Researching community care with older people
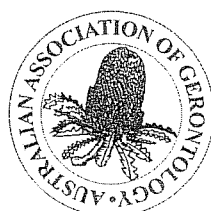
Rationale

Research plays a critical role in enabling the development and ongoing improvement of effective services as well as informing policy and program direction. The widely recognised value of evidence-based practice was reinforced in the Productivity Commission's report *Trends in Aged Care* (2008) and affirmed by the National Health and Hospital Reform Commission's report (2009). Research requires collaboration between service providers, consumers, researchers and funders. To be most useful, it needs to be targeted and timely, built on what is already known, and be applied to further action. Full public access must also be granted to the findings (Bruen, 2006—see Section 3 of the 'Getting Involved in Research' guide below for more information).

Aged & Community Services Australia (ACSA), the Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG) and the ARC/NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well (RNAW) united to develop a National Community Care Research Agenda. The purpose was to set high-priority, high-value topics for investigation and to advise stakeholders how to expand their involvement in research. This publication includes two key deliverables: a list of the top priority research topics which form the National Research Agenda, and a 'Getting Involved in Research' guide to assist people from the sector to engage actively in research.

This paper will be released at the ACSA National Community Care conference in June 2010.

Further discussion is recommended on widening the research agenda to include: people with disabilities and carers at all ages; mainstream health and housing services that interface with community care; and wider societal issues such as ageism. We aim to advocate for the establishment of a national funding program for community care research and the development of collaborative research by ACSA and AAG members in all states.

Aged & Community
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ARC/NHMRC Research
Network in Ageing Well
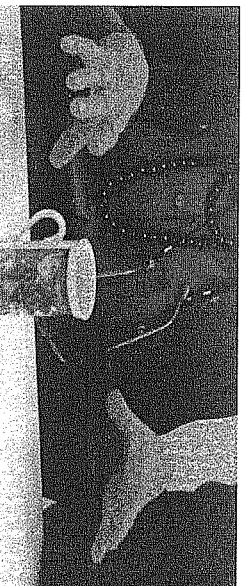
National Community Care Research Agenda

The project was initiated two years ago at ACSA's second National Community Care Conference. Two activities—an interactive workshop and a 'wishing line'—were used to elicit delegates' views as to the key research questions and issues to be researched in community care. The list of questions/topics generated was then circulated to members of the partner organisations for review. They were also asked to add other issues/questions thought to be critical within contemporary community care.

A Delphi process was used to complete the development of the agenda. Six representatives from each of the key stakeholder groups: academics/researchers; consumers; providers; funders/policy makers; and, professional organisations/peak bodies, were recruited as panellists. A four round electronic Delphi process was used in which the panellists initially verified and then rated the importance of each of the 72 questions/issues that had been identified. In the final round each panellist identified and ranked the top 30 questions/issues. The rankings allowed the identification of the top 30 priorities across the sector. These are presented below:
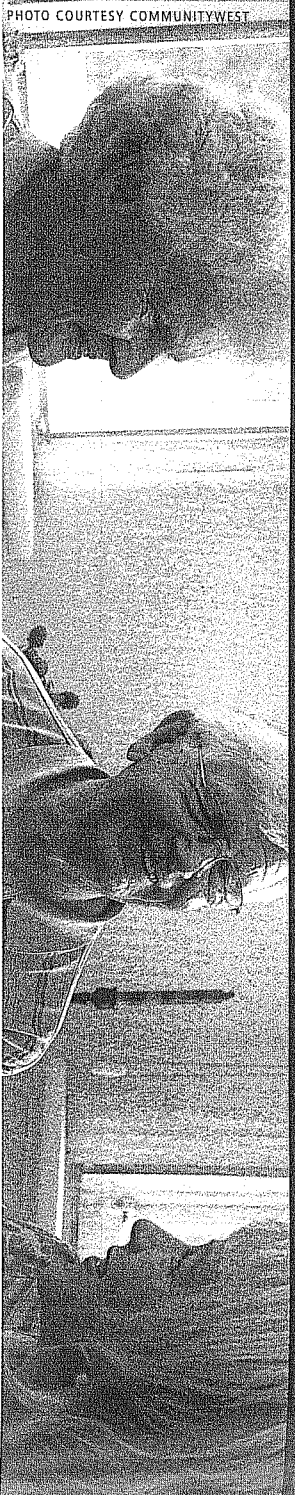
Rank Question/Issue

