

MENTAL MOMENTS

Member Newsletter of the Margaret Roderick
Centre for Mental Health Research

JANUARY 2026



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This issue:

Reflections from
the Centre Head:
Mental Health
Month and Beyond

PAGE 02

Celebrating
National Mental
Health Month

PAGE 03

MRCMHR Events
& Engagements

PAGE 05

Member
Highlights and
Achievements

PAGE 06

Next Generation
of Researchers

PAGE 11

MRCMHR
Announcements
and Upcoming
Events

PAGE 12

Reflections from the Centre Head: Mental Health Month and Beyond

PROFESSOR ZOLTAN SARNYAI

Happy New Year from all of us at MRCMHR!

As we step into 2026, I am delighted to present this special edition of the MRCMHR Newsletter. This issue reflects on our October activities in celebration of National Mental Health Month, a time when our Centre came together to raise awareness, share knowledge, and foster meaningful conversations about mental health and wellbeing.

The final months of 2025 were a busy and productive period for the Centre. In addition to our Mental Health Month initiatives, we continued to drive forward important research projects, strengthen collaborations, and celebrate the achievements of our team. A significant milestone was the Centre undergoing its first review with the MRCMHR trustees. The review delivered positive results, providing a strong endorsement of our work and setting the stage for the next exciting phase of the Centre's growth and impact.

Throughout October, we hosted a series of events designed to engage our research community and the broader public. These initiatives not only highlighted the importance of mental health research but also showcased the creativity, dedication, and collaborative spirit that define MRCMHR. From thought-provoking seminars and interactive workshops to community engagement activities, each event reflected our commitment to advancing mental health outcomes through research and education.

In addition to these highlights, this edition includes our usual sections featuring recent publications, presentations, and achievements from our Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students and Early Career Researchers (ECRs), as well as updates on partnerships and upcoming opportunities. We also have exciting initiatives and events planned for 2026, and we look forward to sharing these with you in the months ahead.

On behalf of the Centre, I wish you a safe, and productive start to the year. Thank you for your continued support and commitment to improving mental health outcomes, we look forward to working together in 2026.



Celebrating National Mental Health Month

October was a month of connection, learning, and collaboration as MRCMHR proudly celebrated National Mental Health Month. Through a series of public lectures, community forums, and research-focused events, we brought together experts, students, and community members to share knowledge, spark dialogue, and promote mental wellbeing. These events reflected our commitment to bridging research and practice, fostering resilience, and advancing innovative approaches to mental health across diverse contexts.



Public Lecture *Dr Hannah Critchlow*

On 10 October, internationally acclaimed neuroscientist and author Dr Hannah Critchlow delivered *Learning to Flourish* at JCU Townsville. This interactive lecture explored the science of learning, memory, and mental wellbeing, offering practical strategies to boost brain power and thrive. Dr Critchlow's dynamic presentation captivated attendees and advanced MRCMHR's mission to promote scientific literacy and community engagement.

Mental Health Forum *MRCMHR x St James Cathedral*

On 15 October, MRCMHR partnered with St James Cathedral for a community forum titled *Mental Health for All*. Centre Head Professor Zoltan Sarnyai presented on the complex effects of chronic stress and trauma, followed by a panel of local health and education leaders. The discussion addressed resilience strategies and systemic challenges, fostering inclusive dialogue and strengthening community partnerships.





Community Lecture Professor Andrew McKune

On 17 October at Cowboys HQ, Professor Andrew McKune delivered Heart, Mind, and Motion: Using HRV to Understand Mental Health in Sport and Exercise. His talk highlighted the role of heart rate variability (HRV) in monitoring stress and emotional wellbeing, offering practical insights for athletes, clinicians, and the community. This event exemplified MRCMHR's commitment to translational research and preventative health.



A Milestone Gift for the MRCMHR

The MRCMHR is delighted to announce a generous charitable donation of \$34,460 from the **Tropical Brain and Mind Foundation**.

This remarkable gift marks an important milestone in the life of our Centre, it is the first independently raised donation supporting our mission to advance mental health research and community engagement.

MRCMHR Symposium: Shaping Tomorrow's Mental Health

The inaugural MRCMHR Symposium, held on 24 October at JCU Townsville, showcased cutting-edge research and innovation. Highlights included Professor Zoltan Sarnyai on metabolic psychiatry and Professor Mostafa Rahimi Azghadi on machine learning for stress measurement. Seed Grant recipients presented diverse projects, from refugee community gardens to music-based interventions, demonstrating the Centre's dedication to interdisciplinary collaboration and research excellence.

Missed it, or want to re-watch? Head over to the recording:

 Zoom Recording: [Click here](#) | Password: LF63#==G

The Foundation, which holds charity status, has provided flexible funding that has already enabled us to deliver impactful Mental Health Month events. Looking ahead, these funds will continue to strengthen our efforts to promote the Centre, engage with the community, and support our research activities.

