

NorthWestern Mental Health Research Strategy 2016-2020

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NWMH Research Strategy and NWMH Research Committee are part of the Melbourne Health Office for Research.

1. Overview

NWMH provides mental health services to residents in the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne, a catchment area of approximately 1.2 million people. Mental health research has numerous benefits for the mental health care system with three of the most important being that it helps attract and retain the best clinicians, it encourages best clinical practice and practice improvement and it supports an environment in which high quality teaching, training and professional development can flourish.

NWMH stated vision is a leading edge mental health service renowned for ensuring the delivery of easily accessible, timely and responsive quality mental health services in an environment which supports learning, research and continuous quality improvement. A clear research strategy is in keeping with this.

2. Vision

NWMH is committed to supporting research to ultimately improve the service experience and outcome for all our service users and significant others affected by mental health problems.

3. Aims

Consistent with national, state and service mental health research priorities, our aims are to:

- Foster research innovation, capacity and collaboration to address key research priorities in identification, treatment and management of mental health problems across the lifespan
- Promote knowledge translation of research findings into strengthening consumer and carer wellbeing and outcomes through improvements in mental health practice, prevention, and treatment.

4. The Importance of Mental Illness and the relevance to Victoria

The Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing revealed that almost half (45%) the population aged 16-85 years had a mental disorder at some point in their life (ABS, 2008), and 20% had a mental health problem in the preceding 12 month period. Almost 64,000 individuals have a psychotic illness and are in contact with public mental health services each year (National Survey of Psychosis, 2010), and it is estimated that 560,000 children and adolescents (14%) experience mental health problems (Young Minds Matter, 2015). In Australia, mental health problems have been estimated to account for 12.9% of the total burden of disease, making it the third highest group after cancer and cardiovascular disease (IHME, 2013). In Victoria, approximately 1.2 million people will experience a mental illness during any one year, which is consistent with the national rate (Victorian Government, 2015).

In contrast to the significant disease burden attributable to mental illness is the Commonwealth Government funding for mental health research in Australia. Mental health

is identified as a national health priority area together with several areas including cancer, and cardiovascular disease. However, while cancer and cardiovascular disease each attracted \$191.9M and \$121.3 respectively in 2015, mental health research was only provided with \$86.4M (NHMRC, 2015). This is despite the fact that almost half (45.8%) of respondents to the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) 'Australians Talk Mental Illness' survey identified the need for more research into mental illness (MIFA Mental Health Research – principles and priorities for the future, www.mifa.org.au).

Christensen et al. (2013) analysed Australian Research Priorities in Mental Health including comparison of burden of disease with research funding allocation. The following areas were found to be under-funded:

1. Prevention and promotion
2. Suicide & self-harm, personality disorders, anxiety disorders, childhood conditions & dementia.

Subsequently, the following key areas were under-researched:

1. Suicide, anxiety disorders and personality disorders

5. NWMH Research Principles

NWMH will adopt the key principles discussed in the Mental Health Research and Evaluation Framework (Mental Health Branch, Department of Human Services, Victoria State Government 2005). These are:

1. Focus on research priorities
2. Ethical and quality standards
3. Consumer and carer participation
4. Translation and dissemination of research findings.

Principles in setting research priorities

- Relevance - Focus on care and treatment for those affected by serious mental illness. Potential benefit to consumers and carers.
- Novelty - Address critical knowledge gaps of significance to mental health care. Have the potential to pioneer new treatment/care approaches
- Practicality - Timeliness and feasibility of the research. In keeping with existing research priorities across the broader health sector
- Translation: - Existence of clear plans for translating the research into clinical practice or policy. Promote improvement in clinical quality and safety
- Inclusive: Have the capacity to involve practitioners, consumers and carers in the development, delivery and evaluation of research projects. Involve active partnership between researchers, managers, clinicians, consumers and carers in order to conduct research and make use of the evidence base from research in service planning and delivery

Ethical and quality standards

All proposed research projects will receive ethical approval from the Melbourne Health Human Research Ethics Committee. They will be assessed on their scientific merit and benefit to the mental health field. They will adhere to appropriate ethics and standards including confidentiality, safety and quality. Proposed projects will be culturally appropriate, respectful of diversity and have regard for the welfare, beliefs, perceptions and customs and cultural heritage of research participants. All research designs should be credible, robust and high quality.

Consumer and carer participation

Consumer and carer participation in the research process is key to bringing a lived experience perspective to the research process. This generates important questions,

relevant to clinical practice, and improves the evidence base used to inform how services are provided. Wherever possible, this is conducted within a co-production approach.

