



Academic Health Science Centre



2021-2022

ANNUAL REPORT

Western Alliance Health Research Ltd
(Western Alliance)



Our Vision

Healthier regional and rural communities.

Western Alliance supports its members to improve the health of their communities through research-based and evidence-informed health care.

Our Mission

We foster relationships between organisations and individuals who can influence regional and rural health outcomes and research.

We build capability of regional and rural health practitioners, researchers and consumers, enabling them to contribute to and benefit from health research.

We prioritise regional health problems and fund regional and rural health research teams to investigate, generate evidence and implement solutions.

We support development of nationally relevant models of regional and rural health research.

We work to achieve equitable funding for regional and rural health research.



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About Us

Western Alliance Academic Health Science Centre (Western Alliance) was established in 2014 and incorporated as a registered health promotion charity (Western Alliance Health Research Ltd) in 2016. It is Australia's first rural and regionally focused academic health science centre.

Western Alliance is comprised of 12 member organisations located across the Barwon/Southwest and Grampians regions of western Victoria. The two regions have a combined population of over 675,000 residents or approximately 44% of rural/regional Victoria's population. Members include six regional, sub-regional and local public health services, three private hospitals, a primary health network and two universities.

Western Alliance supports the development of healthier regional and rural communities. This is in recognition of the significantly poorer health outcomes experienced by people living in the Barwon/South West and Grampians regions of Victoria compared to their metropolitan counterparts. The challenges that affect the health of people living in western Victoria include distance and major variations in access to healthcare, lower socio-economic status and poorer infrastructure.

The key function of Western Alliance is to support the development of the capability and capacity of our members to conduct research relevant to regional health and to support the implementation of research-based and evidence-informed healthcare across western Victoria.

Western Alliance has established important collaborations with leading national and state-based organisations to improve our capacity to support research in our priority themes and platforms.

To date, Western Alliance has supported over 52 studies, including flagship research, project grants, scholarships, seed funding and financial contributions to large NHMRC-funded projects. In addition, Western Alliance is a lead organisation in the DELIVER project, a five-year, \$9 million Medical Research Future Fund research project that will identify and build a suite of programs to improve and extend in-home healthcare, and will further build health research capacity and capability across the region.

The Alliance delivers a broad research education program, including funding for multi-year research fellowships, and the STaRR training program and resource library for mentors, managers and health practitioners. It also provides critical 'on-the-ground' support to members through three health service-embedded Research Translation Coordinators located across the Barwon/Southwest and Grampians regions.

Our three-year strategic plan is dedicated to enabling research that will help to address the key health issues faced by our member organisations.

Our Track Record

Western Alliance funded studies include:

- Identifying barriers, facilitators and strategies for implementing cardiac tele-rehabilitation to address access inequalities in western Victoria
- What is the prevalence of malnutrition in a small rural health service? Evaluation of a malnutrition screening program
- Let's have a yarn about chronic disease: A collaborative, multidisciplinary, participatory action research approach to addressing Aboriginal health in south-western Victoria
- The Rural Acute Hospital Data Register (RAHDaR)
- Chronic disease, injury and ageing in western Victoria: opportunities to improve health delivery
- A Post-Hospital Discharge Pharmacist Medication Management Service for High-Risk Patients Using Telehealth
- Development of a Grampians small towns cancer strategy
- Developing a best-practice, pre-operative exercise therapy 'prehabilitation' model for patients with prostate, colon and breast cancer in the Grampians region of Victoria
- Whole of systems trial of prevention strategies for childhood obesity: WHO STOPS childhood obesity
- COVID-19 geographical equity in a pandemic
- Evaluation of telehealth services implemented for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the primary healthcare setting
- The rapid adoption of telehealth by a regional community-based palliative care service due to COVID-19: Patient and health care professional perspectives and opportunities for service enhancement
- Investigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health and wellbeing of staff in rural health services
- Evaluation of the expansion of telehealth through primary care in Australia
- The Pregnancy Research and Translation Ecosystem (PRT-E)
 - A listening and learning healthcare system approach to improve outcomes for acute-care mental health consumers in the Barwon-Southwest Victoria region
- COVID-19 & Regional Health Staff Wellbeing – Accessibility of Support Strategies
 - Co-design and evaluation of Hospital in the Home (HITH) for young people accessing Eating Disorder Services
 - Workforce Impact: Lessons learnt from COVID-19 and the impact on rural and regional health system workforce
 - Feasibility and acceptability of the Digital Inclusion – Social Connections (DI-SC) Program

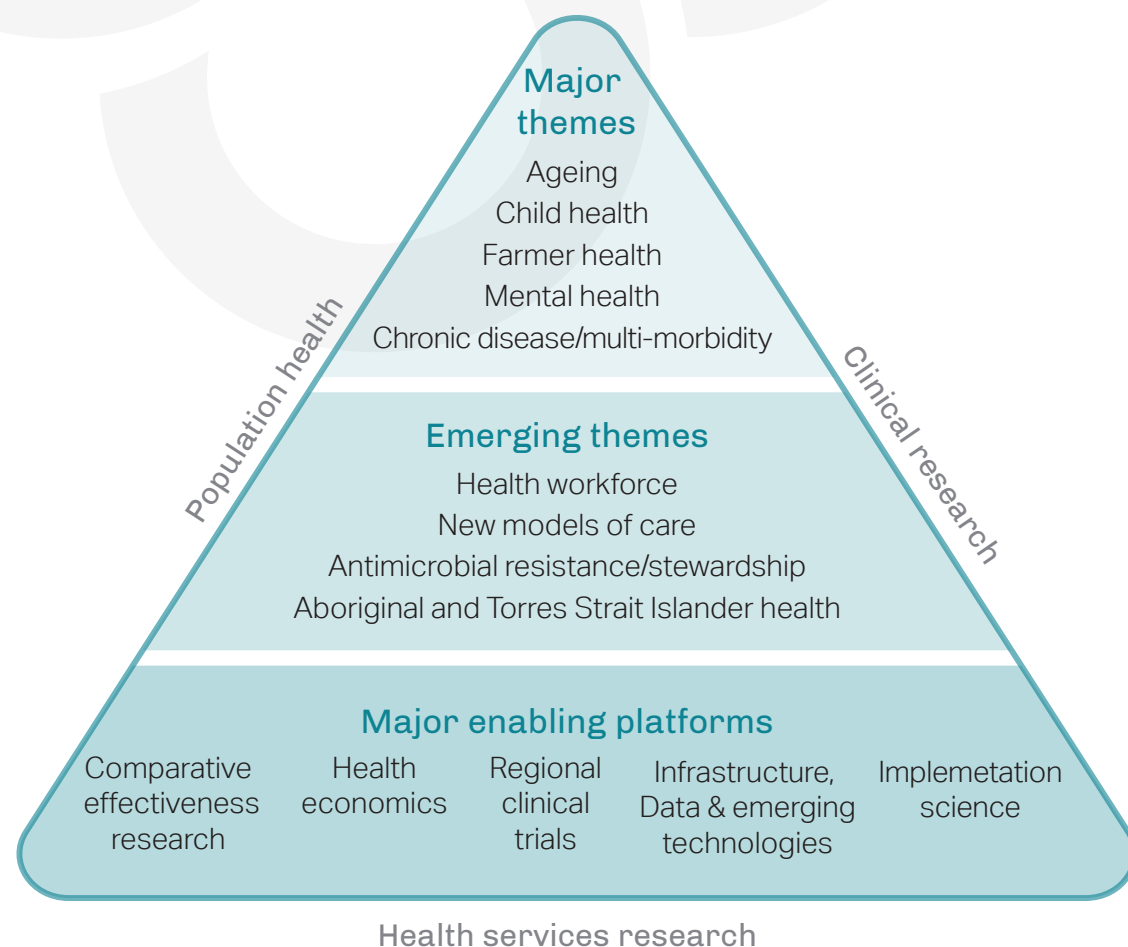
Our Research Focus Areas

Underpinning Principles

- > Prevention
- > Access to health services
- > Equity
- > Quality, safety & innovation
- > Promoting consumer engagement
- > Collaboration & communication in healthcare
- > Stimulating engagement with other industries & sectors