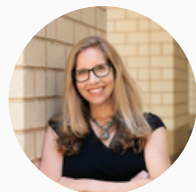
We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Tropical Brain and Mind Foundation for their vision and generosity. Their support not only amplifies our work but also helps us build stronger connections between research and the communities we serve.





MRCMHR Events and Engagement

MRCMHR x College of Healthcare Sciences International Scholar Visit



***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 explored how everyday moments of connection can strengthen a child’s confidence, coping skills, and emotional resilience. Grounded in the latest psychological and attachment research, the 40-minute talk offers concrete, practical, and compassionate tools for supporting children through challenges while deepening the parent-child bond.

 Zoom Recording: [Click here](#) | Password: aXX7Ph=^

Collaborative Meetings Strengthening Partnerships

Over the last few months of 2025, the Margaret Roderick Centre for Mental Health Research engaged in a series of collaborative meetings with key partners, reinforcing our commitment to applied research, service integration, and community impact. Here are just a few.....

With the Child & Youth Mental Health Service, Qld Health, we explored joint initiatives to improve outcomes for young people, advancing our focus on translational research that directly benefits communities. A meeting with Professor Stephan Reik at the Graduate Research School highlighted opportunities for PhD scholarships to attract high-caliber candidates, supporting the Centre’s capacity-building and research training objectives. Discussions with the Richmond Fellowship Queensland centred on community-based mental health research, aligning with our goal of impactful, real-world collaborations that strengthen service delivery. Finally, at Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service (TAIHS), we met with Social and Emotional Mental Wellbeing Team Leader



Lorelle Benson and Clinical Research Coordinator Luciana Theodoro de Freitas to explore joint projects. This partnership underscores our commitment to culturally responsive research and to strengthening relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services.

Together, these collaborations reflect the Centre’s vision of building vibrant, interdisciplinary partnerships that advance mental health research and deliver meaningful outcomes for diverse communities.



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



Dr Klaire Somoray
College of Healthcare Sciences
James Cook University



Indigenous Australian Datathon 2025

Over the weekend of October 31 to November 2, Dr Klaire Somoray participated in the Indigenous Australian Datathon 2025, an event that brought together innovators to explore how data and technology can drive positive change for Indigenous communities.

Klaire’s team focused on health equity in remote areas, developing a groundbreaking concept for a community-controlled drone aid system to deliver medical services and connect remote communities with essential healthcare. Their idea was selected as the winning pitch for Most Innovative Solution, a testament to the team’s creativity and commitment to improving health outcomes.

This achievement highlights MRCMHR’s dedication to fostering innovative approaches that address health disparities and promote wellbeing in diverse communities.

To learn more about the Datathon, click [here](#).



TMSG Community Garden Launch

Last month marked the official launch of the *TMSG Community Garden*, a project proudly supported through the first round of MRCMHR Seed Grants. This initiative aims to create a welcoming space that promotes community connection, wellbeing, and sustainable living. The garden is a testament to how small grants can spark meaningful change and strengthen local engagement.

Photos from the launch showcase the vibrant energy and collaboration behind this project.

Thank you to everyone involved in bringing this vision to life!

Honours, Recognition, Engagement and Achievements

A/Professor Denise Dillon Appointed to ARMS Board



Congratulations to A/Professor Denise Dillon on her appointment to the new Board of Directors of the Australasian Research Management Society (ARMS), announced at the Annual General Meeting on 24 September 2025. Denise will serve on the General Committee as an International Member, contributing her expertise to advance research management across the region. To read more about ARMS, and the board, visit the website [here](#).

International Mental Health Nursing Leaders' Summit Barcelona 2025



In November, Professor Tanya Park attended the inaugural International Mental Health Nursing Leaders' Summit in Barcelona, Spain. Over two days, mental health nurses from across the globe explored ten priorities for the profession, including education and workforce development, human rights and safe environments, diversity and inclusion, technology and AI, climate change, suicide prevention, and transformative kindness.



The summit offered a chance to unify our global voice and commit to establishing an International Council of Mental Health Nursing. Its outcomes will be captured in the forthcoming Barcelona Declaration, setting a shared vision for advancing mental health nursing worldwide.

For the Margaret Roderick Centre, this engagement reflects our commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration, ethically grounded research, and strengthening global connections that inform local practice, ensuring our work contributes to both national priorities and the international movement for mental health.

Celebrating Excellence: Dr Amanda Krause

The Margaret Roderick Centre for Mental Health Research warmly congratulates Dr Amanda Krause on receiving the 2025 Australian Psychological Society "Outstanding Academic Mentor Award." This prestigious national award recognises individuals in the mid-to-late career stage who have demonstrated extraordinary leadership, provided exceptional support to peers and students, and shown a deep commitment to advancing the discipline and profession of psychology.

