



Academic Health Science Centre



2022-2023 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 11 member organisations located across the Barwon/Southwest and Grampians regions of western Victoria. Members include eight public health services, a primary health network and two universities. The two regions have a combined population of over 700,000 residents or approximately 44% of rural/regional Victoria's population.

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 rural and 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 using our key platforms.

To date, Western Alliance has supported 59 studies, including flagship research projects, project grants, scholarships, seed funding and financial contributions to large NHMRC-funded projects. In addition, Western Alliance is the lead organisation in the DELIVER program, a five-year, \$9 million Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) research translation initiative that will identify a suite of activities 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 the STaRR (Supporting Translation of Research in Rural and Regional Health Settings) training program and resource library for mentors, managers and health practitioners, as well as funding for multi-year research fellowships. 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 strategic plan is dedicated to enabling research that will help to address the key health issues faced by our member organisations.



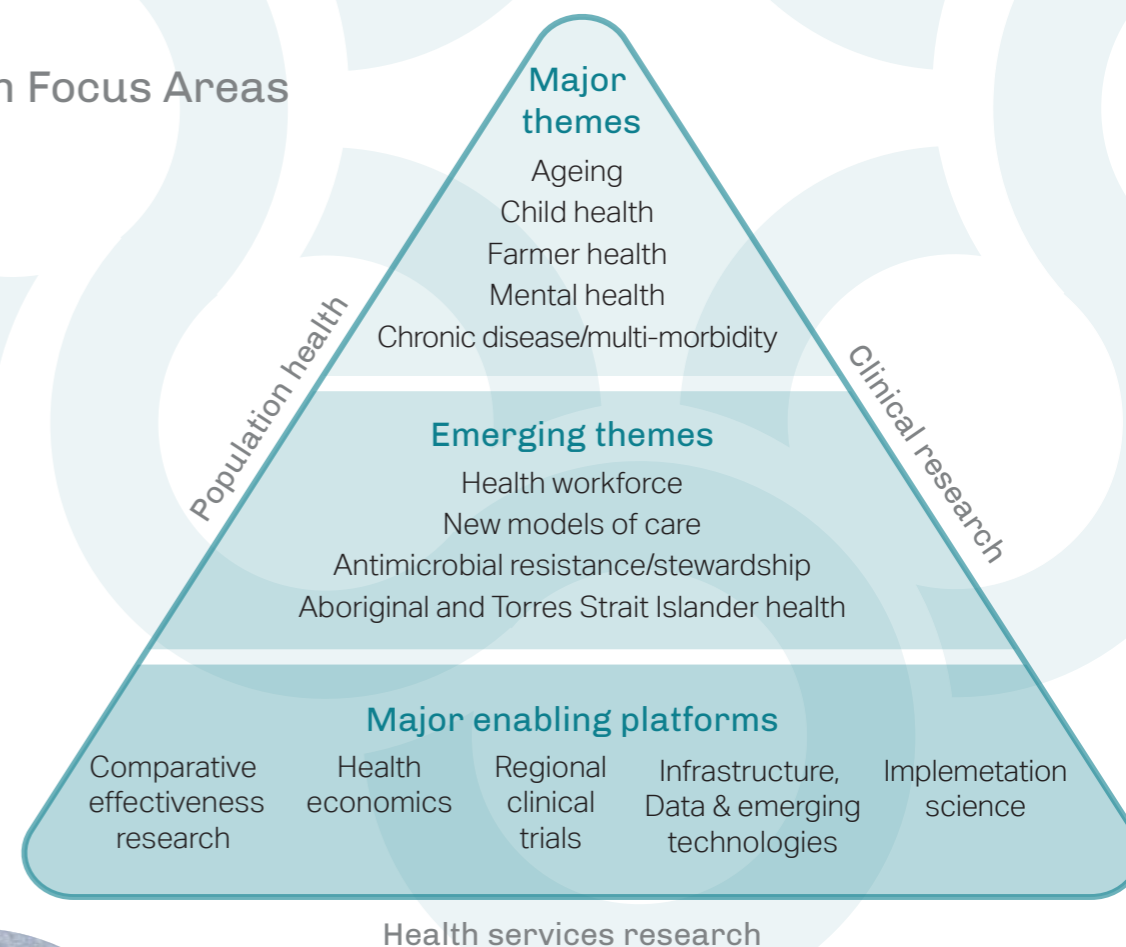
Our Research Focus Areas



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 Track Record

Since its establishment, Western Alliance has funded 59 research studies that align with our identified research focus areas. Western Alliance has contributed \$2.73 million to these studies, which have also attracted over \$17 million in external funding. These include:

Ageing

4 projects, Western Alliance funding: \$225,000, external funding: \$9,100,000

Child Health

12 projects, Western Alliance funding: \$751,377, external funding: \$5,060,325

Farmer Health

1 project, Western Alliance funding: \$40,000

Mental Health

6 projects, Western Alliance funding: \$257,693

Chronic Disease/ Multi-morbidity

14 projects, Western Alliance funding: \$490,037,

external funding: \$2,398,055

Health Workforce

10 projects, Western Alliance funding: \$303,491, external funding: \$17,500

New Models of Care and Antimicrobial Resistance/ Stewardship

9 projects, Western Alliance funding: \$462,947

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

3 projects, Western Alliance funding: \$199,797, external funding: \$25,000

Our Members

Western Alliance's ten member organisations comprise two major regional city-based health services: Grampians Health and Barwon Health; six regional and rural health services: Colac Area Health, East Grampians Health Service, South West Healthcare, Western District Health Service and Portland District Health; the Western Victoria Primary Health Network (PHN); and two regionally based academic institutions: Deakin and Federation Universities. St John of God Health Care withdrew from the Alliance this year, and we thank them for their contribution.

Western Alliance acknowledges the valuable input and contribution of our member organisations, who have been critical for the translation of research into clinical practice, policy and administrative processes for the benefit of patients and communities.

This year we are delighted to welcome a new health service member to Western Alliance:

Portland District Health provides an integrated health service which comprises acute, primary health and aged residential care service to people in the Glenelg Shire. As an integrated healthcare organisation, Portland District Health provides a range of services in sub-acute and aged care, population health, primary and community care.



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	To 30 June 2023
Mr Mario Santilli	Director	
Professor Rachel Huxley	Director	
Professor Shane Thomas	Director	To March 2022
A/Professor Gabrielle O'Kane	Director	
Professor Alison Verhoeven	Director	
Ms Samantha Sharp	Director	From May 2023

Employees and funded positions

Name	Position
Professor Warren Payne	Executive Director
Mr Drew Aras	Executive Officer
Ms Cassandra Hamilton	Administrative Officer
Dr Laura Alston	Associate Research Fellow
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
Dr Olivia King	Manager, Research Capability Building
Ms Emma West	Program Officer, Research Capability Building
Ms Charlotte Molesworth	Biostatistician



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	To December 2022
Mr Mario Santilli	Member	To February 2023
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	
Ms Emma West	Member	From June 2022
Ms Kate Huggins	Member	From February 2023

Our Structure

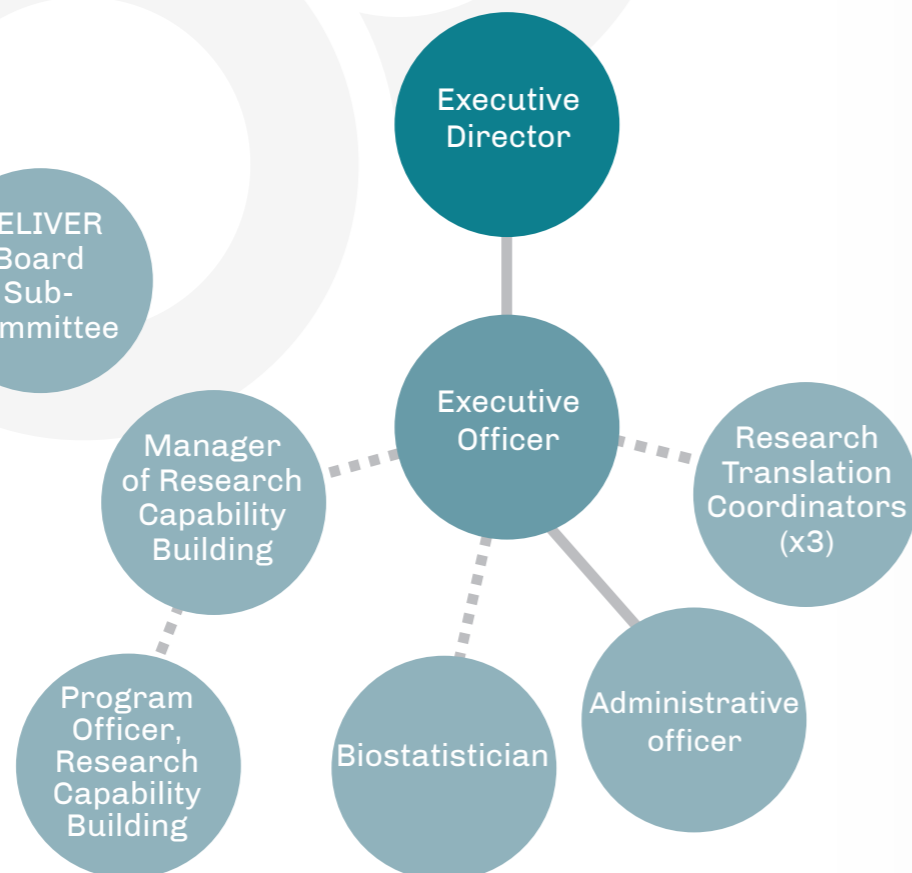
Western Alliance operates as a company limited by guarantee and is registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). The Western Alliance Board of Directors includes representation from all member organisations in addition to three skills-based independent positions. The 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