Translation, dissemination and implementation

Information and data generated from research activities needs to be disseminated in a manner that is most likely to influence outcomes for individuals with mental health problems.

6. Current research Priorities

Priorities include research related to the aetiology, understanding and treatment of mental illness (see below), fostering research careers, research collaborations and knowledge transfer.

The scope of current NWMH **research areas** can fall in the following broad domains:

- Assessment of the efficacy and effectiveness of existing mental health interventions and treatments
- Identification of innovative interventions that reduce relapse and improve recovery outcomes
- Identification of best practice approaches to promotion, prevention and treatment of mental illness
- Examination of the aetiology of major mental illness to improve our understanding of the causes of these illnesses
- Neurobiological aspects of mental illness and the interaction between neurobiology and environment
- Examination of the use and effects of e-health interventions for consumer and carer wellbeing and outcomes
- Knowledge translation and implementation of findings to improve service provision and consumer and carer outcomes
- Research into workforce development, including the peer workforce
- Evaluation of the impact of the translation of proven research into clinical practice
- Research into the most effective ways to translate and sustain research findings into practice change
- Epidemiological research, particularly to inform our understanding of disorders and their course and assist with service planning
- Economic and demand modelling
- Cyclical evaluations of the impact of existing research programs.

Centres and Units of Research Activity: Psychiatric research across NWMH covers youth, adult and old age, and is linked to several centres and units. These include:

- Psychosocial Research Centre (PRC), Bell St Coburg (focus on family/carer interventions, epidemiology of severe mental illness and social impacts of illness)
- Melbourne Neuropsychiatry Centre (focus on neurobiology, organic mental illness such as young onset dementia and schizophrenia).
- Academic Centre of Old Age Psychiatry, Royal Park (focus on prevention and intervention in dementing illnesses)
- Academic Mental Health Nursing Research Unit (focus on health services research; physical health of people with mental illness, safety and wellbeing, models of care)
- Sunshine Psychiatric Research Centre (focus on severe mental illness, especially schizophrenia)
- Orygen Youth Health (in conjunction with the Orygen, National Centre for Excellence in Youth Mental Health – focus on first episode psychosis, mood and personality disorder in young people)
- Academic Psychology Unit, at The Northern Hospital (focus on psychological processes and interventions for people living with psychotic disorders)

- Deakin University / NorthWestern Mental Health Partnership for Occupational Therapy Research – partnership focus:
 - Assessment of the efficacy and effectiveness of existing mental health interventions and treatments
 - Identification of innovative interventions that reduce relapse and improve recovery outcomes
 - Identification of best practice approaches to promotion, prevention and treatment of mental illness
 - Research into workforce development, including the peer workforce
 - Evaluation of the impact of the translation of proven research into clinical practice
 - Research into the most effective ways to translate and sustain research findings into practice change
 - Cyclical evaluations of the impact of existing research programs.

Fostering careers: Priority will be given to encouraging all clinicians working within NWMH to consider research as an essential method to improve service delivery and service user quality of life. Further priority will be given to encouraging young clinicians to become research active and to foster their research careers by providing:

- mentorship
- seed funding
- advice on designing and planning a research project
- approaches to data analysis
- writing research papers
- writing grant skills and identifying pathways for research funding
- advice on becoming an independent researcher and leading a research team

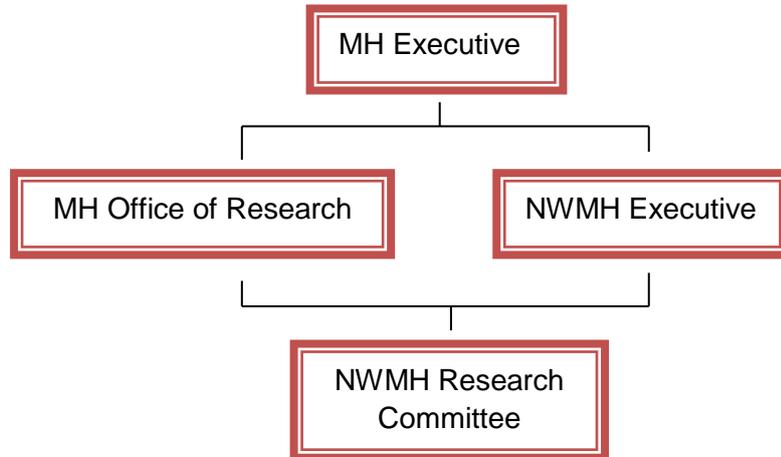
Research Collaborations: Today's research questions and challenges are complex and cannot be addressed by researchers working in isolation. NWMH and its research committee will foster an environment to encourage interdisciplinary research, which will involve local or international collaborations across research groups with differing and complementary expertise. Productive and successful collaborations will be encouraged.