Research Focus Areas



Our Members

Western Alliance's member organisations comprise two major regional city-based health services: Grampians Health and Barwon Health; four regional and rural health services: Colac Area Health, East Grampians Health Service, South West Healthcare, Western District Health Service, and; three private hospitals: the St. John of God hospitals in Geelong, Ballarat and Warrnambool; the Western Victoria Primary Health Network (PHN); and two regionally based academic institutions: Deakin and Federation Universities.

Western Alliance acknowledges the valuable input and contribution of our member organisations, who have been instrumental in accomplishing the translation of research into clinical practice, policy, administrative decision making and benefits for patients and communities.



Our People

Board members

Name	Position	Dates (if not for whole year)
Professor Brendan Crotty	Chair/Director	
Ms Rowena Clift	Director	
Ms Frances Diver	Director	
Mr Dale Fraser	Treasurer/Director	
Professor Warren Payne	Director	
Mr Rohan Fitzgerald	Director	
Mr Craig Fraser	Director	
Ms Fiona Brew	Director	
Mr Stephen Roberts	Director	
Mr Mario Santilli	Director	
Professor Rachel Huxley	Director	
Professor Chris Hutchinson	Director	To March 2022
Professor Shane Thomas	Director	From March 2022
A/Professor Gabrielle O'Kane	Director	From March 2022
Professor Alison Verhoeven	Director	From March 2022

Employees and funded positions

Name	Position	Dates (if not for whole year)
Professor Warren Payne	Executive Director	
Mr Andrew (Drew) Aras	Executive Officer	
Ms Cassandra Hamilton	Administrative Officer	
Dr Laura Alston	Associate Research Fellow	
Dr Jaclyn Bishop	Research Translation Coordinator	To August 2021
Dr Michael Field	Research Translation Coordinator	
Dr Louise Greenstock	Research Translation Coordinator	
Ms Sarah Shaw	Research Communications Support Officer	
Dr Ella Ottrey	Research Translation Coordinator	From August 2021
Dr Olivia King	Manager, Research Capability Building	
Ms Emma West	Program Officer, Research Capability Building	
Ms Charlotte Molesworth	Biostatistician	From October 2021



Research Translation Committee members

Name	Position	Dates (if not for whole year)
A/Professor Anna Wong Shee	Chair	
Professor Warren Payne	Member	
Dr Olivia King	Member	
Mr Drew Aras	Member	
Ms Barbara Moll	Member	
Mr Mario Santilli	Member	
Professor Peter Vuillermin	Member	
Professor Susan Brumby	Member	
Professor Anna Peeters	Member	
A/Professor Mark Yates	Member	
Professor Fergal Grace	Member	
Mr Andrew Giddy	Member	From July 2021
Dr Laura Alston	Member	
A/Professor Vincent Versace	Member	
Professor Alison Hutchison	Member	
Dr Michael Field	Member	
Ms Ashleigh Clarke	Member	
Mrs Jaclyn Bishop	Member	
Dr Louise Greenstock	Member	
Professor Colette Browning	Member	
Mrs Marilyn Dolling	Consumer Representative	
Ms Alicia Boyd	Member	From February 2022

Messages from our Health Partners



Barwon Health

Barwon Health is proud to be a governing partner of Western Alliance. Over the past three years our partnership with Western Alliance has provided benefits at an organisational level as well as for Barwon Health employees in terms of research funding, support and capability building, all of which have translated to improvements in care for the greater Barwon community. Notable examples of our work together include:

Research capability building:

Over 50 Barwon Health staff have participated in Western Alliance's STaRR research training program to date. These include 38 emerging researchers from unit such as Nursing, Emergency Medicine, Physiotherapy, Urology, Mental Health Drugs and Alcohol Services, 13 managers and 4 mentors.

Research funding:

Flagship Research Program: The Pregnancy Research and Translation Ecosystem (PRT-E) received a \$200,000 grant from Western Alliance to generate and implement best evidence to improve maternal and infant health. The CHIME Translational Research Partnership in Mental Health between Deakin University and Barwon Health has been further supported with \$200,000 through Western Alliance to deliver a Flagship Program titled 'A Listening and Learning Healthcare System approach to improve outcomes for acute-care mental health consumers in the Barwon-Southwest Victoria Region'.

Western Alliance Mental Health Grants: The Barwon Health Eating Disorders Service, supported by CHIME, received \$15,000 from Western Alliance to co-design an evaluation and enhancements of Hospital in the Home (HITH) for young people accessing Eating Disorder Services in the Barwon South-West region.

External funding support program: Western Alliance provided \$20,000 in support of the successful application to Cancer Council Victoria and the Victorian Cancer Agency towards an Allied Health Clinical Trials Unit specialising in Cancer Supportive Care and Survivorship.

Emerging Researcher grants: Barwon Health participants in the STaRR program have received eight \$5000 grants to date that will be used further develop their research ideas in the areas of Podiatry, Speech Pathology, Paediatrics, Physiotherapy, Emergency Medicine, Urology and Trauma Care.

COVID grant: Barwon Health researchers were awarded \$10,500 towards the rapid adoption of telehealth by a regional community-based palliative care service due to COVID-19.

Research support:

Dr Angela Holmes, Urology Registrar, who completed STaRR program in 2021 and utilised other Western Alliance support including Biostatistics consultation, has gone on to achieve significant research success, including publishing her research in an international medical journal, being awarded a Western Alliance Emerging Researcher grant, and receiving the 'Best Research Poster in Surgery' at Barwon Health's 2021 Research Awards.

Collaborations:

Dr Michael Field, Western Alliance Research Translation Coordinator is a steering committee member of the Adrian Costa Clinical Trials Centre-led Allied Health Clinical Trials Unit Oncology project.

Western Alliance Research Translation Coordinator and members of Barwon Health's Research Ethics Governance and Integrity Unit are members of the Victorian regional and rural ethics and governance working group.

We look forward to continuing our work with Western Alliance and further strengthening our partnership to ensure an effective and collaborative approach to research and capability building across the Barwon-South West and Grampians regions.

*Prof Pete Vuillermin, pictured
Director of Research, Barwon Health*



Messages from our Health Partners



Ms Fiona Brew
CEO, Colac Area Health

Colac Area Health

CAH RU has been successful in attracting research funding and publishing research results, collaborating with partners throughout Victoria and Australia, and supporting 25 Colac Area Health staff and students to undertake research and clinical audit projects. Being one of the few rural health service research units, CAH RU recently published a paper describing its journey in The Australian Journal of Rural Health.

In 2022, CAH RU held the inaugural Colac Area Health Research Symposium, which featured 10 research presentations from Colac Area Health staff and was attended by over 70 people from Colac and across the wider Western Victoria region.

