

MENTAL MOMENTS

Member Newsletter of the Margaret Roderick
Centre for Mental Health Research

VOL. 1 • OCTOBER 2025

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WELCOME

BY PROFESSOR ZOLTAN SARNYAI

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the Margaret Roderick Centre for Mental Health Research (MRCMHR), and to the inaugural edition of the MRCMHR newsletter. As members of this growing community, you are part of a shared commitment to advancing mental health research that is rigorous, inclusive, and translational. The Centre was established to improve the lives of individuals and communities across Northern Australia and beyond. The themes of the Centre reflect our dedication to addressing complex mental health challenges through interdisciplinary collaboration, ethical integrity, and participant-centered approaches.



This newsletter offers a glimpse into our early collective efforts - from membership growth, celebrating the recipients of our inaugural seed grants to highlighting events that foster connection and impact. It also reflects the breadth of expertise and dedication among our members, whose work spans diverse disciplines and communities.

Thank you for being part of the MRCMHR. Together, we are building a Centre that is responsive, collaborative, and deeply committed to improving mental health outcomes.

Center Goal, Vision, and Research Themes

Our Goal

At the MRCMHR, our primary goal is to create a leading multidisciplinary research hub addressing mental health challenges in regional, rural, and remote areas as well as in the Tropics in Australia and worldwide. We aim to develop local mental health leaders, innovate in prevention, intervention, treatment, and well-being promotion, and use evidence-based methods to improve mental well-being locally and globally.

Our Vision

Our vision is to lead in mental health research through an interdisciplinary approach that delivers real-world benefits. We aim to understand mental health complexities by uniting diverse experts to improve individual and community well-being. This includes working with communities to address health disparities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. By collaborating with partners, we will create evidence and knowledge to transform practice and education, supporting industry and community capacity to conduct relevant research.

Centre Research Themes

Theme 1: Severe mental illness diagnosis, treatment and support (major psychiatric disorders; age-related cognitive decline and dementia; high-risk cohorts including children, adolescents First Nations communities, men in rural environments etc.)

Theme 2: Mental health and wellbeing for enhanced functioning across lifespan (neurodevelopmental and neurodiverse conditions; mental health literacy to foster early detection, reduce stigma and facilitate help seeking; specific challenges in regional, rural and remote environments)

Theme 3: Emerging issues and novel approaches to innovating in mental health practice (digital technology and artificial intelligence for enhanced diagnostics, telehealth and new models of care for treatments, and patient/consumer engagement)



Centre Membership Growth and Overview

Since its launch, the Margaret Roderick Centre for Mental Health Research has grown into a vibrant, interdisciplinary community of 165 members, each contributing to our shared mission of advancing mental health research that is rigorous, inclusive, and translational.



Our membership spans a wide range of disciplines and institutions, reflecting the Centre's commitment to collaboration across sectors, professions, and geographies. Members hail from across James Cook University, including the Colleges of Healthcare Sciences (CHS), Medicine and Dentistry (CMD), Arts, Society and Education (CASE), Public Health, Medical and Veterinary Sciences (CSE), and Business, Law and Governance (BLG) and JCU Singapore, as well as the Cairns Institute, and the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health. We also welcome members from external organisations such as Townsville Hospital and Health Service (THHS), other universities, and community-based partners. This diversity is not only disciplinary, it's generational. With HDR candidates and students among our ranks, the Center is fostering the next generation of mental health researchers.

Members represent a wide spectrum of expertise, from clinical sciences, psychology, and public health to education, digital innovation, business, social work, and Indigenous health. This collective expertise is channeled into a set of strategic research priorities that guide the Centre's work. These include improving support, diagnosis, and treatment for severe mental illness across the lifespan; enhancing mental health and wellbeing through inclusive practices and community literacy; and exploring emerging challenges and innovations in mental health care, including digital technologies and new models of service delivery. Together, these areas reflect the Centre's commitment to ethical integrity, participant-centered approaches, and real-world impact.

As the Centre continues to grow, so too does its potential to build meaningful partnerships, launch innovative projects, and support research that transforms lives. The strength of the MRCMHR lies in its people, and this expanding membership base is a testament to the shared vision and momentum that define the Centre's future.



Celebrating Our First Round of Seed Grant Winners

The Margaret Roderick Centre for Mental Health Research is delighted to announce the recipients of its 2025 Round of Seed Grants.