During 2022/2023 Western Alliance has worked hard to further consolidate its activities, as well as implement a range of exciting new initiatives.

Highlights include:

- Commencing the DELIVER program (Delivering Enhanced healthcare at home through optimising Virtual tools for older people in Rural and regional Australia), a **\$9 million Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) grant** as part of the Rapid Applied Research Translation (RART) program. DELIVER 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. DELIVER is currently in its co-design and priority setting phase, which involves extensive consultation with health services and communities across western Victoria.
- Expanding the **Victorian Clinical Trials Education Centre (V-CTEC)** into a national platform (Australian Clinical Trials Education Centre – A-CTEC) in partnership with the other two Victorian Academic Health Science Centres, Melbourne Academic Health (MACH) and Monash Partners. A-CTEC is a member-based education platform, hosting a suite of evidence-based, interactive clinical trials education activities for a range of learning needs. A-CTEC has so far enabled more than 4000 people from Australia'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 second iteration saw 76 emerging health practitioner researchers, health service leaders, and research mentors participate in translation-focussed research training. This also included our STaRR emerging researcher grants, with five past STaRR participants each receiving \$5,000 to progress their health service based research projects.
- Supporting local, large-scale collaborative research through our **External Funding Support Program**, with \$60,000 allocated to three local projects, attracting external funding of \$3.63M to the region.
- 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**.
- Bringing together over 100 health professionals, researchers and community members and showcasing a vast array of local research translation activity at our annual symposium in Dunkeld.

I would like to thank all our member organisations for your ongoing support of Western Alliance and 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 Where requested, support 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 (including program evaluation) 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 to promote and develop rural and regional health and medical research

- 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 state, national and international translational research entities
- 4.4 Prepare to respond to future national opportunities



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



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 (MRFF) in late 2021. The DELIVER project (Delivering Enhanced healthcare at home through optimising Virtual tools for older people in Rural and regional Australia) 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 MRFF grant in early 2022, the DELIVER team have built the foundations of the project and have moved into the co-design and priority setting phase, where the team is working 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. Other activities include:

- Provision of a report to health services that consolidates their feedback about ways DELIVER can support research
- Protocol development for the co-design and priority setting phase
- 'Introduction to co-design' workshop presented at the Western Alliance Symposium
- Development of the DELIVER website, an expert webinar series and a monthly newsletter to partner health services
- Recruitment of key personnel, including the DELIVER Implementation Scientist and Health Economist Research Fellow roles and Research Translation Coordinators, and introduction of DELIVER PhD scholarship opportunities.

DELIVER leaders



Alfred Deakin
Prof Anna Peeters PhD, CF
DELIVER Program Director



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

A-CTEC: The Australian Clinical Trials Education Centre

In late 2021, the Victorian Research Translation Centres Collaborative developed V-CTEC, The Victorian Clinical Trials Education Centre, a not-for-profit, Victoria wide, member-based education centre that aims to make high quality training more accessible to the clinical trials workforce. In March 2023, the Centre was opened for national access as the Australian Clinical Trials Education Centre (A-CTEC).