Drawing on Western Alliance's locally tailored resources, CAH RU has been able to complete important research and translation activities. A recent project led to improved nutrition and speech pathology care, benefiting >6,000 admissions since 2021 when the health service implemented a new food service management system and nutrition policy based on CAH RU research.



Colac Area Health is dedicated to promoting a positive research environment across the health service and community and this vision has been made possible with the support of Western Alliance. The Colac Area Health Research Unit (CAH RU) was established in 2020 with support from Western Alliance and Deakin Rural Health, with a mission to address rural health inequities through improving the availability of research evidence and ensuring evidence-based care.

CAH RU has also been able to increase research activity including leading the state-wide CReW and CReW-Ace studies (rural health staff wellbeing), joining the large DELIVER project (improving care of older Australians), and conducting family violence research.

Colac Area Health's membership with Western Alliance continues to allow our staff to improve their ability to tackle local health issues through developing their research and translation skills, access to vital research funding opportunities, and participating in region-wide initiatives.

Dr Laura Alston
Director of Research,
Colac Area Health



This year, East Grampians Health Service (EGHS) has continued to build its research capabilities, collaborations and reputation for quality health services research.

East Grampians Health Service

Supported by our Western Alliance Research Translation Coordinator, we completed our evaluation of a novel salaried medical officer position. We were excited to share our findings that the position improved work efficiency, increased accessibility to timely medical advice and improved quality of care, particularly for patients at risk of sudden deterioration, publishing the evaluation in the Australian Journal of Rural Health. Another of our projects—a pilot study of a modified sport program for older adults in rural communities—is also nearing completion. Funded through Western Alliance and EGHS Emerging Researcher grants, the success of this project shows the benefits of investing in our emerging researchers, and the strong partnership between EGHS and Western Alliance.

We have also collaborated with other member organisations on Western Alliance-funded projects. The CReW study (COVID-19 and Regional and Rural Health Staff Wellbeing) explored the wellbeing of rural health service staff during the pandemic, informing how we can best support our staff in times of hardship. We were a founding collaborator on the Western Alliance Flagship program, the Pregnancy Research and Translation Ecosystem (PRT-E). Through this research, we contribute the important rural voice in planning interventions to improve outcomes for women and children.

We continued our partnership with Federation University, with a representative serving on our Research Committee and partnering on a successful grant application for the Happy Healthy Hearts Program. We also welcomed a PhD student from Torrens University, who progressed the Ararat Heart Study.

We look forward to continuing to work with Western Alliance and its partners, building on our research successes and improving the health of people in our local community and region.

Nick Bush, pictured
Chief Executive,
East Grampians Health Service



Messages from our Health Partners



Grampians Health

The last 12 months provided a unique endeavour with the formation of Grampians Health following the amalgamation of Edenhope and District Memorial Hospital, Stawell Regional Health, Wimmera Health Care Group and Ballarat Health Services.

Grampians Health's vision is to be a trusted, progressive and innovative leader of regional and rural healthcare, and research will be central to achieving this.

Across our campuses there are now over 270 active research projects including over 100 clinical trials. Our researchers have published or presented on more than 100 occasions.

We are thrilled to have three Grampians Health clinical teams and their managers taking part in the second round of the STaRR program. We congratulate the 17 Grampians Health teams who participated in the first round.

Our emerging researchers are focusing on issues including understanding professional development needs of regional allied health professionals, evaluating services offered by allied health assistants, and implementing projects such as an exercise program for older adults.

The Western Alliance is critical for us to strategically continue building and scaling our research to become more efficient and effective. Our Alliance partnerships allow us to grow our capability and impact.

We are proud to have Craig Wilding and Anna Wong Shee as Chief Investigators on the Western Alliance project DELIVER, which was awarded a \$9m grant through the federal Medical Research Future Fund. We will deliver enhanced healthcare at home for older people in western Victoria with Western Alliance.

The next 12 months will see the development of the Grampians Health Research Strategy. Our work with the Alliance will provide unique opportunities to deliver safe, sustainable healthcare tailored to changing work and community needs in the Grampians region.

On behalf of Grampians Health, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Western Alliance community and congratulate all staff within the partnership.

***Mr Dale Fraser, pictured
CEO, Grampians Health***



South West Healthcare

The upheaval caused by the Covid pandemic has changed our organisation. We are more agile and responsive, we have grown in size and we are a stronger team. We could not be more proud of our wonderful staff who have led and supported our community.

Research activity during this time did not cease and the solitary discipline of research could have been a lonely one for researchers. However, the support of the Western Alliance team has enabled frontline staff to develop their skills and to be mentored. It has also enabled them to feel encouraged and supported.

The professional relationships between the members of Western Alliance community are deeper with passion and knowledge being willingly shared between members. The research team has benefitted from the leadership and expertise of the network of research staff.

Participation in the Western Alliance flagship project Pregnancy Translation and Ecosystem project (PRT-E) and the GenV Projects enables us to be part of transformative projects that will impact on the lives of children and families. Our staff also gain better understanding of research by their involvement in the co-design process and from working alongside project staff.

Hayley Keane, a member of our education team and STaRR participant, submitted her research paper "The role of digital literacy in workplace e-learning – a study of low technology roles in public healthcare" in November 2021 to complete her Graduate Certificate of Education Research at Deakin University. Hayley has been offered a full scholarship to complete her Doctor of Philosophy (Education) at Deakin University, further exploring how public health organisations deliver education to meet the digital literacy needs of the learners themselves.

Eloise Simpson (STaRR Mentor and recipient of a Western Alliance emerging researcher grant in 2020) – "During the early postpartum period, is rectus abdominis training more effective than transversus abdominis training in reducing the inter-recti distance in people with diastasis of the rectus abdominis muscles? A randomised controlled trial". Physiotherapy Canada This pilot trial was impacted by high loss to follow up due to COVID-19 restrictions, but feasibility was otherwise acceptable. The findings of the study will inform future fully powered trials comparing these two exercise types in postpartum women with DRAM.

The complexity and volume of guidance and information for researchers can be daunting to navigate. The upgrade to the South West Healthcare website presented an opportunity to review essential information for anyone seeking to undertake research at South West Healthcare. We have also created a repository of essential resources on SharePoint covering literature review, research design, ethics and governance, data management, funding, and clinical trials. This one-stop shop is being launched in late 2022 as we recommence our monthly Research Working Lunch.

A dedicated Research Manager role has been created to lead on the research strategy and capability building.

2021-22 SWH Research in Numbers

- 29 Publications
- 49 Research active staff
- 45 Active research and Clinical Trials
- \$363k grants and funding
- 7 Research and Clinical Trial staff (4FTE)

***Craig Fraser, pictured
Chief Executive Officer, South West Healthcare***

Messages from our Health Partners



St John of God Healthcare

The Western Alliance is playing a significant role in helping SJGHC achieve its organisational strategic research vision by providing research capacity building training opportunities and resources to our partnering Victorian hospitals.

Our teams really appreciated participating in the STaRR research training program, offering vital support for research mentoring and other resources. In particular, we are very thankful to the South Western District Research Translation Coordinator, Louise Greenstock, who mentored one of our Physiotherapists, Alicia Boyd at SJOG Warrnambool Hospital with her research project. With Louise's guidance and support, Alicia not only just completed her research study, but also won a research grant and presented her research findings at National Allied Health Conference. Western Alliance has also been very supportive to our recently appointed Allied Health and Rehabilitation Research Lead, Sangeeta Rathi, in terms of providing networking opportunities with other Research translation coordinators and also offered an opportunity to be involved as a mentor in the STaRR training program.

