



Capability Statement

Mental health

The University of Wollongong (UOW) is committed to pursuing a transformative agenda in research, teaching and engagement in order to address regional and global health needs such as mental health.

UOW has a long history of work on mental health in three key areas:

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

UOW is a member of the Illawarra Shoalhaven Suicide Prevention Collaborative, which was created at the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute (IHMRI) in 2015 to tackle the region's high rate of suicide. The group has grown to be a partnership of more than 40 local organisations that work together to prevent suicide in the Illawarra-Shoalhaven. This includes working with local workplaces and schools to educate people on how to talk about suicide. It consists of representatives from the Local Health District's mental health services, UOW, IHMRI, Grand Pacific Health, Lifeline South Coast, and COORDINARE.

In 2020, the UOW School of Psychology and IHMRI received funding under Suicide Prevention Australia's Innovation Grant scheme for a project to investigate gender differences in suicide prevention aftercare programs.

RECOVERY CAMP

Recovery Camp delivers life-changing, evidence-based programs for students, health professionals, and people with serious and enduring mental illness. It combines a professional experience placement for health students, with a recovery-oriented experience for those living with a mental illness. It also provides respite for carers. Nursing and paramedicine students can count the experience as a mental health clinical placement for their degree.

For people with mental illness, Recovery Camp provides an environment that challenges, supports and empowers them, giving them greater ownership over their recovery journey. The initiative is evidence-based with numerous research publications and HDR student completions. It has provided more than 95,000 hours of clinical placement to more than 1,200 health students from 14 institutions. Recovery Camp is also partnering with peer work students at TAFE NSW for their professional work hours.

Recovery Camp is a successful social enterprise with two UOW co-founder directors since it joined the entrepreneurial start-up program at UOW's iAccelerate in 2016. Recovery Camp was awarded a Citation for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning at the 2017 Australian Awards for University Teaching. It was nominated for the Connecting Community Award at the 2021 NSW/ACT Community Achievement Awards.

MIND THE GaP AT NOWRA

MIND the GaP (Mental Illness in Nowra District: Goals and Prevention) addresses the high level of mental health needs in the Shoalhaven, particularly among vulnerable and younger people.

The purpose-built MIND the GaP building at UOW Shoalhaven was jointly funded by the Australian Government, through the National Stronger Regions Fund, and UOW. MIND the GaP provides person-centred, holistic and preventative services in partnership with healthcare professionals, researchers and frontline support services. A consortium of partners, led by UOW and Shoalhaven City



Council, includes Lifeline South Coast, Lifeline Australia Research Foundation, COORDINARE, the Illawarra and Shoalhaven Local Health District, Noah's Shoalhaven, and the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute.

The initiative harnesses expertise to deliver best quality healthcare practice, clinical services, practitioner training, community outreach and engagement, supported by innovative research in the three critical areas of suicide prevention, traumatic stress response and community resilience.

MIND the GaP is engaged in the provision of limited psychological services and houses simulation labs for social work students. Parenting programs have been successfully completed and have been mirrored in the community as an outreach program.

Psychological intern placements began in 2019 and the Flexible Learning Centre within the building has experienced support from a wide range of local mental health-related organisations.

Lifeline South Coast provides financial counselling services from the MIND the GaP building and Grand Pacific Health provides three outreach programs.

ILLAWARRA HEALTH AND MEDICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute (IHMRI), a partnership between UOW 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.

Research under this theme brings together 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 neurodevelopmental disorders.

Researchers aligned with this theme are based at IHMRI's headquarters or within various UOW 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, neurodegenerative diseases, and post-traumatic stress disorder. They are also seeking to identify molecular and genetic targets for new therapies and treatments.

Clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, and mental health nurses are looking at the causes of mental health disorders, as well as possible treatments and management options. These include psychiatric disorders such as personality disorders and schizophrenia, and also drug and alcohol treatment, aged care, dementia management and preventative health.

NORTHFIELDS PSYCHOLOGY CLINIC

Northfields Psychology Clinic has provided high-quality mental health services to the community and supervised professional development for the University's psychology students for more than 30 years, assisting over 10,000 individual clients and training more than 500 professional and clinical psychologists.

The clinic has a range of individual or group therapy options available for people of all ages. Its focus is on providing

MIND the GaP supports innovative research in the areas of suicide prevention, traumatic stress response and community resilience.





high-quality, affordable psychological services to all clients. Treatment at the clinic is provided by intern psychologists who are undertaking advanced postgraduate study in Professional and Clinical Psychology (including Masters and PhD degrees).

Services are provided flexibly with the introduction of Northfields Online, allowing for mental health consultations via video and phone. All psychology students are provisionally registered with the Psychology Board of Australia, and receive regular professional supervision from fully qualified senior clinical psychologists.

Group therapy programs available at the clinic include Confident Carers Cooperative Kids (parenting program), Cool Kids (child anxiety), and Doing ADHD Differently (adult ADHD group). Services are offered across two clinics: the adult clinic and the child-adolescent clinic Northfields Clinic @ Early Start.