These grants were established to support early-stage research projects that align with the Centre's strategic themes and demonstrate potential for interdisciplinary collaboration and translational impact. Open to Centre members, the program prioritised proposals that addressed the core themes of the Center; including mental health challenges in high-risk populations, explored innovative models of care, or advanced digital and community-led approaches. The successful projects reflect the Centre's commitment to fostering ethical, inclusive, and impactful research across Northern Australia and beyond.

We warmly congratulate each Principal Investigator and their research team for their successful proposals.

Principal Investigators and Project Titles

Professor James Dimmock
College of Healthcare Sciences

Social support for perinatal mental health in Northern Queensland: A pilot randomised controlled trial

A/Professor Joanna Barlas
JCU Singapore

Clinicians' Perceptions and Practices of Assessing and Diagnosing Borderline Personality Disorder in Singapore

Alyssia Merrick & Dr Daniel Miller
College of Healthcare Sciences

The Impact of the Roleplaying Game "Dungeons & Dragons" on Wellbeing: A Randomised Controlled Trial

Dr Liza van Eijk
College of Healthcare Sciences

Early detection, early support: leveraging predictive markers to prevent escalation of mental health symptoms



Dr Kelsey Lowrie

College of Arts, Society and Education

Innovating system integration for mental health and social and emotional wellbeing for children in North Queensland

Dr Amanda Krause

College of Healthcare Sciences

Examining the short- and longer-term mental health benefits of focused and immersive music listening events

Dr Kris McBain-Rigg

College of Medicine and Dentistry

The Ways Remote Communities Care: Creating a Community Resilience Framework through social networks and story mapping of Mount Isa Community Groups and their impact on mental health and wellbeing

A/Professor Wendy Li

College of Healthcare Sciences

MBCSR: Co-Designing a Mindfulness-Based Climate Stress Reduction Group Intervention to Improve Climate-Related Mental Health

Dr Tingzhen Chen

College of Business, Law and Governance

Reconnecting through roots: Exploring the role of diaspora tourism in mental health literacy among Indonesian migrants in North Queensland, Australia

Dr Klaire Somoray

College of Healthcare Sciences

Community garden for mental health and wellbeing among the refugee and migrant population in Townsville



Member Highlights and Achievements

We are proud to celebrate the outstanding accomplishments of our MRCMHR members. This section showcases recent successes across research publications, media features, grant awards, and professional recognitions. These achievements reflect the dedication, innovation, and impact of our community in advancing mental health research and practice.

Spotlight

Associate Professor Joanna Barlas

JCU Singapore

Joanna Barlas attended the South East Asia Mental Health Consortium Summer School in Kuala Lumpur (25–28 August), a competitive-entry program that brought together 32 participants from nine ASEAN countries. Over three days of presentations and workshops, academics, mental health professionals, and policy makers shared lively and insightful conversations, offering diverse perspectives on mental health care across the region.

Joanna delivered a presentation titled “Beyond the Boxes: Reimagining Mental Health Research Without Diagnosis”, which was warmly received. Both clinicians and academics echoed concerns about the limitations of diagnostic systems in treatment and research, and expressed enthusiasm for new ways forward. The Summer School was a fascinating and humbling opportunity to learn about the varied approaches to mental health care in the region, exchange examples of best practice, and build strong relationships. Joanna looks forward to collaborating with new peers in the coming year.

Joanna’s work resonates strongly with the MRCMHR’s commitment to rethinking traditional models of care, and advancing inclusive and innovative approaches to mental health.



Her engagement in international dialogue reflects the Centre’s vision to foster innovation and collaboration across borders.

Project Spotlight: Social Work in General Practice Project

Led by Associate Professor Ines Zuchowski and team, the Social Work in General Practice Project explores the impact of embedding Social Workers in eight GP clinics across North Queensland. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study found that Social Workers played a vital role in supporting patients with mental health, aged care, and chronic conditions through counselling, advocacy, assessments, and referrals. Their presence enhanced holistic care, improved patient wellbeing, and eased GP workloads. The project highlights the value of integrating Social Workers into general practice, with several clinics continuing the model post-study, though long-term sustainability will require structured, evidence-informed pathways.