As the Group Research Director at St John of God Healthcare, I want to thank Western Alliance for their invaluable support to our partnering hospitals over the last few years.

Collaboration is vital to the scope and quality of the research conducted in our hospitals. As an organisation, we are investing heavily in the area of research by the appointment of a national research director, building a national research strategic framework, appointment of research leads, successful research fellowships, more funding and research grants to support our clinicians. We are committed to translational research that will have the greatest impact on patient outcomes, which aligns strongly with Western Alliance vision and values. We would like to thank Western Alliance for their ongoing support and look forward to strengthening our partnership moving forward.

Best Wishes,

**Prof Steve Webb, pictured
Director of Research,
St John of God
Health Care**



Western District Health Service

WDHS is glad to be a member of Western Alliance. Our membership enables us to support and encourage clinical and health services research, and our commitment to the ethical and systematic gathering of information for use in decision-making and improvement of health care.

Having a Research Translation Coordinator on our staff has assisted us to identify research opportunities that fit our strategic objective of transforming rural health and creating healthy communities.

Highlights of recent research at WDHS include:

- Gen8Change: Prevention strategies for childhood obesity. Prof. Steve Allender et al. (Deakin University) with WDHS, University of Southern California; Curtin University; University of Auckland; Primary Care Partnership, Hamilton.
- Evaluation of a workplace intervention in a primary healthcare setting in regional Victoria. Dr. Kristy Bolton, Penny Fraser, Prof. Steve Allender (Deakin University), Prof. Susan Brumby (National Centre for Farmer Health and WDHS)
- 'Communicate' and 'Manage': Microcredentials program. Development of an evidence-based program to inform employee wellbeing. WDHS, South West TAFE, Foundation for Young Australians (funded by the Dept. of Education and Training)
- Mental health at the COVID-19 frontline. A/Prof. Muhammad Aziz Rahman and Prof. Susan Brumby with WDHS, South West Healthcare, Deakin University and Federation University (funded by Western Alliance)
- Partnered Pharmacist Medication Charting (PPMC) at WDHS: A qualitative study. Mr. Dayo Ayorinde, WDHS, and Dr. Louise Greenstock, Western Alliance and WDHS
- Evaluating the Oedema Management Program. Yvette Morton, WDHS
- Primary Producer Knowledge Network (Campfire Platform). Dr. Alison Kennedy, National Centre for Farmer Health, Deakin University, Griffith University, University of South Australia and the University of New England (funded by Victorian Government's WorkSafe WorkWell Mental Health Improvement Fund)

WDHS has been a research site in:

- Value in Care: Optimising surveillance COLonoscopy. Melbourne Academic Centre for Health; Monash Partners; Western Alliance – WDHS Site Nurse Champion: Julianne Schultz, WDHS
- A feasibility study of RESET (Resuming Employment after Stroke: Enhancement through Telecoordination) – Deakin University (funded by IMPACT, Deakin University, and the Stroke Foundation, Australia). Principal Investigator: Dr Alyna Turner. Site Investigators: Sarah Baker, WDHS, and Dr Alison Kennedy, National Centre for Farmer Health

WDHS has been part of the STaRR program with two staff members attending the Emerging Researcher training. The National Centre for Farmer Health also supports the STaRR program by contributing valuable mentoring supports.

WDHS is growing research capacity by ensuring staff who want to take part in research have appropriate guidance. By promoting stories and achievements in research, we will continue to match staff with opportunities that align with their own interests and rigorous research activities.

**Rohan Fitzgerald, pictured
Chief Executive, Western District Health Service**

Messages from our Health Partners



Western Victoria Primary Health Network (WVPHN) is proud to have partnered with Western Alliance for another year. WVPHN aims to take an evidence-based approach to improving health outcomes in Western Victoria region, elevating the influence of our commissioned work through applying research rigor, generating the evidence base for change.

Western Victoria Primary Health Network

Accordingly, across 2021-21, WVPHN supported 50 research projects across 32 different universities and research organisations and is a contributing partner on numerous projects in areas as diverse as cancer screening, dementia diagnosis and heart health. The support of Western Alliance as part of the WVPHN Research Committee has made a significant contribution to this result.

2021-22 saw WVPHN staff win a Western Alliance Emerging Researchers Grant to conduct research into men's mental health and use of primary health services in the Western Victoria region. Research results were presented to WVPHN service designers for further consideration.

WVPHN staff have also collaborated with Deakin University researchers to author several journal articles leveraging practice data to look at patterns of telehealth uptake in the region. The research has provided recommendations to our Digital Health team around further implementation of a platform so vital to rural and remote communities.

In March 2022, WVPHN and Deakin University collaborated around a day-long research workshop to scope potential areas for joint research and collaboration, including senior representatives from Deakin Rural Health, Institute for Health Transformation and Institute for Mental and Physical Health and Clinical Translation (IMPACT).

As a result of his workshop, in September 2022 WVPHN and Deakin entered into a research agreement for ongoing collaboration. WVPHN will collaborate with Deakin to develop an approach to primary care translational research that involves joint research projects funded through WVPHN that will also include third party service providers. The first project will involve development and enhancement of model of care for the new Commonwealth-funded Priority Primary Care Centres.

We look forward to working with WA in 2022-23 around the continued implementation of our Research Strategy.

