Plan to guide federal, state and local action.

These steps are needed to strengthen resilience and reduce future losses.

[Learn more](#)

## PROJECT

# NHMRC – Targeted call for research into climate-related health impacts and effective interventions to improve health outcomes

HEAL Global Research Team is building the evidence for interventions addressing current and future risks of climate change on the health and wellbeing of Australians and on Australia's health system.

Congratulations to Professor Sotiris Vardoulakis and the UC HEAL GRC team who have been awarded approximately \$1 million to investigate *Community resilience centres for improving climate adaptation to bushfire smoke and heatwaves in changing urban environments*.

More people will be affected by bushfire smoke and extreme heat in Australia due to climate change. Those with lung or heart disease, the elderly, pregnant women, children, the poor and those with disability are more vulnerable to heat and smoke. Clean air shelters have been proposed in public buildings but not thoroughly tested for their ability to reduce harmful exposures. This project will test how these shelters can protect Australians in vulnerable situations from extreme heat and smoke.

### Key areas of expertise

#### Environment, climate change and health risks

- Population health impacts of climate change and extreme events (heatwaves, bushfires, floods, droughts)
- Population health impacts of environmental degradation and pollution (air, water, soil, waste)
- Impacts of environmental and climate change on health services (primary care, hospitals, urban health).

#### Mitigation and adaptation solutions

- Evaluation of climate change adaptation solutions (housing, transport, green space, air quality, heat-health plans)
- Evaluation of climate change mitigation co-benefits (clean energy, active travel, electrification)

- Decarbonisation of the health sector (healthcare infrastructure, public health services, treatment and management of patients).

#### Policy and practice implementation

- Implementation of climate and health policy (intervention analysis, health impact assessment, cost-effectiveness analysis)
- Implementation of environmental, public and urban health policy
- Climate, environment and health communication (risk communication, citizen science, behavioural science).

**“Climate change has been identified as a significant threat to global health in the 21st century, with its impacts on health and wellbeing being unevenly distributed across people and communities.”**

NHMRC 2024.

[Learn more](#)

### Research team

- › Sharon Campbell
- › Christine Cowie
- › Shamila Haddad
- › Abby Mellick Lopes
- › Guy Marks
- › Geoffrey Morgan
- › Julien Periard
- › Mat Santamouris
- › **Sotiris Vardoulakis**
- › Amanda Wheeler

Funded by National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)



**“Australia already experiences health impacts from climate-related events such as floods, fires and heatwaves and these events are likely to occur with greater frequency due to both the direct and indirect impacts of climate change. Adaptation is necessary to address inevitable health impacts and build resilience.”**

NHMRC 2024.

## PROJECT

# Building wellbeing into policy and action: Setting Australia's future wellbeing agenda

Our Wellbeing and Resilience Unit (WellRes Unit) focuses on improving understanding of the wellbeing and resilience of regions and communities across Australia.

We collect data through our own surveys, interviews and workshops, and also analyse a range of existing data sets. Through this we help a wide range of organisations build understanding of how wellbeing, resilience and liveability are changing for different people and communities across Australia, and of the types of actions that can help.

### Research focus

- Tracking the wellbeing, resilience and liveability of individuals, communities and different groups of people across Australia over time, and understanding what influences that wellbeing.



Some of the WellRes Unit staff.

- Identifying what makes a community or an individual resilient to change, particularly in relation to natural disasters (such as drought, bushfires, floods, storms or earthquake) and other significant stressors (such as impacts from COVID-19).
- In-depth examination of specific activities that can support wellbeing, resilience and liveability, ranging from adoption of natural resource management practices and regenerative farming to work health and safety practices, disaster preparation, and public and private support programs designed to help

specific groups of people such as carers or those impacted by disaster.

The Regional Wellbeing Survey (RWS) is Australia's only national survey dedicated to understanding life in regional, rural and remote communities.

[Learn more](#)

### Research team

- › Greta Amorson
- › Dr Kimberly Brown
- › Dr Suzanne Carroll
- › Dr Michael Dale
- › Dr Kim Houghton
- › Dr Antonia Kish
- › Celia Maddox
- › Dr Mel Mylek
- › **Prof Jacki Schirmer**
- › Jonathan Ward

Funded by local State and Territories



**“It is critical to find pathways to enable people to maintain their wellbeing as they experience more frequent and higher intensity bushfires, floods and droughts, due to the effects of climate change.”**

Professor Jacki Schirmer who leads the HRI WellRes Unit and the Centre for Environmental Governance.

