

NDARC wins more than \$7.1 million in NHMRC research funding

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Researchers from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales in Sydney have been awarded more than \$7.1 million in project grants and research fellowships in National Health and Medical Research Council Funding (NHMRC) announced by Federal Health Minister Tanya Plibersek today.

The funding will support a wide range of projects aimed at preventing and treating drug and alcohol harms including new treatments for co-occurring depression and heroin use; cost-benefit of treatment for heroin dependence; interventions to reduce harms among indigenous Australians; diagnosis of major depression among older Australians; internet based prevention programs in schools aimed at reducing mental health and substance use disorders in adolescence; and internet based treatment of binge drinking and depression among young adults.

New project grants and targeted mental health grants to commence in 2013:

- \$708,997 to study behavioural activation therapy in treating depression among individuals with opioid dependence (**Professor Maree Teesson, Dr Joanne Ross and colleagues**). The co-occurrence of heroin dependence and depression is associated with a range of harms and has been linked to poorer treatment outcomes. Despite this, practical and effective treatment options are scarce. The proposed international collaboration will contribute significantly to understanding of the treatment of this comorbidity.
- \$509,300 to investigate the cost benefit of health interventions for heroin use (**Professor Alison Ritter, Dr Marian Shanahan and colleagues**). This unique study will estimate the net social benefit of heroin treatment, taking into account health, crime and family consequences. The results will help Australia respond better to this devastating health problem.
- \$379, 931 for an intervention trial to reduce alcohol related harms among high risk young Indigenous Australians (**Associate Professor Anthony Shakeshaft and colleagues**). Indigenous Australians experience disproportionately high rates of drug and alcohol harms and young people are particularly vulnerable. This study will investigate the



Media Contacts

Marion Downey, Communications Manager: 02 9385 0180 / 0401 713 850 / m.downey@unsw.edu.au
Erin O' Loughlin, Communications Officer: 02 9385 0124 / 0402 870 996 / erin.oloughlin@unsw.edu.au

benefits/costs of combining cognitive-behaviour therapy with a community-reinforcement strategy to reduce substance-related harms among young Indigenous Australians.

- \$197,845 to investigate the diagnosis of major depression among older Australian adults (**Dr Matthew Sunderland and colleagues**). While studies have consistently indicated that the prevalence of depression decreases with increasing age some researchers have questioned whether this finding is a real age-dependent decline or an artefact of sampling and assessment. The study will make recommendations to improve the diagnostic methods used to diagnose and treat major depression in older age.
- \$1,709, 987 for development and evaluation of internet-based universal prevention for anxiety, depression and substance use in young Australians (**Professor Maree Teesson and colleagues**). Anxiety, depressive and substance use disorders account for three quarters of the disability attributed to mental disorders. Yet we have few models of well-implemented prevention programs for these common disorders. The project addresses this gap by evaluating an innovative internet-based approach to preventing mental health and substance use problems in Australian adolescents.
- \$909,585 for a randomised clinical trial of internet-based treatment for binge drinking and depression in young Australians (**Dr Francis Kay-Lambkin and colleagues**). Binge drinking and depression peak in young adulthood but are undertreated. This project will develop and evaluate a low cost program delivered via the internet.

As well NDARC staff have been awarded the following fellowships to further their research:

- **Professor Louisa Degenhardt** has been awarded a principal research fellowship to continue her work assessing the population health impact of illicit drug use,
- **Professor Richard Mattick** has been awarded a principal research fellowship to support his work studying the impact of alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, and prescribed drugs in large cohorts followed from birth through to adolescence and adulthood,
- **Professor Maree Teesson** has been awarded a senior research fellowship to support her research in mental health and substance use,
- **Dr Matthew Sunderland** has been awarded an early career fellowship to support his research into mental disorders,
- **Dr Michael Livingston** has been awarded an early career fellowship to support research into alcohol policy and its impact on consumption and on health inequalities.

NDARC Director Professor Michael Farrell said that the Australian Government, through the NHMRC, was to be congratulated on its support of drug and alcohol research in Australia.

“Misuse of alcohol and other drugs conservatively costs Australia over \$25 billion a year. But there remain many unanswered questions about the prevalence of alcohol and substance use and about the most effective interventions. Every dollar spent on research provides further evidence to ensure both policy and treatments deliver maximum effectiveness.”

For more details on the grants and a full list of investigators and collaborators see:
<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/>

The National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre is supported by funding from the Australian Government under the Substance Misuse Prevention and Service Improvements Grants Fund.