All staff involved in clinical trials in health service settings across Australia, regardless of role or site, now have access to the program. This includes study coordinators, research nurses and clinical trial assistants, investigators, clinical trial pharmacists and other allied health professions, and Human Research Ethics Committee members and governance officers.

The inaugural A-CTEC Annual Conference: Clinical Trials – Quality or Quantity? was held in in March 2023, and featured two days of panels and presentations with industry professionals and expert speakers, covering a range of topics related to clinical trials.

By June 2023, A-CTEC had over 4000 registered participants from across the country.

Research & Translation Funding

STaRR Emerging Researcher Grant Program:

To support emerging researchers to conduct a translation-focused research project, Western Alliance offered past STaRR participants the opportunity to apply for Emerging Researcher Grants. Congratulations to the following emerging researchers, who were each awarded \$5000 to support their research:

Holly Lewtas – Community Health Nurse, Barwon Health: A feasibility study of using a personalised tool to communicate the needs of clients affected by trauma to a health professional

Hayley Keane – Learning and Development Coordinator, South West Healthcare: Supporting learner agency with mobile technology – a study with public health employees in low technology roles

Cara Hill – Speech Pathologist, Barwon Health: Improving the provision of prescribed food, fluid and mealtime supervision requirements in inpatient and aged care settings

Laura McCredie – Physiotherapist, Grampians Health: Feasibility and acceptability of a stroke circuit group class in a regional rehabilitation community program

Angela Holmes – Urology Registrar, Barwon Health: Are we underestimating urinary retention following intravesical onabotulinumtoxinA in women with overactive bladder and a history of prior pelvic surgery

Support for Major External Research Grants:

Western Alliance offers support to applicants for major external grant opportunities, for example NHMRC partnership grants or MRFF grants, where the objectives of the proposed project align with those of the Western Alliance and its member organisations. We are pleased to announce that three projects supported by Western Alliance were successful in receiving external grants to undertake their research:

CoDeEndo: Co-Designing, Evaluating, and Implementing Supportive Care for Endometriosis – \$1.4m, MRFF. Prof Antonina Mikocka-Walus, Deakin University. Impacting 1 in 10 women, endometriosis is under-recognised. Usual care, comprised of hormone and pain medications, has limited efficacy, is associated with considerable side effects, and discontinued by 40% of patients. Surgery often fails to prevent recurrence of disease. Comprehensive management of chronic pain is urgently needed to address the poor quality of life of 830,000 Australians with endometriosis. This project will evaluate and implement a person-focused supportive care model for endometriosis.

Randomized E-hypnotherapy for Chronic Pelvic Pain Syndrome Trial (REST) – \$1.3m, MRFF. Prof Antonina Mikocka-Walus, Deakin University. Chronic pelvic pain syndrome impacts up to 20% of Australians. It is associated with poor quality of life and psychological health, but the effective treatment is lacking. Hypnotherapy is known to improve mental health and pain. Our pilot studies showed that hypnotherapy might help to treat depression, anxiety and pelvic pain. This study will examine the impact of e-hypnotherapy on the pain and mental health of people living with chronic pelvic pain syndrome.

Beyond Bugs and Bumps RCT - \$930,000, NHMRC. Dr Samantha Dawson, Deakin University, Barwon Health & Colac Area Health. The effect of a gut-focused dietary smartphone app for pregnant women on infant mental health-related outcomes. This randomised controlled trial evaluates the impact of diet in pregnancy on child emotional behaviour at 18 months and investigate the protective biological pathways supporting child mental health and quality of life.

Research and Translation Support

Research Translation Coordinators

Our three Research Translation Coordinators, Dr Ella Ottrey, Dr Michael Field and Dr Louise Greenstock, have 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 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

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.



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.

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.

The purpose of the Falls Prevention Alliance is to work collaboratively to reduce falls and falls injuries in hospitals. Falls are a leading cause of harm across the continuum of care. Falls are particularly challenging in the hospital setting where they are the most frequent clinical risk in patient care. To date, there is a variable evidence base supporting commonly used strategies to prevent falls. There is also variability between health services as to what strategies are utilised for the prevention of falls.

The World guidelines for falls prevention and management for older adults were released in September 2022. Through its community of practice of health service falls prevention representatives, The Falls Prevention Alliance will play an instrumental role in facilitating the implementation of these guidelines across Victoria.