Dr Krause's achievement reflects not only her dedication to mentoring and leadership but also the values we uphold at the Centre, fostering excellence, collaboration, and the growth of future leaders in mental health research. Well done, Amanda, on this outstanding accomplishment!



Honours, Recognition, Engagement and Achievements

New MRFF Grant to Address Youth Alcohol Use in the Digital Age

Dr Sam Teague from JCU's Department of Psychology is a Chief Investigator (CI-C) on a newly funded \$1.99M Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) Alcohol and Other Drugs grant (GA505358) led by A/Prof Delyse Hutchinson (Deakin University). Alcohol is a leading cause of disease among young Australians, and rising access among 14–24-year-olds is increasingly linked to the rapid spread of alcohol-related content across digital technologies and social media.

The multidisciplinary team will use AI-enabled living systematic reviews and collect new cohort data to evaluate the risks and impacts of increased alcohol access, with the aim of informing future policy, prevention, and harm-minimisation strategies. The project also includes collaboration with consumers and key sector partners including headspace, the Australian Drug Foundation (ADF), and ARACY.

This five-year program will generate much-needed evidence to help reduce the mental and physical health burden of alcohol-related harm on young Australians.

MRCMHR Members Shine in JCU 2025 Awards for Excellence



The Margaret Roderick Centre for Mental Health Research is proud to celebrate the achievements of our members recognised in the 2025 Awards for Excellence.

Community Engagement Finalist

Associate Professor Wendy Li, Jennifer Gaskin, Dr Marc Chao, and Carolyn Heward

Project: JCU MINDS – Building Healthier Communities Through Partnership.

This recognition highlights their outstanding work in fostering partnerships that strengthen community mental health outcomes.

Innovation and Change Winner

Dr Lauren Shaw

Project: Transforming 4th Year Psychology for Flexible, Student-Focused Learning.

This award celebrates Dr Shaw's leadership in reimagining psychology education to better support students through innovative, flexible approaches.

These honours reflect the Centre's commitment to excellence, collaboration, and impact, both in the community and in advancing education and research.

Publications

McKenzie, S. M., Krause, A. E., Glasser, S., & Osborne, M. S. (2025). Exploring the role of music listening in cultivating self-compassion. *Psychology of Music*, 0(0).

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Andreazza, A. C., Barros, L. F., Behnke, A., et al. (2025). Brain and body energy metabolism and potential for treatment of psychiatric disorders. *Nature Mental Health*, 3(6), 763–771.

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Teague, S. J., Shatte, A. B. R., Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, M., & Hutchinson, D. M. (2025). Mobile app-based intervention for paternal perinatal depression, anxiety, and stress: A randomised controlled trial. *Journal of affective disorders*, 382, 325–335.

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Coté, J. J., Dilsaver, D. B., Dimmock, J., Doehrman, P., Teague, S., Coté, R. D., ... & Massey, S. H. (2025). Prenatal attachment interventions: a comprehensive systematic review and meta-analysis. *Archives of women's mental health*, 1-25.

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Vos, G., Ebrahimpour, M., Eijk, L., Sarnyai, Z., & Rahimi Azghadi, M. (2025). Decoding neural emotion patterns through large language model embeddings. *Neurocomputing*. 669. 132513

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Griffith, G. M., & Teague, S. J. (2025). Telehealth in third-wave therapies: Applications, challenges, and opportunities. *The Palgrave handbook of third-wave psychotherapies*. 735-755.

Publications

Hung, A. A., Krycer, J. R., Sarnyai, Z., Palmer, C. M., Navarro, S. (2025). The Ketogenic Diet: An Anti-Inflammatory Treatment for Schizophrenia?. *J Inflamm Res.* 18:16761-16771

[Article](#)

Finlay, S., Adegboye, O., Rudd, D., McDermott, B., & Sarnyai, Z. (2025). Stress-related multisystem dysregulation during adolescence predicts mental health symptoms in young adulthood. *Psychological medicine*, 55, e334.

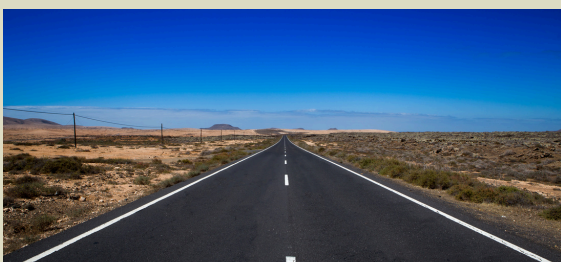
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MRCMHR Contributes to Landmark Mental Health Research

We're proud to share that the Monash University press release highlights a significant paper recently published in *Molecular Psychiatry*. This collaborative work presents a roadmap for improving outcomes in mental health care, bringing together leading researchers and institutions to tackle one of the most pressing challenges in healthcare. Professor Zoltán Sarnyai, Head of the Centre, is among the contributing authors, reflecting our commitment to advancing evidence-based solutions and fostering impactful partnerships.