## PROJECT

### Early insights for more resilient communities

Many Australian communities have experienced multiple challenges in recent years: some have had drought, bushfire, storm, pandemic and flood damage, all within the space of four or five years.

In an era of increasing exposure to natural hazards, it has never been more important to monitor how the resilience of Australia's communities is changing. However, despite wide recognition of the importance of resilience, there remains a significant gap in our ability to monitor whether and how resilience is changing in different communities.

The *Sharing Early Insights for More Resilient Communities* project, funded by the Southern NSW Innovation Hub as part of the Australian Government's Innovation Hubs Program, aims to change this. The project set out to develop pilot tools that enable communities and the organisations who work with them to rapidly identify changes in resilience as they begin to occur in their region.

#### Research team

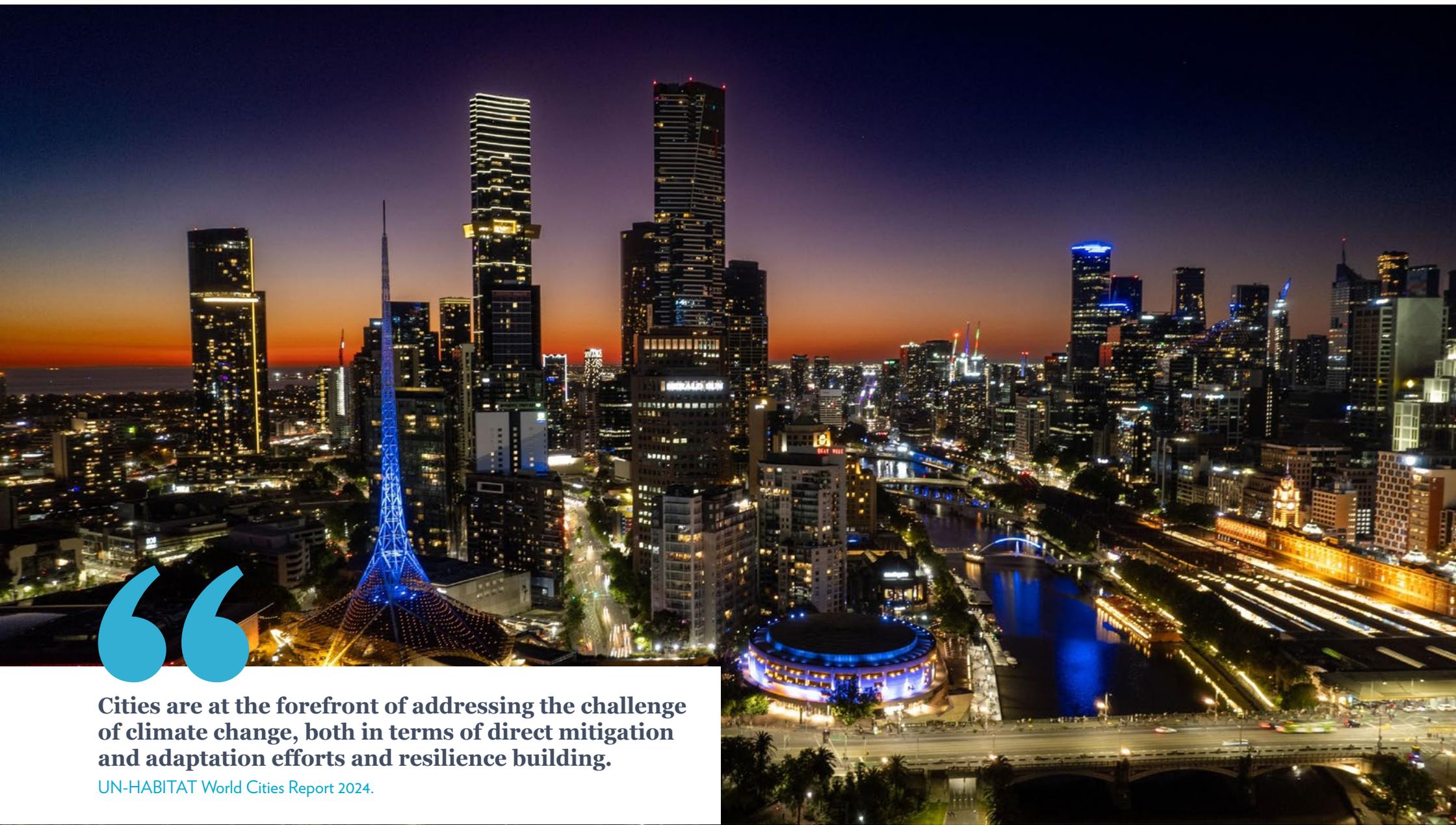
- › Greta Amorsen
- › Dr Kimberly Brown
- › Prof Jacki Schirmer