Knowledge Transfer: NWMH and its research committee encourage the generation of new knowledge to improve the quality of life of its service users. Knowledge transfer is a mutual responsibility between researchers and services/practitioners. There is a priority on disseminating this new knowledge by presentation of relevant findings to NWMH Executive with recommendations for translation for consideration by NWMH for implementation; publication in reports and peer-reviewed journals; presentation at conferences and community user groups.

7. Research governance framework

The NWMH research strategy will be developed, disseminated throughout NWMH and monitored by NWMH Research Committee. The Chair of the NWMH Research Committee will report to NWMH Executive Committee on a quarterly basis. The Executive will guide the NWMH research committee on its research strategy as mental health priorities and service user needs change over time. The NWMH Research Committee will report to NWMH Executive Committee and Melbourne Health Office of Research.

Governance Structure of NWMH Research Committee



NWMH Research Committee

Objectives

- 7.1 NWMH Research Committee will be guided by the research principles (adopted from New South Wales Mental Health Research Framework)
- 7.2 NWMH Research Committee will set the research priorities periodically in order to maintain the vision of NWMH and in line with State and Commonwealth policies.
- 7.3 NWMH Research Committee will collate information on current research programs
- 7.4 NWMH Research Committee will facilitate partnerships and project development.

Membership

- Chair – Professor Everall, NWMH Director of Mental Health Research
- Deputy Chair – Professor Kim Foster, Professor of Mental Health Nursing, NWMH
- Executive Director NWMH
- Director of Clinical Governance NWMH
- Representatives from each research program within NWMH
- Directors of Clinical Services
- Representation from Nursing
- Representation from Allied Health

NWMH Research Committee Goals for the next five years

These goals will be to achieve our priorities as set out in Section 6.

Goal 1 Aligning our Research Priorities

NWMH researchers and practitioners have a mutual responsibility to ensure that current NWMH sponsored or supported research activities are aligned with our stated research priorities. NWMH Research Committee will carry out annual scoping activity of all research activity that occurs across NWMH sites and audit the projects to ensure that they are relevant to our stated research priorities.

Goal 2 'Grow our Own'

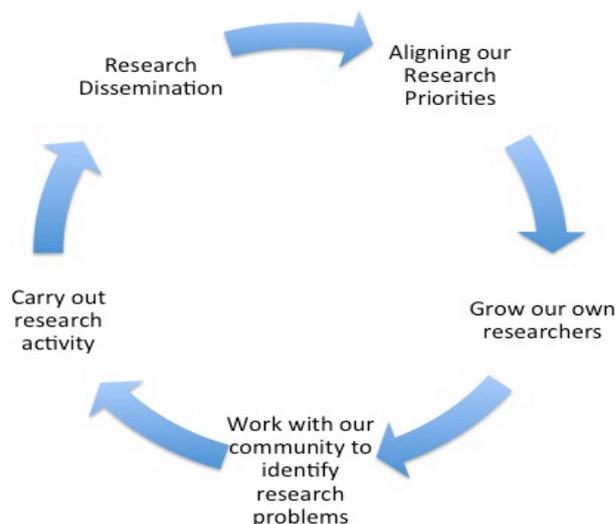
We will actively encourage all clinicians working within NWMH to consider the importance of research in improving clinical services and for those interested in a research career we will provide mentorship and advice with regard to career development.

Goal 3 Reaching out

Reaching out and partnering with consumers and carers and fellow researchers as well as disseminating our new knowledge to the academic and wider community are essential activities if we are going to make a difference to the quality of life of our service users.

NWMH will encourage the establishment and maintenance of productive research collaborations with both local and international research groups. We believe that promoting the formation of interdisciplinary research groups is crucial to NWMH success in answering the complex clinical problems that will improve the quality of life of our service users.

Process of goal achievement over next 5 years



Key references and resources

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2008. *National survey of mental health and wellbeing: summary of results, Australia, 2007*. ABS cat. no. 4326.0. Canberra: ABS.

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REVISION AND APPROVAL HISTORY

Date	Rev No	Author and Approval
April 2011	1	NWMH Research Committee
February 2017	2	NWMH Research and Executive Committees