1   Which models of care in the community best support older people who have little informal support?

2   How can the involvement of older people themselves in decisions about their care be increased?

3   How can community and residential care be better integrated and what are the structural barriers preventing this?

4   Development of an agreed set of outcome measures, both quantitative and qualitative, for measuring the impact of community care.

5   Explore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific community care and appropriate models for various communities.

6   What are the support and service needs of people living with a mental illness/mental health problem?
    What role can/does community care play in meeting these needs and how can this be improved?

7   How can we manage the community care/acute care interface to ensure seamless pathways without creating additional areas of tension between state and federal governments?

8   Investigate consumer directed care i.e. conduct studies of the effectiveness of different models in the Australian context.

9   How many and what type of clients fall between existing funding programs (HACC, CACPs and EACH)?
    What would be the most effective way to bridge the gaps?

10 How can we better meet the transport needs of older people?

11 How can we more effectively attract and retain care staff?

12 Is the provision of community care at a comparable level to residential care cost effective?

13 Gain a population-based knowledge of those who do (and do not) use services, the individual and carer factors that precipitate entry to and change of services over time, the influence of the local availability of the mix of services on service use, and the overall duration of service use in the community and in residential care over the course of later life to death.

14 How can aids and equipment be most effectively accessed, provided, used and funded—to maximise cost effectiveness? (This should cover the spectrum of aids from low to high tech and include home modifications)

15 In a community-based restorative model:

What are the staff competencies for assessment and direct care?

How does it link with rehabilitation?

How is seamless delivery of care between hospital, rehabilitation and home to occur?

16 How viable would the different models of long-term social care insurance be for community care, especially given other countries' experiences?

17 What outcome measures are appropriate for services delivered within a wellness model and how can these be incorporated into reporting models?

18 Is there any impact on client outcomes of using staff with 'lesser' or no professional qualifications (e.g. ENs rather than RNs, coordinators with no health or human services tertiary qualification rather than those who have a qualification) in community care services?

19 What are the jobs and associated skills required for community care now and in the future, are they the same or different?

20 How do different housing and neighbourhood features impact on the delivery of, and benefits gained from, community care.

21 Case management. Who needs it, who wants it, who gets it? Is it for everybody? What are the benefits?

22 Does the quality of community care meet consumer expectations?

How much would it cost to deliver the full range of services that consumers actually want, at industry standard?

23 What are we trying to achieve with restorative care/recovery based models of community care and what are appropriate outcome measures?

24 What is the impact of low income on community care use and outcomes?

25 How can we work better across the different sectors providing support to older people with mental health problems?

26 How effective is the wellness approach at improving quality of life as well as health and functional status?

27 What factors positively contribute to outcomes associated with ageing well?

28 What works when and how to maintain the health and well being of family carers?

29 Identify what interventions (particularly early intervention approaches) are effective and under what circumstances.

30 Why does care at home fail and what is needed to make it succeed?

Getting involved in community care research

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1 Locating a researcher to collaborate with

Suggestions for finding researchers:

▪ **Via your own organisation**—Many organisations have research officers or have been involved in research collaborations. Your colleagues may be able to assist.

▪ **Via ACSA or the AAG**—Your local contacts within Aged and Community Services Australia and the Australian Association of Gerontology would have a good knowledge of the key researchers in your area interested in community care issues. See www.agedcare.org.au or www.aag.asn.au for information on the ACSA and AAG state contacts. The AAG website also includes the contact details for the AAG Collaborating Centres in Australia, the leading ageing research centres in the country (see www.aag.asn.au).