PROVIDING EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Project Air is a centre of excellence for research, education and treatment of personality disorders and related complex conditions including suicide, self-harm and other comorbidities. It is also a capacity-building program to help schools and communities identify and respond more effectively to suicide risk, self-harm and complex mental health presentations.

Project Air Strategy works to improve the capacity of services to diagnose, manage and provide effective treatment for personality disorders.

The Project Air Strategy stems from a strong partnership between the NSW Ministry of Health and the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute (IHMRI) at UOW. The centre also partners with health services from both government and non-government sectors, Departments of Education and non-government schools, justice, community services and organisations, foundations, and consumer and carer groups. It delivers scientific discoveries to promote recovery through effective response and treatment of complex mental health challenges including personality disorders.

Since 2010, the Project Air Strategy has been working to improve the capacity of services to diagnose, manage and provide effective treatment for people with personality disorders. The centre has authored the national Borderline Personality Disorder e-learning training auspiced by the Australian BPD Foundation and supported by the National Mental Health Commission. It has also established e-learning for best practice adolescent treatment of emerging personality disorder, suicide and self-harm, supported by the NSW Departments of Education and Health.

Published scientific evaluation of the Project Air approach has demonstrated the average cost saving for treating personality disorder using its model of care is \$3,900 per patient per year. It showed presentations to emergency departments were reduced by 22 per cent, and admissions and length of stays in hospitals significantly reduced from an average of 13.46 days to 4.28 days per admission.

Analysis of longitudinal patient data demonstrates that people graduating from stepped care clinics experienced significant improvement in symptoms, quality of life, and productivity in their daily activities from initial assessment to follow-up at 12 months. They also reported significantly lower rates of suicidal ideation and attempts, and reductions in deliberate self-harm.

AHEAD OF THE GAME

Ahead of the Game provides athletes with strategies to deal with mental health challenges. The program is funded by global men's health charity Movember and was developed by researchers within UOW's School of Psychology in 2016.

Scientists are investigating the molecular, cellular and genetic underpinnings of psychiatric disorders.

While the Ahead of the Game program has its roots in Wollongong, Movember has helped expand the program into other countries including the United Kingdom and Canada. Movember and the AFL have engaged in a partnership to deliver Ahead of the Game to over 60,000 adolescents across the country in the next three years.

Ahead of the Game equips adolescent males with skills, confidence and support systems to help recognise the warning signs of mental health problems and act on them as early as possible.

Research showed that teenage boys who undertook just two hours of sport-based mental health and resilience training demonstrated a better understanding of what mental health is, had greater intentions to help others who have a mental health problem and were more confident about seeking help themselves.

Resources developed as part of Ahead of the Game include Help Out a Mate, a mental health literacy workshop, and Your Path to Success in Sport, a sports-based resilience workshop and app. The sports-based program was the official mental health program of the Rugby League World Cup 2021.

FOCUS ON FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

Ngarruwan Ngadju First Peoples Health and Wellbeing Research Centre is located within the Australian Health Services research Institute (AHSRI) at UOW's Innovation Campus.

The research team focuses on the health and wellbeing of South Coast First Nations communities, including the Illawarra, Shoalhaven, Batemans Bay and Bega.

The team also addresses issues of inequality, such as life expectancy and suicide rates. The centre is leading the way for a future generation of researchers by engaging with PhD candidates and post-doctoral fellows.

SUPPORT FOR STAFF AND STUDENTS

Support services available to staff and students include UOW's Employee Assistance Program and LifeWorks, which provides 24/7 confidential counselling. Mental health awareness, intervention training, counselling and wellbeing support for students is also provided.

UOW has increased our investment in student mental health services overall, in alignment with our Student Mental Health Model and strategy.

Current services include the 24-hour Student Wellbeing Support line, and we have entered into a partnership with Lifeline Direct to provide a guaranteed number of one-on-one counselling sessions per week. This will augment the services provided by the four FTE student mental health specialists (education, one-on-one and group sessions etc). The Woolyungah Indigenous Centre has established a service that enables referral to an Aboriginal psychologist. The Graduate Research school has established a peer mentoring program for international students and a series of mental health promotion and connection initiatives to support HDR students' emotional wellbeing.

UOW's Unilife provides students with free access to guided meditation sessions.



TACKLING SUICIDE IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

UOW's MIND the GaP initiative, based at our Shoalhaven Campus, has partnered with the South Coast Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation (AMS) to develop and provide culturally tailored suicide prevention training to the region's First Nations communities.

Known as Community Linkers, the project aims to reduce suicide by bridging the gap between at-risk community members and professional services. With workshops held monthly, training is free for participants and is delivered by First Nations facilitators.

Data from the project is being used to inform research, examining the effectiveness of culturally tailored suicide prevention training. It is anticipated that the evaluation will inform future development and increase the effectiveness of suicide prevention programs for First Nations communities more broadly.

UOW WELCOMES THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK WITH GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY PARTNERS TO DELIVER EXCEPTIONAL OUTCOMES

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