Funded by The Southern NSW Innovation Hub

Through consultation with multiple local, state and national organisations working in disaster-affected communities, as well as review of the international literature, a set of resilience change indicators was developed.

This was followed by developing the indicators and a pilot dashboard enabling any user to easily access data for these indicators for their local community, as well as to understand what the data means for resilience.





**Cities are at the forefront of addressing the challenge of climate change, both in terms of direct mitigation and adaptation efforts and resilience building.**

UN-HABITAT World Cities Report 2024.

## PROJECT

# 1000 city global challenge

In 2025, 45% of the world's population now lives in cities, according to the UN World Urbanization Prospects 2025 report.

Researchers at the Health Research Institute track progress of Canberra towards a healthy and sustainable city.

The 1,000 Cities Challenge is an initiative of the Global Observatory of Healthy and Sustainable Cities which aims to provide evidence-based spatial and urban policy indicators to advocate for and track progress towards healthy and sustainable cities for all.

Postdoctoral Research Fellow Dr Gweneth Leigh and Senior Research Specialist Vincent Learnihan completed the 1,000 Cities report and scorecard in partnership with local advocacy organisation Greater Canberra, while also working closely with local government and policymakers.

The report shows that urban planning for Canberra is well covered through policy, scoring 93.8% for the presence of urban and transport policies that support health and sustainability.

“Our scorecard gives us real reason to celebrate, and I think that’s important for Canberrans to hear,” Dr Leigh said. However, where Canberra does lose marks is around quality of policy. One hallmark of quality policy is the incorporation of measurable, evidence-aligned targets. On this, Canberra scores just 42.7%.

“One great example of a measurable target is around urban canopy, where the ACT government aims to retain a 30% canopy cover in all suburbs,” Dr Leigh says.

“Such an initiative helps to quantify future shade coverage. This is important, as reducing urban heat will be an ongoing issue in addressing in a warming climate. Looking ahead at Canberra’s future, health considerations need to be embedded in transport and urban policies, and investment in active and public transport should be prioritised.”

[Learn more](#)

### Research team

- › Dr Gweneth Leigh
- › Vincent Learnihan
- › Dr Soumya Mazumdar
- › Prof Luis Salvador-Carulla