The Victorian Falls Prevention Alliance also presents an annual workshop addressing a key focus area in falls prevention. Each workshop provides an opportunity to meet experts and share experiences, as well as providing clinicians with practical tips to reduce falls in their location of practice.

Research & Translation Capability Building

The STaRR Program

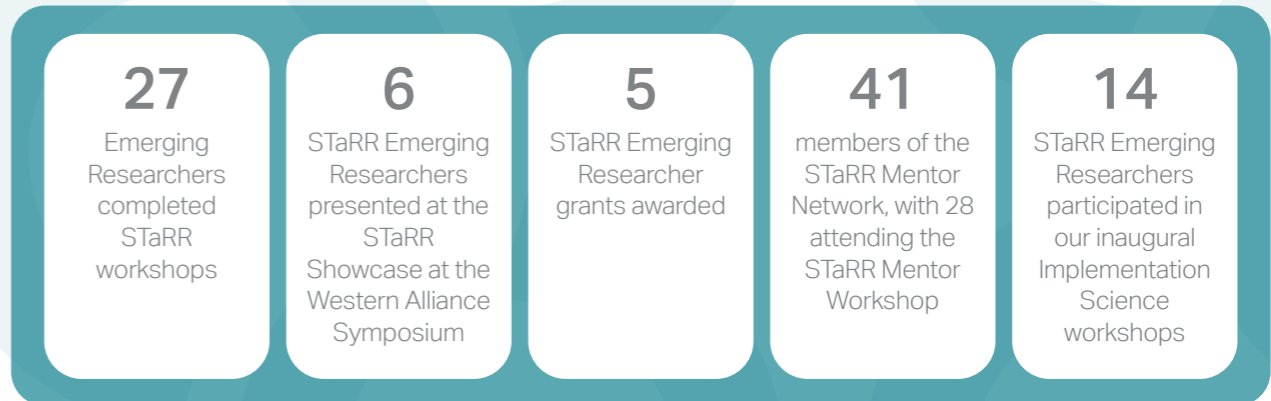
STaRR has had a very successful year, training and supporting emerging researchers and research mentors to enhance research capability and capacity within our member organisations.

STaRR Emerging Researcher Training

A huge congratulations to our 2022-23 STaRR Emerging Researcher cohort who completed their training. We are heartened by the engagement and enthusiasm of our emerging researchers and will continue to support them and watch their progress with

great interest. We would like to thank our fabulous STaRR mentors, workshop presenters, and facilitators for their invaluable contributions to and support for the STaRR program.

2022-23 in numbers



STaRR Emerging Researcher Training

The annual STaRR Emerging Researcher Showcase was held during the Western Alliance Symposium in November. Excellent presentations were delivered by five emerging researchers on their findings and learnings to date.

STaRR Mentor Network

Mentoring is a fundamental part of the STaRR Emerging Researcher training program. Our STaRR Mentor Network comprises over 40 health service and academic researchers who volunteer their time to provide one-on-one support and guidance to a STaRR Emerging Researcher as they participate in the 10-week training program.

Our mentors are mainly from western Victoria, with some from metropolitan Melbourne and other locations, who have an interest in rural health or connections to the STaRR program.



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 and holds an Adjunct Research Associate position with the Monash Centre for Scholarship in Health Education. She is a podiatrist, credentialed 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.

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 Victoria.

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.

Western Alliance Annual Symposium

After three long years and several false starts it was wonderful to connect with over 100 research translation leaders, partners and consumers in person at the 2022 Western Alliance Symposium in Dunkeld.

The symposium theme, Reconnecting Through Rural and Regional Research, was evident throughout the program, from the inspiring Welcome to Country delivered by Gunditjmarra Kirrae Whurrong man Lee Morgan, and opening remarks by our Executive Director Prof Warren Payne, to the stimulating keynote speeches by:

- o Ms Olivia Payne, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO).
- o A/Prof Neil Orford, Barwon Health.
- o Prof Suzanne Robinson, Deakin Health Economics.
- o A/Prof Gabrielle O'Kane, member of the Western Alliance Board, formerly CEO of the National Rural Health Alliance.

Current and emerging researchers from our member health services and other organisations across our region provided a feast of rural and regional research and translation, with quality presentations delivered concurrently in the streams of health services research, clinical research, and population health and community research. A feature of each presentation was the direct relevance and translation potential to make real change to clinical practice and health outcomes.