**Andrew Giddy, pictured
Acting Chief Executive Officer, WVPHN**

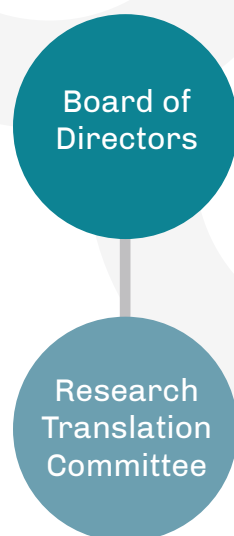


Our Structure

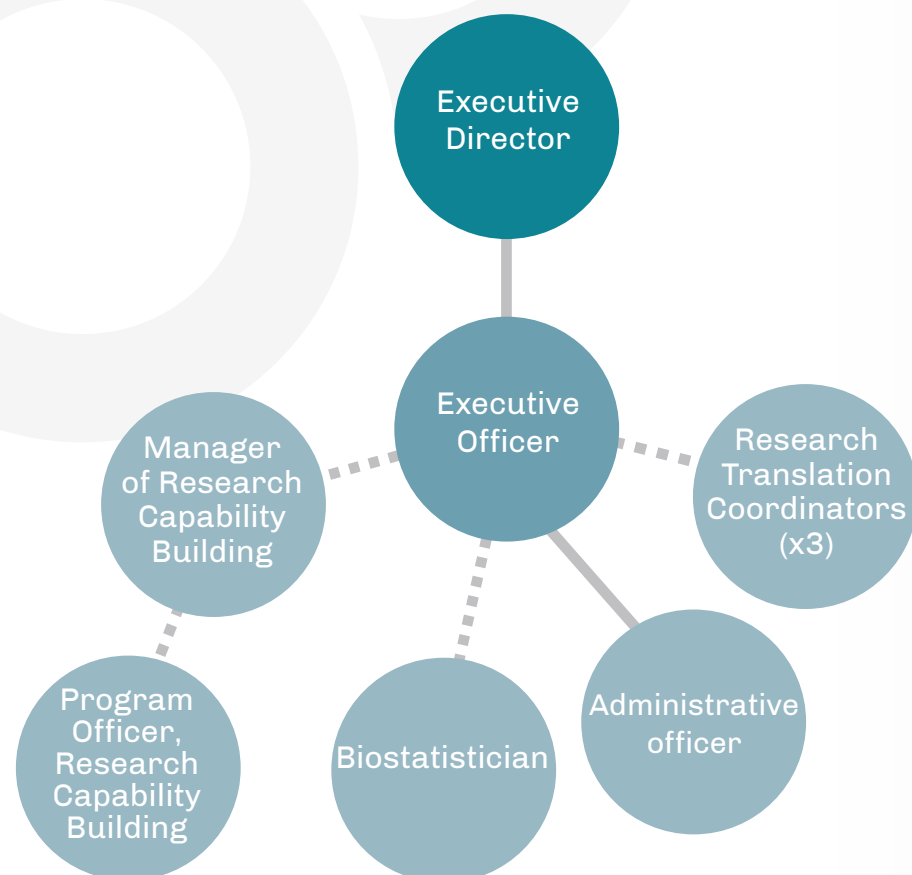
Western Alliance operates as a company limited by guarantee and is registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). The Western Alliance Board of Directors includes representation from all member organisations in addition to three skills-based community positions. The Western Alliance Research Translation Committee, which reports to the board, is made up of health practitioners, researchers and consumers from across the Western Alliance member base. It advises on the development of Western Alliance operational activities as well as providing an additional feedback loop between the Alliance and its member organisations.

Western Alliance Organisational Structure

Governance structure



Personnel



Chairperson's Report



The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to throw up many challenges for Western Alliance, its members and our community. Our member health services have delivered large-scale vaccination programs and restored services despite significant staff shortages, while continuing to manage active COVID-19 cases.

Despite these challenges, Western Alliance has worked hard to further consolidate its activities, as well as implement a range of exciting new initiatives.

Highlights include:

- Successfully leading a bid for a **\$9.1 million Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF)** grant as part of the Rapid Applied Research Translation (RART) program. DELIVER (Delivering Enhanced healthcare at home through optimising Virtual tools for older people in Rural and regional Australia) is a five-year program which will address key challenges in delivering healthcare at home to older people in rural and regional areas. It will also implement a sustainable capacity building model to support rapid research translation for rural and regional health services.
- Co-developing and implementing the **Victorian Clinical Trials Education Centre (V-CTEC)** with the other two Victorian Academic Health Science Centres, Melbourne Academic Health (MACH) and Monash Partners. V-CTEC is a Victoria wide, member-based education platform, hosting a suite of evidence-based, interactive clinical trials education activities for a range of learning needs. V-CTEC has so far enabled more than 1000 people from Victoria's clinical trials workforce (including many from Western Alliance member organisations) to access world-class education at no cost.
- Further enhancing research capability building across western Victoria through our **STaRR (Supporting Translation of Research in Rural and Regional settings) Program**, which in its first iteration saw more than 100 emerging health practitioner researchers, health service leaders, and research mentors participate in translation-focussed research training.
- Addressing key rural and regional mental health priorities through our **Mental Health Research Grant Round**, which will see \$65,000 allocated to three translation-focussed projects led by Colac Area Health, Barwon Health, and East Grampians Health Service.
- Supporting local, large-scale collaborative research through our **External Funding Support Program**, with a \$20,000 contribution to Catherine Williams and her team from Barwon Health, who were successful in attracting over \$500,000 from Cancer Council Victoria and The Victorian Cancer Agency. Their project will build the first regional Allied Health Clinical Trials Unit specialising in cancer supportive care and survivorship.
- Improving opportunities for consumers and community members to become meaningfully engaged in research, through **co-funding a Lived Experience Engagement Officer** as part of the Community and Research Network (CARN). This initiative will also support the expansion of CARN across Western Victoria.
- Facilitating and funding timely access to support for our health professional researchers through employment of a **dedicated Western Alliance biostatistician**.
- Advocating for rural and regional research at state and national levels through participation in the **co-design of the Victorian Health and Medical Research Strategy, and our leadership in Spinifex, a national rural health research network**.

I would like to thank all our member organisations for your ongoing support of Western Alliance. I thank all members of our Board and Research Translation Committee, particularly Professor Chris Hutchison, who stepped down during the year, and new Board members, Professors Shane Thomas, Alison Verhoeven and Gabrielle O'Kane. I look forward to continuing to work with you all towards our goal of healthier regional and rural communities.

Emeritus Professor Brendan Crotty,
Board Chair
Western Alliance Academic Health Science Centre



Our Strategic Priorities

Our goals for the next three years

Develop

1

Build rural and regional research culture, capacity and capability

Translate

2

Facilitate and support high value translational research

Sustain

3

Strengthen the sustainability of the Alliance

Grow

4

Position the Alliance to promote and develop rural and regional health and medical research

Western Alliance is uniquely positioned to demonstrate the ways in which rural and regionally focused research can improve the health of local communities. Western Alliance is an enabler of, and contributor to, a journey that starts with consumer and health practitioner-informed identification of health and healthcare issues. These are converted into high quality research hypotheses and translated into health system outcomes by skilled health research teams working with regional practitioners. By developing and piloting models of research appropriate to the regional and rural communities it serves, and by communicating, engaging with and advocating for organisations in other regions to support their own local efforts, Western Alliance aspires to improve the

health of regional and rural Victorians. The strategic priorities identified by Western Alliance in its 2020-23 plan are targeted to building the research culture of its health service members in alignment with the long term goal of facilitating the establishment of a rural and regional health research network for all of Victoria. Western Alliance will achieve its strategic goals through the following priorities.

Our priorities for the next three years

1 Develop

Build regional and rural research culture, capacity and capability

- 1.1 Deliver a region-wide translational research education program
- 1.2 Review membership model and facilitate membership by all eligible organisations
- 1.3 Train health practitioners and consumers in research co-design and consumer engagement
- 1.4 Work with other regions to develop state-wide regional & rural research capacity and capability building initiatives

2 Translate

Facilitate and support high value translational research

- 2.1 Validate priority research themes and consolidate processes for defining priority research topics and questions
- 2.2 Target funding to priority health research themes and questions that have potential to improve rural and regional practice and health outcomes
- 2.3 Develop practical systems, processes and resources to support high value translational research in the region, interfacing with existing health service quality improvement activities
- 2.4 Reduce barriers to conducting research in rural and regional health settings by working to improve consistency, ease of use and clarity of research ethics and governance processes

3 Sustain

Strengthen the Alliance's sustainability

- 3.1 Revise and consolidate organisational governance structures as appropriate
- 3.2 Develop and implement a communication and engagement strategy with a focus on members, consumers and communities
- 3.3 Establish an evaluation framework and continuously evaluate performance
- 3.4 Prepare to respond to future national opportunities

4 Grow

Position the Alliance for state-wide and national influence

- 4.1 Strengthen alignment with regional and rural health priorities
- 4.2 Advocate for equitable state and national support for regional and rural translational research
- 4.3 Strengthen links with Victorian Advanced Health Research & Translation Centres (AHRTCs) and other relevant research entities
- 4.4 Prepare to respond to future national opportunities

Our Strategic Priorities

Our commitment

Over the next three years we will demonstrate our commitment to healthier regional and rural communities by:

1 Develop

Attracting broad membership across Western Victoria

Building research literacy across our membership

Supporting the development of organisational research plans/frameworks for Alliance members

Assisting our members to navigate research ethics and governance processes

Embedding Research Translation Coordinators as a resource for our regional and rural health services

Developing and delivering research education and training resources – including on-line modules for flexible delivery and greater access

Designing and implementing research funding programs that meet the needs of regional and rural health practitioner researchers and their communities.