Funded by the NHMRC



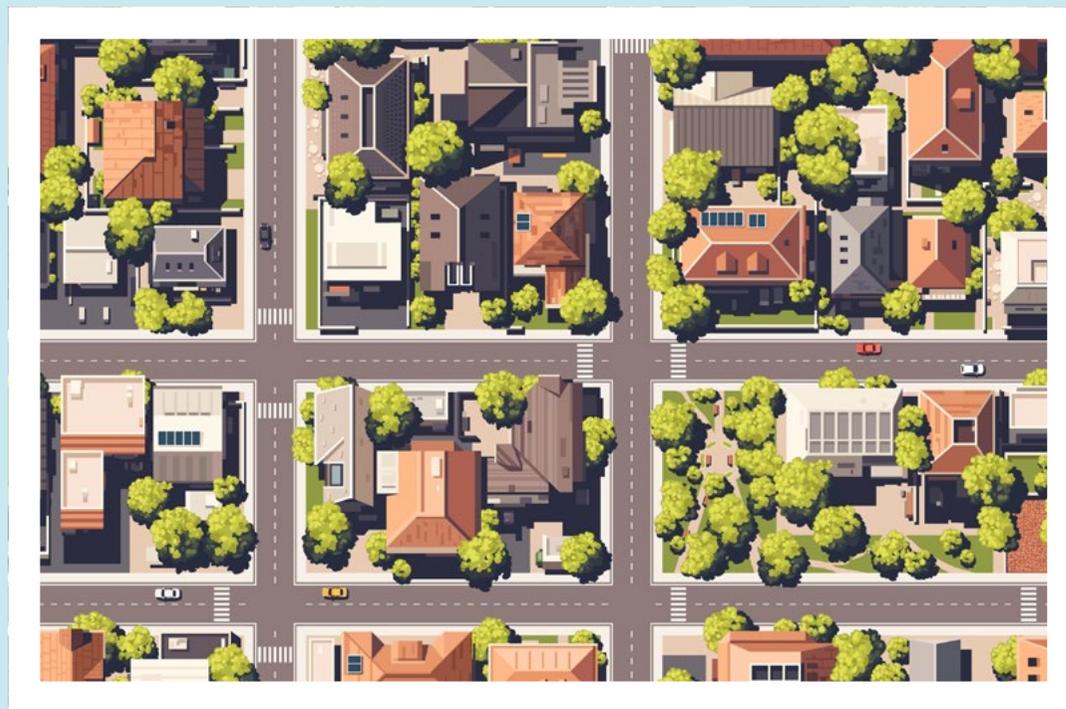
# 87.9%

Population with access to any public open space



# 32.3%

Population with access to regularly running formal public transport (<20 min)



## PROJECT

# Transforming schoolyard spaces into places for student wellbeing

The 'Schoolyard Greenprint' is a research study investigating how schoolyard spaces can better support teenagers as they navigate the intense emotional, social and physical changes that accompany adolescence.

Led by the University of Canberra, this work will lead a national conversation around the value and role of schoolyard spaces within secondary school environments. The work relies on the insights and knowledge of schoolyard designers and planners, managers and users to identify the types of schoolyards we currently have, want and need. This knowledge and evidence will be synthesized into a resource to guide the development of school grounds that support the creation of positive outdoor experiences for high school students.

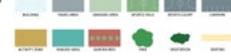
[Learn more](#)



### TYPOLOGIES DIAGRAMS



### TYPOLOGIES KEY



School yard typologies.

### Research team

- › Professor Rachel Davey
- › Linda Corkery (LFA)
- › Noel Corkery (LFA)
- › **Dr Gweneth Leigh**
- › Dr Claire Manning
- › Hannah Richardson
- › Finn Robinson

Funded by Hort Innovation, Landscape Foundation Australia (LFA) and contributions from the Australian Government

## Strengthening health systems, improving lives

Our researchers address issues of building a more cost-effective and sustainable health service system through drawing on expertise in health and healthcare services, design, digital technology, health policy and management.

# Launch of MChart

Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA



Rachel Stephen-Smith has been a senior member of the ACT Legislative Assembly in various capacities for health, social justice, and government services. She is currently a Minister for Health, Mental Health, and Community Services, the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, and a Minister of Health. Following the 2020 ACT Election, Rachel was appointed as the Minister responsible for Health, Mental Health, and Community Services.

Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, ACT launches the MChart mental health navigation tool.

## PROJECT

### A local navigation tool for Mental Health Care (MChart)

Five universities and more than 50 researchers and partners, including ACT Health and lived experience advocates, collaborated in shaping MChart into the platform that is ready for roll-out nationally and internationally.

Roughly 1 in 5 Australians (22%) aged 16-85 experienced a mental disorder, with anxiety, depression, and substance use disorders being most common<sup>3</sup>.

Access to services, living conditions and employment status are just a few factors that affect someone facing mental illness. Staff from our Mental Health Policy Unit, led by Professor Luis Salvador Carulla have developed a user-friendly digital care platform that can be used by mental health professionals to guide people experiencing mental ill-health to navigate the mental health system.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Institute of Health & Welfare 2025.



Demonstration of the MChart mental health navigation tool.

**“I know the power this tool can have, because I know that departments and planners need to understand how to best allocate scarce resources and how to identify where needs are, as well as what changes have happened over time.”**

Honourable Bill Shorten, Vice Chancellor and President, University of Canberra



“Disadvantage and challenges such as mental health are not easily defined by the simplistic systems of a postcode — so what I see MChart doing is taking out the postcode lottery of the provision of services where who you know and how much you have determines the quality of services you get.”