If you would like further information on the Social Work in General Practice Project, please email ines.zuchowski@jcu.edu.au



Media Coverage

Professor Nigel Marsh

Debunking the Myths and Misconceptions of Adolescence

The article dispels common myths about adolescence, emphasizing that teenage behavior is shaped by ongoing brain development, social context, and emotional growth, not just hormones or rebellion. It encourages caregivers to foster trust and resilience through empathetic guidance rather than control.

[Article](#)

Honours and Recognition

A/Professor Mark Chong

Appointed a Member of Springer Nature's "Humanities and Social Sciences Communications" Editorial Board

Melissa Freestun

Invited panel member at the 17th Annual National Obstetric Medico Legal Conference, Melbourne, August 2025



Photo: Melissa Freestun

Visiting Scholar

Thanks to a successful bid under JCU's Grant Scheme, **Dr Amanda Krause** hosted **A/Professor Melissa Forbes** in Townsville for a public talk titled "[Making Music That Matters: The Power of Participatory Music for Social Health](#)". Congratulations to Amanda for securing the grant and delivering such an inspiring and well-received event!



Photos: Dr Amanda Krause and A/Professor Melissa Forbes

Presentations

A/Professor Rachel Hay

Connectivity Literacy a barrier to online health services in rural, regional and remote Australia. TropiQ Research Symposium 2025. [Poster Presentation].

Dr Moira Smith

Stride Forward: Exploring the journey of running with multiple sclerosis. A qualitative study.

Australian Physiotherapy Association Conference October 2025.

The effect of non-invasive brain stimulation and exercise on gait, for people with multiple sclerosis.

Australian Physiotherapy Association Conference October 2025.

Publications

Chrisp, L., Putter, K. C., & Krause, A. E. (2025). How music listening can support antepartum and intrapartum maternal well-being: A scoping review. *Music Perception*. Advance online publication.

[Article](#)

Hayward, K. S., Donnan, G., Godecke, E., Balabanski, A., Barker, R., Bernhardt, J., Brauer, S., Brodtmann, A., Brogan, E., Brownsett, S., Chapman, P., Copland, D., Cowley, E., Dalton, E., Ellery, F., Fink, P., Garcia Esperon, C., Hill, A. J., Janssen, H., ... Churilov, L. (2025). Integrated UPper limb and Language Impairment and Functional Training (UPLIFT) after stroke: Study protocol for an umbrella Bayesian optimal Phase IIa clinical trial. *BMJ Neurology Open*, 7(2), e001212.

[Article](#)

Meng, J., Suárez, L., Yip, C. C. E., & Marsh, N. V. (2025). White-collar workers in the post-pandemic era: A review of risk and protective factors for mental well-being. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(10), Article e1313.

[Article](#)

Nguyen, H., Hyde, Z., Smith, K., Malay, Flicker, L., Watson, R., Radford, K., Russell, S., Quigley, R., Sagigi, B., Strivens, E., Withall, A., Timbery, A., Donovan, T., Draper, B., Delbaere, K., Cumming, R., Hughson, J., McNamara, B., & LoGiudice, D. (2025). A prototype rapid tool to enhance detection of dementia for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in primary care. *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*. Advance online publication.

[Article](#)

Tucker, D., & Freestun, M. (2025). Maternal collapse in pregnancy: Evolving aetiology and healthcare system response. *Case Reports in Women's Health*, 37, e00750.

[Article](#)

Zanker, J., Hyde, Z., Smith, K., Bessarab, D., Bradley, K., Douglas, H., Hughson, J., Nguyen, H., Malay, R., Quigley, R., Radford, K., Russell, S., Smith, R., Werdiger, F., Strivens, E., Flicker, L., & LoGiudice, D. (2025). The clock is not enough: The Clock Drawing Test versus the Kimberley Indigenous Cognitive Assessment for detecting dementia in older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults. *Dementia and Geriatric Cognitive Disorders*.

[Article](#)

Freestun, M., George, K., O'Brien, C., & Nagle, C. (2025). The conceptualisation and evolution of psychological birth trauma in the absence of identifiable risk factors: A scoping review. *Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare*, 44, 101084.

[Article](#)

Rae, C. D., Barros, L. F., Behnke, A., Goyal, M. S., Herculano-Houzel, S., Peleg-Raibstein, D., Picard, M., Rothman, D., Vernon, A. C., & Sarnyai, Z. (2025). Brain energy constraints and vulnerability. In D. Öngür & J. M. Ford (Eds.), *Metabolic neuropsychiatry* (pp. 29–56). Strüngmann Forum Reports. Springer.