2 Translate

Achieving recognition of Western Alliance as an authority and resource for rural and regional health research

Adopting a governance structure that supports inclusive membership

Promoting research as core business for rural and regional health services

Developing and advocating for career pathways for clinician-researchers in rural and regional health services

Advocating for state and national research ethics and governance policies and procedures that take into account the needs of rural and regional health services

3 Sustain

Supporting health service quality improvement activities through application of research principles

Bringing Alliance members together in networked and collaborative research projects aligned with our key themes and priorities

Developing a series of projects that strengthen research collaboration between members

Supporting one or more flagship projects that bring our partners together for the benefit of rural and regional health

Engaging the community in the design and implementation of research that improves the health of the community

4 Grow

Establishing links with AHRTC's and other research centres and entities

Developing and demonstrating established networks and collaborations that will enable a state-wide CIRH bid

Increasing engagement with major regional health services in Victoria and Nationally



Our Activities

Supporting and funding translation focussed research, building research capability and advocating for improved rural/regional health outcomes via a multifaceted program of:

- Research & Translation Collaboration
- Research & Translation Funding
- Research & Translation Support
- Research & Translation Capability Building
- Consumer & Community Involvement
- Partnerships
- Advocacy for Rural and Regional Health Research & Translation



Research & Translation Collaboration

DELIVER: better healthcare closer to home



Western Alliance, in partnership with the Deakin University Institute for Health Transformation, was awarded a 5-year, \$9 million research project grant by the Federal Government Medical Research Future Fund in late 2021. The DELIVER project will bring together, for the first time, rural healthcare providers, consumers, academic health science centres, universities, and national peak bodies to:

1. Improve healthcare at home for older people in regional and rural areas using rapid research translation, digital tools and co-design.
2. Implement a sustainable capacity building model to support rapid research translation for regional and rural health services.

Since being formally awarded the DELIVER grant in early 2022, the DELIVER team have built the foundations of the project and have met with senior health service staff from the Western Victorian region to hear about health services' home-based care initiatives, research capabilities and needs, consumer engagement and some of the challenges and opportunities in the region.

DELIVER is now moving into the co-design and priority setting phase, where the team will work with health service representatives and consumers to build understanding of the home-based healthcare and research systems, and to identify opportunities for the DELIVER research team to support evaluation and practice innovation.

Meet the DELIVER leaders



Alfred Deakin Prof Anna Peeters PhD, CF
DELIVER Program Director



A/Prof Kate Huggins BSc (Hons), PhD
DELIVER Program Director

Research & Translation Funding

Mental Health Research Grant Program:

With the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated mitigation strategies (including lockdowns) on the mental health of our communities, as well as the release of the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System in early 2021, 2022 was an opportune time to support translation-focussed mental health research in our region.

This grant round saw the total allocation of \$50,000 (split across up to two projects) towards solving a key problem, based on mental health priorities from our health sector member organisations and communities across rural and regional western Victoria.

Congratulations to the two successful projects:

Alison Buccheri (Colac Area Health): CReW-Ace (COVID-19 & Regional Health Staff Wellbeing – Accessibility of Support Strategies) - \$35,000

Genevieve Pepin (Deakin University/Barwon Health): Co-design and evaluation of Hospital in the Home (HITH) for young people accessing Eating Disorder Services in the Barwon region - \$15,000

Support for Major External Research Grants:

In November 2021, Western Alliance was thrilled to announce support for our second successful externally funded project through this initiative. The project, which will be led by Catherine Williams and her team of clinician researchers from Barwon Health, has been awarded over \$500,000 from Cancer Council Victoria and The Victorian Cancer Agency to build the

first regional Allied Health Clinical Trials Unit specialising in Cancer Supportive Care and Survivorship. The project includes collaboration from several Western Alliance member health services, as well as in kind support and a \$20,000 contribution to the project from Western Alliance.

Research and Translation Support

Research Translation Coordinators

Our three Research Translation Coordinators; Dr Ella Ottrey, Dr Michael Field and Dr Louise Greenstock, have now established themselves as an integral component of research capability building in western Victoria.

Commencing in early 2019, the positions, which are funded by Western Alliance together with the generous support of the Victorian State Government, are embedded in Western Alliance member health services to provide 'boots on the ground' support for research development and translation.

The objectives of these roles are to:

- Provide technical support for developing and translating research evidence in the regional health setting.
- Assist with identifying opportunities for collaboration and grant funding and facilitating teams to take up these opportunities.
- Develop and deliver research capacity and capability building initiatives, including translation focussed research training.
- Support organisations and researchers to build and navigate research ethics and governance processes

Meet our Research Translation Coordinators



Dr Louise Greenstock
PhD Human Communication, PG
Cert Social Sciences:

**South West/Western District
(Warrnambool/Hamilton)**

Louise is an experienced researcher whose post-doctoral career began with a Research Fellow position at the Australian Health Workforce Institute at the University of Melbourne in 2010. In this role, Louise designed and led a number of research projects on topics related to health workforce, models of care, inter-professional learning, and health inequalities.

Louise has since worked on a wide range of academic and applied research projects and has a rich consulting portfolio, which spans the fields of primary prevention, harm minimisation, and health system redesign. This work has included developmental evaluation, research capacity building, mentoring and training roles.



Dr Michael Field MBBS, BCom, BA:
Geelong/Colac Region

Michael grew up on the Bellarine Peninsula and studied at Deakin University on Geelong before moving to Adelaide where he attended medical school. Michael worked as a junior doctor in South Australia in both city and country settings then returned to Victoria taking up a position in population health research at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute at the Royal Children's Hospital.

Michael's research experience spans clinical trials, cross-sectional studies and cohorts, and his research interests include childhood allergy and addressing rural health outcome inequalities. He also maintains part-time clinical practice in surgical assisting.



Dr Ella Ottrey

PhD, BNut(Hons), BNutrDietet
Ballarat/East Grampians region

Ella grew up in Gippsland, before moving to Melbourne to train and work as a clinical dietitian. Ella's research career began eight years ago, completing honours and then a PhD, exploring mealtimes in hospital. In addition to her role with Western Alliance, Ella is a Postdoctoral Fellow with Monash Centre for Scholarship in Health Education.

Ella provides support to people conducting research, by reviewing protocols or ethics applications, accessing statistical support, navigating the pathway to publication, and in linking health services with universities.

Biostatistics Support:

Building on our biostatistics support program which has seen funded access to a biostatistician for our health service and PHN member employees, Western Alliance now has a dedicated biostatistician to fulfil this role. The position is funded by Western Alliance and employed through and supported by Deakin Biostatistics Unit.

Meet our Biostatistician



Charlotte Molesworth BSc, MBiostat:
Consultant Biostatistician

Following the completion of a Masters in Biostatistics in 2013, Charlotte worked with the Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics Unit and the Emergency Research Group at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute at the Royal Children's Hospital for a number of years.