Consumer advocates welcomed the next stages of the MChart roll out and the differences it will make, “The cry from the community is that we want to know that we are safe, we want to know that there is quality and safety in the provision of services,” said consumer Ms Eileen McDonald.

“So, I’m excited about this tool. I see it having a longevity and the flexibility to serve all of Australia and to be an example for the rest of the world.”

MChart has been designed as a digital tool that incorporates a set of multi-applicable modules for navigation of the mental health care system.

The modules include:

- Service availability
- Workforce
- Demographic, neighbourhood characteristics and mental health care utilisation
- Service utilisation of inpatient, outpatient and emergency mental health services
- Accessibility to public transport
- Reported connections between services.

[Learn more](#)



#### Research team

- › Assoc Prof Amir Aryani
- › **Prof Luis Salvador Carulla**
- › Dr Manoj Dissanayake
- › Dr Jane Koerner
- › Assoc Prof Sebastian Rosenberg
- › Dr Cindy Woods

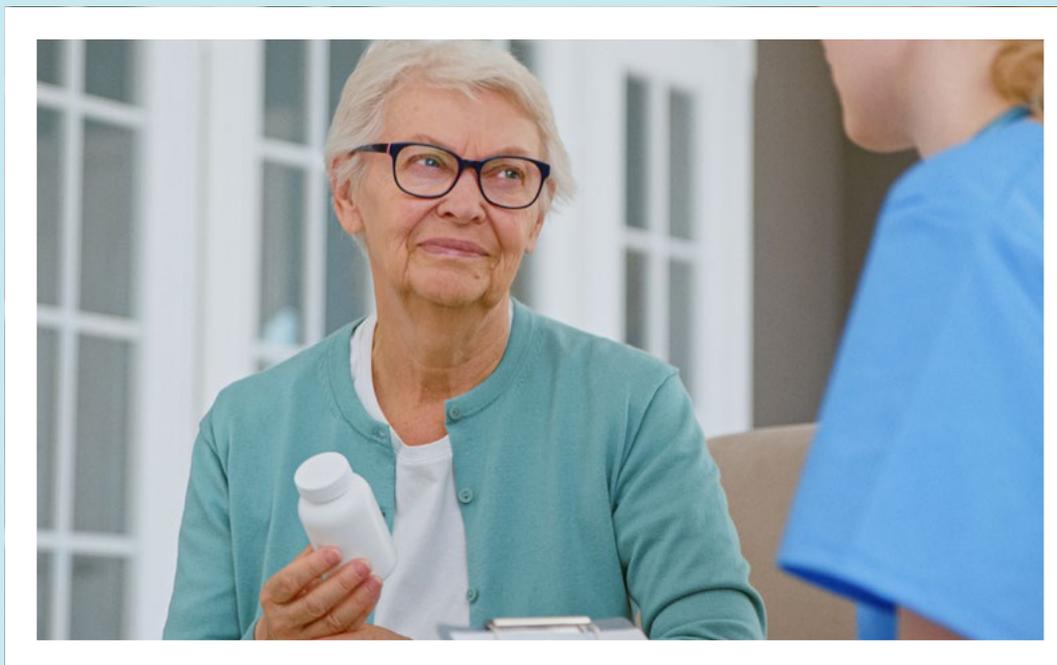
Funded by the Digital Health Cooperative Research Centre

## PROJECT

### Better medications management for residential aged care

The Department of Health and Aged Care has announced a \$345.7 million investment to improve medication management and safety for aged care residents through the provision of on-site pharmacists and community pharmacy services. This is in response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

This new model of care integrates on-site pharmacists into residential aged care facilities as part of facilities care teams. On-site pharmacists work alongside facility staff and conduct activities to improve medication management. In addition, on-site pharmacists work to enhance collaboration and communication with residential aged care residents and family members, staff, GPs and other prescribers.



Our OPTIMISER Australian study is implementing and scaling up the on-site pharmacist model in residential aged care into regional, rural and remote RACFs through a co-design process that develops quality indicators for resident-focused and facility level outcomes.