[Article](#)

Kim, T., & Jordan, L. P. (2025). A Systematic Review on Intergenerational Transmission of Genocide-Related Trauma. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 0(0).

[Article](#)

Zuchowski, I. S., Waters, E., Kuruvila, A., Kuhn, B., & Lee, R. (2025). Integrating Social Work in an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service Primary Health Care Setting: The First Three Months of Data. *Journal of the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet*, 6(1), 6.

[Article](#)

Zuchowski, I., Kuruvila, A., Sen Gupta, T. & Wielandt, R. (2025). Integrating social workers in Australian primary health care settings. *Journal of Integrated Care* 2025; 33(5): 72–85.

[Article](#)

Next Generation of Researchers at MRCMHR: HDR & ECR Focus

At MRCMHR, Higher Degree by Research (HDR) candidates and Early Career Researchers (ECR) are a vital part of our research community, bringing fresh perspectives, energy, and a deep commitment to advancing mental health knowledge. In this section, we celebrate their achievements, share their journeys, and highlight the innovative work they're doing to shape the future of research.

JCU 2025 Human Health Symposium: Enhancing Science Communication

Held from September 24–26 at the JCU Townsville campus, the 2025 JCU Human Health Research Symposium brought together Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students and Early Career Researchers (ECRs) focused on human health. As an event sponsor of the 2025 JCU Human Health Symposium, MRCMHR proudly supported this important platform for HDRs and ECR's. The Centre also sponsored the Best Mental Health Research Presentation Prize to recognise excellence in emerging mental health research and communication.

Dr Amanda Krause

Examining how focused music listening events can support well-being.

Carolyn Heward

Beyond the Uniform: Military Culture, Military Identity and Mental Health Outcomes

People's Choice Oral Presentation Award

Jennifer Gaskin

Operationalising Mindfulness: A Multi-Phase Investigation into Stress and Mental Health in Australian Police Officers

Best Mental Health Presentation Award

Catherine De Hollander

Concussion Reporting and Knowledge of Australian Semi-Professional Female Rugby League Players [Poster]

People's Choice Poster Presentation Award

Sabine Finlay

Adverse Childhood Experiences, Allostatic Load Index, and Later Mental Health Symptoms from the ALSPAC Longitudinal Birth Cohort [Poster]



Publications

Dutton, C., North, E., Chun Tie, Y., Oliva, J., & Skeffington, P. (2025). Harm reduction practises for users of psychedelic drugs: a scoping review. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 22(1), Article 158.

Article

Finlay, S., Suvarna, B., Adegboye, O., Rudd, D., McDermott, B., Westphal, S., Guest, P.C., Meyer-Lotz, G., Dobrowolny, H., Bahn, S., Steiner, J., & Sarnyai, Z. (2025). Allostatic load in major depressive disorder: an in-patient clinical study. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*.

Article

Finlay, S., Adegboye, O., Rudd, D., McDermott, B., Sarnyai, Z.. (in press). Stress-related multisystem dysregulation during adolescence predicts mental health symptoms in young adulthood. *Psychological Medicine*.

Gaskin, J., Li, W. W., van Eijk, L., & Sarnyai, Z. (2025). The effect of mindfulness-based interventions on stress and mental health outcomes among police officers: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Police Practice and Research*, 1–33.

Article

Vos, G., van Eijk, L., Sarnyai, Z., & Rahimi Azghadi, M. (2025). Stabilizing machine learning for reproducible and explainable results: A novel validation approach to subject-specific insights. *Computer methods and programs in biomedicine*, 269, 108899..

Article

HDR Spotlight



Carolyn Heward

**PhD Candidate / Senior Lecturer
College of Healthcare Sciences
James Cook University**

Carolyn Heward is a clinical psychologist and senior lecturer in clinical psychology at James Cook University. Based in Townsville, she has worked clinically with Army personnel for over a decade. Her involvement in the Australian Psychological Society's response to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide highlighted a critical gap in the field: while much attention is given to identity loss during transition from service, there is limited understanding of how Army identity is constructed in the first place.

Carolyn's qualitative PhD research seeks to address this gap. Using grounded theory methods, she is conducting interviews with current and ex-serving soldiers to explore the processes involved in developing Army identity and how these processes relate to mental health outcomes, both positive and negative.