As a biostatistician, Charlotte can help with all stages of a research project, providing advice from study design, data collection and data management, through to the final stages of statistical analysis and interpretation.

As a consultant with Western Alliance, Charlotte's primary role is to support other researchers in applying the best research methods and statistical methodologies suitable within the wide range of regional and rural health settings covered by the collaboration.

Social isolation and prescribing network

Awareness of loneliness and social isolation as significant public health and wellbeing issues has increased in recent years, along with the development of targeted government and community support programs for affected Australians.

A collaboration with the Australian Disease Management Association, Bolton Clarke Research Institute, Melbourne Academic Centre for Health, Melbourne School of Population & Global Health, Monash Partners, and the Western Alliance has developed an extensive network of stakeholders researching or developing programs of support for social isolation.

The collaboration commenced in 2020 with a series of online forums focusing on social isolation and social prescribing, which have continued regularly throughout 2021 and 2022. The webinars include a mix of research and learnings from trials and services that have been implemented and provide an opportunity to collate the work being done across Australia. They are open to all healthcare and social care sector workers, researchers and policy makers.

Victorian Falls Prevention Alliance

The Victorian Falls Prevention Alliance was established in November 2021 and includes representation from consumers, clinicians, researchers, managers and policy makers across Victoria. It is supported and administered by the three Victorian Research Translation Centres (Western Alliance, MACH and Monash Partners).

In March 2022, the Alliance hosted a falls prevention symposium which attracted almost 300 participants across Victoria. The symposium presented the latest

research on hospital-based falls prevention and provided an opportunity to discuss challenges and opportunities to work collaboratively. Key messages arising from the Workshop included:

The Alliance has since established a community of practice for health service falls prevention representatives and is leading work to support implementation of the global falls prevention guidelines into hospital settings across Victoria.



Research & Translation Capability Building

Western Alliance plays a key role in developing research capability within western Victorian healthcare settings. In addition to our research funding and support, we also offer a comprehensive training program through our STaRR (Supporting Translation of Research in Rural and Regional settings) initiative. The STaRR program commenced in late 2020 with support from the Victorian Department of Health.

The program was informed by a comprehensive scoping exercise, which included a systematic review of the research education literature and the Victorian Rural/Regional Research Training Needs Project. Key principles were identified and further developed through engagement with emerging researchers, health managers, and research mentors across the Barwon Southwest and Grampians Region. The updated guiding principles are that STaRR:

Delivers evidence-informed **translation-focused** research training, mentoring, and support

Enables **co-designed, responsive, accessible** research and translation training and resources

Promotes **organisation-level** research and translation **capability** and infrastructure

Facilitates **experiential** and **collaborative peer learning**

Promotes **engagement with stakeholders** to identify **research translation priorities**

Supports the development of **research and mentoring networks**

Guided by these principles, we developed our comprehensive STaRR training and capability program for health practitioners in rural and regional settings. Training is targeted towards emerging health practitioner researchers, their health managers/leaders, and our research mentors.

In 2022, the STaRR Program has received a boost with the addition of funding via the MRFF- funded DELIVER project, and consequently, the employment of Emma West as Program Officer, Research Capability Building. Emma has been supporting multiple aspects of the STaRR program including STaRR Resources – an online open access repository of research and translation-focused resources to support independent “just in time” learning, and guided teaching on various aspects of research development, design, activity, and translation. We have identified 14 topics for STaRR resources, and the content for six of these topics has been developed and published online. We are continuing to work on the content for the remaining eight and will continue to develop more topics and content as we support our STaRR emerging researchers.

Following our call for STaRR research mentors in 2022, we received 31 expressions of interest from researchers, working across both academic and health service settings. Of these, 28 participated our STaRR mentor workshop.

We received 19 expressions of interest from emerging researchers to participate in our flagship STaRR mentored research training program. The applicants represented a range of health professions and roles including allied health, medicine, nursing, and health program managers. All 19 teams were accepted into the 2022 program, and a total of 27 emerging researchers attended the first workshop. The second and final workshop for the 2022 STaRR emerging researcher cohort is coming up at the end of November. The managers of the emerging researcher leads have been invited to participate in the afternoon session of the workshop.

We launched the STaRR Emerging Researcher grant round, where emerging researchers who have participated in the STaRR program can apply for up to \$5000.00 to support their research activity. We awarded five grants worth \$5000.00 to successful applicants who represented three of our member organisations: Barwon Health, Grampians Health, and South West Healthcare.



We are looking forward to running our inaugural STaRR Emerging Researcher Showcase which will take place on the first day of the Western Alliance annual Symposium in November. We have six emerging researchers presenting the progress and findings of their projects to date.

We are continuing to evaluate the 2021 (pilot) STaRR program with a combination of pre-post training surveys, interviews with participants representing the three key training groups (emerging researchers, health managers, and research mentors), and a longer-term outcomes survey of all participants.

The STaRR program will continue to be evaluated on an annual basis, via surveys at three time points. We also collect informal feedback via surveys and on an ad hoc basis and continue to develop the program accordingly.

We have received some encouraging feedback from current participants:

“Thank you for an excellent Day 1 for the STaRR program. The topics were interesting, the presenters were excellent, and I was astounded that there was barely an IT issue in sight”.

STaRR Emerging Researcher, 2022

We will see more additions to the STaRR program in 2023, thanks to the extra resources and capacity afforded by the DELIVER grant. These will include additional training opportunities via our DELIVER partners and more STaRR training topics and workshops.



Meet our Manager, Research Capability Building



Dr Olivia King
*PhD (Health), Grad. Cert. Diab Ed.,
B. Pod (Hons):*

Olivia is an allied health researcher and educator. She is Manager of Research Capability Building for Western Alliance Academic Health Science Centre and holds an Adjunct Research Associate position with the Monash Centre for Scholarship in Health Education. She is a podiatrist, credentialled diabetes educator, and an early career researcher. Through her PhD, she explored the role boundaries and scopes of practice in diabetes education. She is passionate about developing research capability in the health sector, particularly in rural settings. Her research interests include interprofessional role boundaries, allied health workforce, sociology of the professions, qualitative methods, and health professions education.

Olivia enjoys running, camping with her family, and spending time at the beach.

Meet our Program Officer, Research Capability Building



Emma West BA
Psych (Hons)

Emma grew up in the Wimmera region and completed a Psychology Honours degree at Federation University, Australia in 2015. She has since worked on a range of clinical and health service research projects across western Vic.

In addition to her role with Western Alliance, Emma is currently completing a PhD in clinical epidemiology at Deakin University's Institute for Physical and Mental Health and Clinical Translation (IMPACT). As part of her PhD she collects data for the Geelong Osteoporosis Study, based at University Hospital Geelong.

Emma is passionate about supporting health practitioners to engage in research and is thrilled to join the Research Capability Building team.

Consumer and Community Involvement (CCI) in Research

Western Alliance recognises the importance of ensuring that consumers and the community have opportunities to be involved in the design and implementation of health research. With this in mind, we are putting in place a range of programs to facilitate meaningful consumer and community involvement across our region.

As part of this, Western Alliance has co-developed and co-funded an exciting new position alongside philanthropic funding through the McIntosh Family in response to the passing of Mr Mishka McIntosh, whose passion for community engagement and recognition of the importance of the lived experience through practice and research will continue through this role.