Read the full press release [here](#) and access the published paper [here](#) to explore the findings and recommendations.

Consortium for Preclinical Psychiatric Research (2025). Of mice, molecules and mental health: establishment of the consortium for preclinical psychiatric research to find solutions to the translational gap. Molecular psychiatry. [Advance online publication].



Grief in the Digital Age: The Double-Edged Role of Social Media

Can social media help us heal? A new scoping review uncovers its double-edged role in grief expression and highlights opportunities for innovative support.

Through a review of extant literature, the authors found that social media platforms facilitated expressions of grief and aided healing for some but made it more difficult for others to move on and kept them stuck, revealing its double-edged nature. It is also worth noting that most of the research was conducted on platforms like Facebook or Instagram, but newer forms, such as TikTok, have not been explored as frequently. Moreover, most studies didn't thoroughly examine the effectiveness of using social media to express grief or its influence on the long-term trajectory of grief. Nevertheless, it would be helpful if social media could be harnessed for good to help people process grief and open the door to novel and innovative approaches.

Given how digitalised our world has become, perhaps it was inevitable that even something as personal as grief would end up in public online domains; this is not necessarily a bad thing. At the end of it all, social media, like any technology, is a tool, and if we use it well, it can be a powerful way to reach people at their most vulnerable and provide them with the support they need in a way they're most comfortable with.

Click to read the article [here](#).

Liang, A. G., Tan, K. H. E., See, J. C., & Kuek, J. H. L. (2025). A scoping review on the use of social media for personal grief. *Death Studies*, 1-15.

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.

Spotlight



Jodie Mottram
PhD Candidate
College of Healthcare Sciences
James Cook University

Supporting a Healthy Kinship System for Indigenous Australian Infants

Supporting a Healthy Kinship System for Indigenous Australian Infants
Privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices from all states and territories, including the Tiwi Islands and Palm Island, this research focuses on the cultural strengths surrounding infants and their kinship systems, with an aim of optimising on these strengths to create the best environment for an infants' socio-emotional well-being and developmental outcomes in a way that is self-determined and culturally sensitive. Moreover, the research looks at traditional practices around infants such as smoking ceremonies, shared breastfeeding, placenta burials, and first hair cuttings.

The end-goal is to develop educational resources for both practitioners and community members that highlight the similarities and differences across different parts of Australia. The research is led by an Aboriginal PhD candidate, Jodie Mottram, as part of her doctoral research while living on the road in an off-road caravan and travelling in person to the communities; very remote, remote, rural and urban. Research data collection has so far been completed in South Australia and the Northern Territory, with Queensland next and the other states to follow.



The research fosters a decolonised yarning approach that commences with a rapport building social yarn before moving into a research yarn with semi-structured questions and a focus on following where the person feels comfortable to share, providing the focus remains strength based.

Uptake has been strong, with N=101 yarns to date and data collection ongoing until July/Aug 2026. Of these, participants have been Caregivers (37%, N=38), Elders (35%, N=35), Non-Indigenous Healthcare Providers (18%, N=18), or Indigenous Healthcare Providers (10%, N=10). Classified against the ASGS Remoteness level, participants are from Major Cities (N=11, 11%), Inner Regional (N=5, 5%), Outer Regional (N=12, 12%), Remote (N=21, 21%), Very Remote (N=52, 51%).

"Self-determination that is empowering and culturally responsive requires a bottom-up approach. An Indigenous-led approach that privileges voices of mob." Mottram, 2025. SAGE Publishing Award Winner Presentation.

If you are a healthcare provider and work with mob, or if you are an Indigenous healthcare provider, we would love to yarn to you around this topic. Reach out: jodie.mottram@my.jcu.edu.au
0409 423 328



MRCMHR Announcements & Upcoming Events

Launching Our Website & Social Media – 2026



The MRCMHR is excited to announce the launch of our new website and social media channels in 2026. These platforms will serve as central hubs for sharing announcements, updates, and information about our research, events, and community engagement activities. Through these channels, we look forward to connecting more widely, celebrating achievements, and keeping our community informed about the Centre's ongoing work to advance mental health research.

Stay tuned for further details as we go live, your link to the Centre will soon be just a click away.

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 in early 2026. Keep an eye out for announcements in your inbox, and future newsletters as we roll out some exciting new pathways for funding and support. To apply for most grants, you must be an MRCMHR member, so submit your membership application (Page 13) today!

Here's a sneak peak of what is just around the corner:

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



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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