Now in her third year of part-time candidature, she has completed 12 interviews and is actively engaged in the iterative process of transcribing, coding, and category development while continuing data collection.

Her work has already made a significant impact. Carolyn has published a scoping review mapping existing research on military identity and mental health, which has attracted international interest. Earlier this year, she was invited as a guest on the US Center for Deployment Psychology podcast, and next month she will deliver a 90-minute webinar focused on the clinical application of her findings.

Through her exploration of Army identity formation and its mental health impacts, Carolyn is generating new insights into how personal and professional identities shape wellbeing. Her research exemplifies the Centre's themes and commitment to grounded, community-informed inquiry that addresses gaps in understanding and supports more responsive models of care.

MRCMHR Events and Engagement

Its been a dynamic and productive first few months for MRCMHR, with a wide range of activities spanning research, community outreach, and strategic partnerships. The Centre has been actively engaging across sectors - and these highlights are just a few of the engagements the Centre has been involved in.

Special Screening: *Seen - The Film*

MRCMHR was proud to host a special screening of *Seen*, a powerful documentary produced by Sam Jockel of ParentTV and supported by the Ningana Trust. The film explores the healing journeys of parents and the ripple effects on parenting and child development.

Brain Building in Education Forum

MRCMHR was delighted to co-host and take part in the Brain Building in Education Forum; a vibrant event brought together educators, researchers and clinicians to explore how neuroscience and brain health can inform teaching, and support student wellbeing.

MRCMHR at Your Home Game - Cowboys v Storm

On Saturday 5 July, MRCMHR proudly hosted a Community Corner booth at the North Queensland Toyota Cowboys game at Queensland Country Bank Stadium. Our team connected with the community, sharing information about our work and handing out flyers and merchandise. It was a fantastic opportunity to raise awareness and engage with locals in a vibrant setting.

Strategic Collaboration with QIMR Berghofer

MRCMHR hosted a foundational meeting with the QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute to explore collaborative opportunities. The session highlighted shared priorities in cognitive research, predictive technologies, and regional health initiatives.

Ongoing Engagement with Orygen

MRCMHR has commenced a series of strategic meetings with Orygen, Australia's centre of excellence in youth mental health. These discussion are focused on identifying shared priorities, exploring collaborative research opportunities, and strengthening national partnerships.

Queensland Brain Institute Collaborative Clinical Roadshow

The MRCMHR was excited to collaborate with the QBIC for an exclusive mental health workshop, and Clinical Roadshow initiative. Bringing together clinicians, researchers and community stakeholder to share insights and strengthen translational pathways in North Queensland.



MRCMHR Announcements & Upcoming Events

Raising Resilience:

Science-Backed Strategies for Nurturing Secure Parent-Child Relationships

Professor Jessie Borelli,
Department of Psychology, University of California Irvine (UCI)



In **Raising Resilience: Science-Backed Strategies for Nurturing Secure Parent-Child Relationships**, Professor Borelli will explore how **everyday moments of connection** can **strengthen a child's confidence, coping skills, and emotional resilience**. Grounded in the latest psychological and attachment research, this **40-minute talk offers concrete, practical, and compassionate tools** for supporting children through challenges while deepening the parent-child bond. **This will be followed by a Q&A session.**

Date: Monday, 10th November 2025

Time: 11:30am - 12:30pm

Where: Building 28, Room 005, Ground Floor
James Cook University, Townsville ([MAP LINK](#))

Zoom: [Click to Join](#)
Meeting ID: 87613740997
Password: 772225

To register, click [here](#)
or scan the QR code



MRCMHR Grants and Funding

MRCMHR is preparing a range of upcoming grant opportunities to support research, collaboration, and innovation across the Centre. While details such as funding rules, eligibility and release dates are still being finalised, we encourage members to stay tuned for updates. Keep an eye out for announcements in your inbox, and future newsletters as we roll out some exciting new pathways for funding and support.



Here's a sneak peak:

- MRCMHR Competitive Research Grants
- MRCMHR Seed Grants
- MRCMHR Visiting Scholar Grants
- MRCMHR Support for HDR's



Become a MRCMHR Member today!

- Connect with a diverse network of researchers, practitioners and partners
- Collaborate on projects, publications and Center-led initiatives
- Participate in events and workshops
- Apply for MRCMHR grants

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We want to hear from you!



Please submit your news, achievements, or opportunities to feature in MRCMHR newsletter to:

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