The primary purpose of the McIntosh CARN Engagement Officer is to continue to develop the Community and Research Network (CARN), an interface for research and the community. The central responsibility of this position will be to work with community members with a lived experience of mental and physical illness to upskill them to understand research, contribute meaningfully to research activities and outcomes and to create an environment of research culture across western Victoria.

We are also extremely privileged to have Mrs Marilyn Dolling as a Consumer Representative of our Research Translation Committee. Marilyn provides a lived experience consumer and carer perspective in the co-development of Western Alliance initiatives.

Meet our Consumer Representative



Mrs Marilyn Dolling is a passionate advocate, empowered ambassador using her personal experiences as a Cancer survivor, carer and family member to ensure optimal care resulting in a positive change in people's lives.

Marilyn is an experienced Chair with a demonstrated history of working in the education, hospital and health care industries at acute and primary service levels skilled inpatient support, patient centred care, palliative care, cancer advocacy and advocacy training, health literacy, supportive care, survivorship, optimal care pathways, aged care advocacy, education at all levels from preschool to tertiary. Marilyn's expertise and contributions are significant, and include:

- Steering and Governance Committees representing National, State, Regional and Rural projects
- Safer Care Vic Victorian Care of Older People VCOP Governance Committee,
- Chair Cancer Action Victoria
- PHN Geelong Otway Western Integrated Council Western Alliance Research committee
- Melbourne University/VCCC 'Older & Wiser' and 'Using the internet to find cancer health information. - Exploring the views of cancer consumers' Project collaborator.
- Presenter of Barwon Health Palliative Care Unit in their Room 64 Podcast
- Global presenter 2020 4th Annual Palliative, Aged, Dementia& Mental Health Forum
- Barwon Health Refuge CAG
- 2021 member of VIC-COL Steering Committee VICS Victorian Integrated Cancer Services Consumer Catch- Up working group
- SCV Steering Committee Creating Age-Friendly Health Systems in Victoria
- Melbourne Uni MRFF ReVITALISE project Regional Research Teaching Hub Associate.

Partnerships

Victorian Research Translation Centres Collaborative

In early 2020 the three Victorian Research Translation Centres, the Melbourne Academic Centre for Health (MACH), Monash Partners and Western Alliance, formed a collaborative to produce and translate evidence to improve the health of Victorians – The Victorian Research Translation Centres Collaborative (VRTCC). Over 95% of health and medical research in Victoria occurs within the members of these centres, and the role of the Collaborative is to embed research into healthcare. The VRTCC has been tasked with contributing to the Victorian healthcare pandemic recovery through identifying priorities, supporting research and evidence translation, and improving outcomes.

In late 2021, the VRTCC developed V-CTEC, The Victorian Clinical Trials Education Centre. V-CTEC is a not-for-profit, Victoria wide, member-based education centre that aims to make learning resources accessible to more researchers. V-CTEC provides all people working in clinical trials across Victoria access to world-class training at no cost to the end user. Investigators, coordinators, and others involved in clinical trials can now access a suite of evidence-based, interactive clinical trials education programs suitable for a range of learning needs through a dedicated Learning Management System (LMS).

Led by the Victorian Research Translation Centres of Monash Partners Academic Health Science Centre, V-CTEC is also supported by the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre, Parkville Cancer Clinical Trials Unit, Melbourne Children's Trials Centre and Alfred Health. Since launching in April 2022, V-CTEC has over 1000 people using the platform in Victoria, with over 200 based in rural and regional locations.

We look forward to continuing our strong collaborative relationship with MACH and Monash Partners, to continue to improve the lives of Victorians through translation focussed research.

National Ageing Research Institute (NARI)

Western Alliance and NARI, through their Melbourne Ageing Research Collaboration (MARC), have been jointly supporting and funding research since 2019. This year, aside from partnering on research training initiatives, we have also co-funded a further rural ageing focussed project based in Ararat:

Sophie Ping (East Grampians Health Service): Supporting the wellbeing of staff caring for residents with challenging behaviours in Residential Aged Care (Swell-RAC) - \$15,000



This project intersects with our priority theme of Mental Health, and is set to have a positive impact in the Grampians region.

Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI)

In 2021, MCRI commenced 'GenV', a large-scale project across Victoria centred around parallel birth and parent cohorts for long-term insights and effective interventional research. Through representation on the GenV steering committee, Western Alliance is actively supporting this program across western Victoria. Through the GenV program, MCRI are also partnering on the Western Alliance Flagship Research Program - 'The Pregnancy Research and Translation Ecosystem (PRT-E)', led by Professor Peter Vuillermin.

We look forward to the progress of GenV over the coming years and to working collaboratively with MCRI to improve child and parent health for our communities.

Spinifex Network

The Rural Health and Medical Research Network – the Spinifex Network – is a consortium and coalition of more than 50 rural and regional health organisations across Australia. Spinifex exists to:

Improve access to healthcare that meets the needs of rural communities, through technology, workforce and innovative care delivery; and

Increase support for sustainable rural communities by responding to the unique health challenges of place.

The Network also works to strengthen Indigenous health, build rural research capacity and increase rural prosperity. Western Alliance is a foundation member of the Spinifex Network and has had a key role in its establishment and operations to date. Western Alliance Executive Director, Professor Warren Payne, has served as the chair of the Spinifex network.

Future Directions

In addition to consolidating, improving and sustaining the above activities, Western Alliance has commenced planning for a number of new initiatives.

- **Rapid Research Translation Grant Program:**

Western Alliance is very excited to announce our next funding program, which will for the first time specifically focus on supporting the translation of existing research and evidence into policy and practice, through implementation and/or scaling within health settings. Up to \$100,000 in total (up to \$40,000 per project) has been allocated to the first iteration of this program. The grants, which will open in November 2022, will be available to target those working in Western Alliance member health organisations in collaboration with Western Alliance university partners. The grants will target;

- *Those who have identified evidence in the literature that is ready to implement*
- *Those who have generated evidence that is ready to implement*
- *Those who have implemented and evaluated a change that can be scaled across other Western Alliance health organisations*
- *Those who have identified a practice that should be ceased or modified based on evidence*

- **Embedded Higher Degree by Research (HDR) program:**

In November 2022, Western Alliance will open expressions of interest for scholarships for staff of our health partners, for study to be completed at one of our two academic institutions, Deakin University and Federation University. The program will aim to:

- *Improve research career development opportunities for health practitioners in regional and rural western Victoria*
- *Increase research capacity and capability within Western Alliance health sector partner organisations*
- *Improve collaboration between Western Alliance academic and health sector partners*
- *Support the development of regional/rural, translation-focussed health sector led research to improve health outcomes across western Victoria*

- **Annual Symposium:** After a second cancellation in 2021, Western Alliance looks forward to November 2022 to recommence our annual symposium. The symposium will provide a long-awaited opportunity for our members, partners and communities to meet face to face and learn about all of the exciting research that has been taking place over the past two years. This will be an excellent networking opportunity for health professionals, researchers and consumers across western Victoria.



Acknowledgements

Thank you

Thank you to our members and supporters, including members of the Western Alliance Board and Research Translation Committee, for your ongoing support and commitment to improving health outcomes in regional and rural Victoria. We have had another challenging but rewarding year, and we very much appreciate your continued dedication.

We would also like to thank our partners and collaborators, including the Melbourne Academic Centre for Health (MACH), Monash Partners, Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) National Ageing Research Institute (NARI), Victorian Department of Health (DH) and Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR).

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