We departed the beautiful town of Dunkeld with a strong sense of pride at what our community is achieving and will continue to achieve, and motivation to continue to grow and develop into the future.



SYMPOSIUM

Reconnecting through rural and regional research
18-19 July 2022 | Dunkeld, Victoria

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 continue to build on our efforts to facilitate meaningful consumer and community involvement across our region.

Western Alliance continues to support and co-fund the McIntosh CARN Lived Experience Engagement Officer, whose role is to coordinate the Community and Research Network (CARN), an interface for research and the community. This position has been

taken on by Sarah Healy, who works closely 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 on our Research Translation Committee. Marilyn provides a lived experience consumer and carer perspective in the co-development of Western Alliance initiatives.

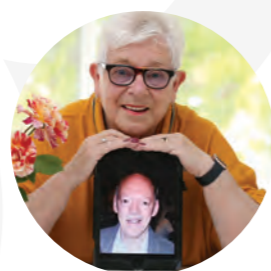


McIntosh CARN Lived Experience Engagement Officer

Sarah Healy has been engaged as the McIntosh Community and Research Network (CARN) Engagement Officer.

Sarah has been working as an Exercise Physiologist for almost 20 years, was an industry trainer at VFA Learning and joined CARN in 2023. Her role is to engage and grow a network of researchers, consumers and anyone with an interest in the benefit of the lived experience voice in research and research design.

Through her work, Sarah aims to support consumer engagement in research as it enables those with lived experience to inform researchers with practical and realistic information about the condition they are researching. Discussions with consumers can also help researchers formulate research questions and identify any gaps or issues in design.



Consumer Representative

Mrs Marilyn Dolling is a passionate advocate and 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 has worked in the education, hospital and health care industries at acute and primary service levels, supporting inpatient support, patient centred care, palliative care, cancer advocacy and advocacy training, health literacy, supportive care, survivorship, optimal care pathways, aged care advocacy and education at all levels from preschool to tertiary.

Partnerships

Australian Health Research Alliance

Western Alliance has been recognised by the NHMRC (National Health and Medical Research Council) as an Emerging Research Translation Centre.

This recognition has occurred through a rigorous accreditation process, and enables Western Alliance to become a member of AHRA (the Australian Health Research Alliance), made up of NHMRC accredited Research Translation Centres from across Australia. AHRA has provided Western Alliance with access to a wealth of opportunities for collaboration and sharing of expertise, as well as access to further funding opportunities.

We are extremely proud to represent Western Victoria in working towards better health through research, and look forward to working with our peers across Australia as we work towards full NHMRC accreditation.

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 is conducted by the members of these centres, and the role of the Collaborative is to embed research into healthcare.

VRTCC has been tasked with contributing to the Victorian healthcare pandemic recovery through identifying priorities, supporting research and evidence translation, and improving outcomes, and oversees key collaborative programs including the Australian Clinical Trials Education Centre (A-CTEC) and the Victorian Falls Prevention Alliance.

Other key partnerships

Western Alliance and the National Ageing Research Institute (NARI), through the Melbourne Ageing Research Collaboration (MARC), have been jointly supporting and funding research since 2019. In addition to partnering on research training initiatives, we have provided further funding to a rural ageing focussed project through East Grampians Health Service.

In 2021 Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) commenced 'GenV', a large-scale project across Victoria centred on parallel birth and parent. 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 continuing the progress of GenV over the coming years and to working collaboratively with MCRI to improve child and parent health for our communities.



Future Directions

Western Alliance has a number of exciting initiatives planned for the 2023-2024 financial year.

These include:

- Finalising the recipients of our inaugural Rapid Research Translation Grant Program, which will see \$100,000 competitively allocated to priority research translation projects across western Victoria
- Contributing to major nationwide projects to support Women's Health and Consumer and Community Involvement in research through our membership of the Australian Health Research Alliance
- Building on the early work of the DELIVER program to improve out of hospital care for older people across western Victoria
- Enhancing our STaRR research capability building program with the addition of an entry-level health service focussed research training workshop (STaRRLite)
- Building new partnerships and working with Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) to support the development of marra ngarrgoo marra goorri; The Victorian Aboriginal Health, Medical and Wellbeing Research Accord.



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 western Victoria. We have had another 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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