Pharmacists will work with residents and their families, staff, general practitioners, and prescribers to reduce the use of inappropriate medications.

**“The findings will inform the national roll out and explore barriers and enablers to implementation particularly in rural, regional and remote Australia.”**

[Learn more](#)

#### Research team

- › Prof Rachel Davey
- › Dr Jane Koerner
- › Prof Sam Kosari
- › Prof Mark Naunton
- › **Dr Jennifer Sonter**
- › Dr Bella St Clair

Funded by the Medical Research Future Fund

## PROJECT

# The wellbeing of carers

Carers are responsible for taking care of the welfare of multiple numbers of vulnerable people, often providing very challenging and complicated caring duties.

The Carer Wellbeing Survey asks Carers to share their experiences around being a Carer. These challenges include high risk of financial stress, poor quality of life and difficulty accessing support. We need to know more about how to better support the wellbeing of carers and how best to advocate for their needs so that they are able and willing to continue to care for these large numbers of vulnerable Australians.

The Carer Wellbeing Survey — an annual national survey into the wellbeing of carers and their support services — was initiated in 2021 in partnership with Carers Australia and Department of Social Services. The survey was established to better understand the changing needs of carers, their wellbeing and quality of life so that organisations like Carers Australia and Department of Social Services know how best to support them.



“This survey informs our advocacy and policy development by highlighting issues, providing figures to support policy measures and giving carers an opportunity to inform policy advice, it is an important tool for our organisation and we dedicate significant time and resources to ensure the survey meets our needs and those of carers,” Carers Australia.

“Findings from this research will help to drives policy, highlighting the needs of carers and give greater recognition and systemic support to improve their own health outcomes.”

**“Australia’s 2.7 million carers provide services valued at \$77.9 billion but they experience significant challenges.”**

Dr Mel Mylek, ARC Research Fellow, project lead

[Learn more](#)

### Research team

› Dr Mel Mylek

ARC funded — Industry Fellowship

Funded by Australian Research Council (ARC)

## Our national and global reach

We have an extensive global footprint of active, ongoing and funded research collaborations across the world with academic institutions, not-for-profit NGOs, and industry partners.

## Collaborative networks

### Australia-Spain Network for Innovation and Research Excellence – AUSPIRE

A new European funded interdisciplinary researcher training program in planetary health.

*Co-funded by the European*

CI for UC Prof Luis Salvador-Carulla

15

international partners

### CANBREATHE

*Funded by Wellcome*

CI Prof Sotiris Vardoulakis

9

international partners

### Digital Health Cooperative Centre

*Funded by Commonwealth Department of Industry, Science and Resources*

CI for UC Prof Rachel Davey

49

national partners

### Healthy Environments and Lives (HEAL) network

*Funded by NHMRC*

CI Prof Sotiris Vardoulakis

33

national partners

### International Children's Accelerometry Network

*Funded by NIHR/MRC*

CI Prof Rachel Davey

17

international partners

### International Physical Activity and Environment Network

*Funded by NIH/MRC*

CI Prof Rachel Davey

13

international partners

### Movember

*Funded by Movember*

CI Prof Luis Salvador-Carulla

16

international partners

### National Best Practice Unit – Tackling Indigenous Smoking consortium

*Funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care and Nintu One*

CI Assoc Prof Penney Upton

26

national Indigenous partners

## Supporting our research with cutting edge infrastructure

Building on our cutting edge E-infrastructure hub to improve our capability in spatial epidemiology and visual decision support tools.



## Visual & Decision Analytics Lab

The VIDEA lab is a living lab that integrates research and visual innovation through multidisciplinary research. It aims to pioneer innovative solutions at the intersection of geospatial and visualisation science, health, and decision analytics in real-world environments.

In aligning with the mission of the Health Research Institute, the VIDEA lab aims to bring together experts from a diverse range of disciplines to advance public health and health services research and have real world impact. We do this through supporting and showcasing research conducted across HRI, engaging and collaborating with new and existing research partners, and developing tools for decision support in health and social policy planning.

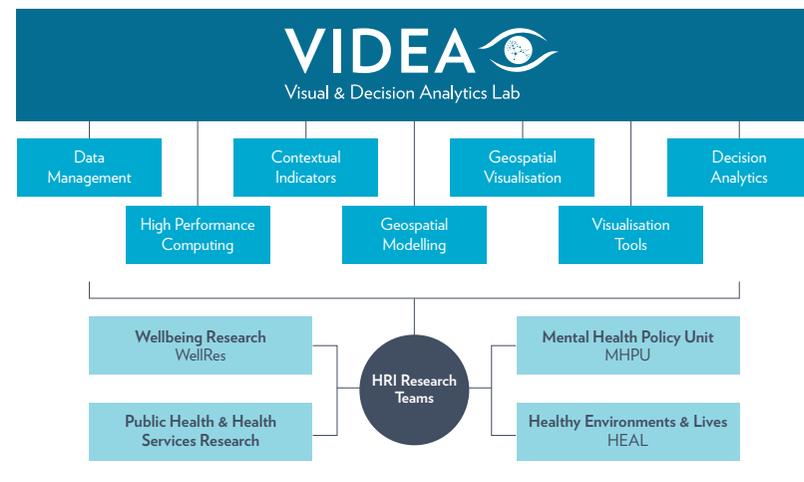
[Learn more](#)



Staff who help manage the HRI labs.

### Research team

- › Vincent Learnihan
- › Nakul Nambiar
- › Anna Syme



## The climate and health HEAL Lab

Built in 2025 this cutting technology will be a national, digital knowledge-action hub providing relevant and easily accessible information to help Australian individuals and organisations respond to climate and environmental changes to sustain our health, the health system, and the environment.

The HEAL Lab will include:

- numerous relevant Australian climate change and health indicators, making them freely and easily accessible on the HEAL Observatory, a national digital knowledge-action hub.
- a comprehensive, systems-based National Environmental Health Risk Assessment will provide evidence on the current and future health burdens of environmental and climate change, and assess the cost-effectiveness of policies and interventions to mitigate risks and provide co-benefits in different sectors/regions.
- story data atlas is being developed as part of the Healing Country project. It will map Aboriginal community priorities regarding climate and environmental change and impacts on health.



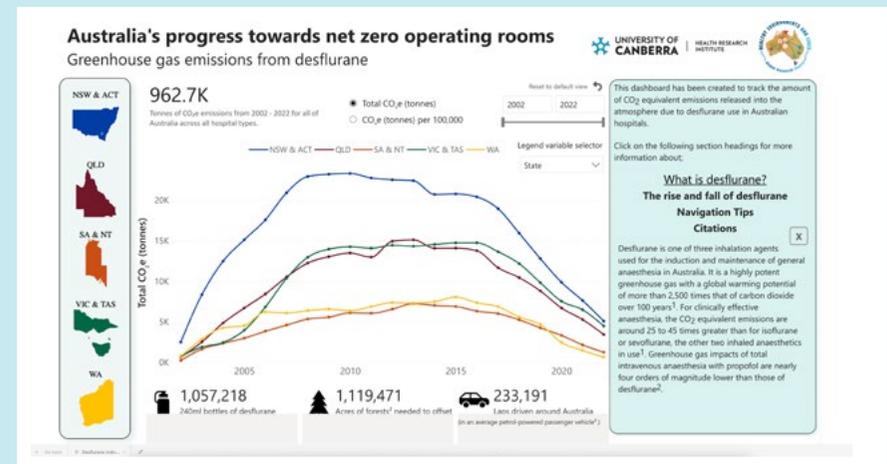
Left: Prof Sotiris Vardoulakis with Her Excellency Arjaree Sriratanaban (Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand), Sisouk Sayyalat (Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Lao PDR) and Dr Paul Grimes PSM, CEO of Austrade at the launch of the CANBREATHE Project Launch event on 20 March 2025.

Below: Interactive HEAL indicator tracking Australian greenhouse gas emissions from desflurane over 20 years.

### Trends in greenhouse gas emissions from desflurane

This indicator tracks the amount of CO<sub>2</sub>e equivalent emissions released into the atmosphere due to desflurane use in Australian hospitals. Desflurane is one of three inhalation agents used for the induction and maintenance of general anaesthesia in Australia. It is a highly potent greenhouse gas with a global warming potential of more than 2,500 times that of carbon dioxide over 100 years.

[Learn more](#)





HEAL field trip in Canberra.



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