▪ **Via conferences**—ACSA and the AAG and other groups such as the Australian and New Zealand Society for Geriatric Medicine (ANZSGM) and the APS Psychology and Ageing Interest Group run state and national conferences related to ageing. These provide an important opportunity to meet with researchers and hear about research projects.

▪ **Via the Ageing Well Network website**—The network ceased public operations as of 31 December 2009, however, the following materials on the website are still available:

Network participants—senior researchers with a track record of ARC and NHMRC research grants with a commitment to multi-disciplinary, collaborative research on ageing. A listing of all participants including their institutions and areas of interest is available at www.ageingwell.edu.au

Network members—the network has over 300 researchers and others with an interest in ageing. Members include a number of very experienced researchers as well as mid-career and early-stage researchers, postgraduate students and practitioners with an interest in ageing research. A listing of all members including their institutions and areas of interest is available at www.ageingwell.edu.au

You can search the above lists and identify potential researchers either by their area of interest or by institution. While the above lists do not provide contact details, this information is readily found on the staff directories available on university websites (e.g. www.usyd.edu.au/staff/directories).

▪ **Via the Ageing Research Online website**—The Department of Health and Ageing has developed the Ageing Research Online website (www.aro.gov.au) as a portal for information on ageing research. This website includes a database of research projects which can be searched by topic area, researcher and institution and includes the contact details for the researchers involved in each project.

▪ **Via the Expert Guide website**—Expert Guide (www.expertguide.com.au) provides the details of academic and professional experts. While the listing is not exhaustive, it is a useful starting point.

▪ **Via your local university**—Many universities have listings of experts within particular fields via 'Find an Expert' search functions etc. Many of these were developed to assist journalists to find relevant researchers but they can also be used by other interested groups. Websites for most universities across Australia are provided in the following table:

How to involve older people in your research activities

The Ageing Well Network and the Australasian Centre on Ageing compiled useful guidelines on involving older people in research — available on the Ageing Well website. A valuable connect point with older people is through stakeholder organisations, including:

Alzheimer's disease	www.alzheimers.org.au
Carers Australia	www.carersaustralia.com.au
Council on the Ageing	www.cota.org.au
National Seniors Australia	www.nationalseniors.com.au

State	University	URL
ACT	Australian National University	http://info.anu.edu.au/ovc/media
	University of Canberra	www.canberra.edu.au/media-centre
NSW	Charles Sturt University	http://news.csu.edu.au/director
	Macquarie University	www.pr.mq.edu.au/
	Southern Cross University	www.scu.edu.au/scunews/experts
	University of Newcastle	www.newcastle.edu.au/research
	University of New England	www.une.edu.au/mpa/media
	University of New South Wales	www.unsw.edu.au/experts
	University of Sydney	http://fmweb01.ucc.usyd.edu.au
	University of Western Sydney	http://corpapps.uws.edu.au/media/expert
NT	Charles Darwin University	www.cdu.edu.au/research/profiles
QLD	Griffith University	http://app.griffith.edu.au/01/griffithprofiles
	Qld University of Technology	www.expertguide.qut.edu.au
	Southern Cross (Gold Coast) University	www.scu.edu.au/scunews/experts
	University of Queensland	www.uq.edu.au/uqresearchers
	University of the Sunshine Coast	www.usc.edu.au/university/newsevents/services
SA	University of Adelaide	www.adelaide.edu.au/directory/expert
	University of South Australia	www.applications.unisa.edu.au/dore
TAS	University of Tasmania	www.research.utas.edu.au/warp/reports
VIC	Deakin University	www.deakin.edu.au/marketing/media
	La Trobe University	www.latrobe.edu.au/news/find-an-expert
	Monash University	www.monash.edu.au/news
	RMIT University	www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=s3oxlcosrjd
	Swinburne University of Technology	www.swinburne.edu.au/corporate/marketing/mediacentre/core/expert-guide
	University of Melbourne	http://newsroom.melbourne.edu/expert
	Victoria University	http://wcf.vu.edu.au/expertise
WA	Curtin University of Technology	http://experts.curtin.edu.au
	Murdoch University	www.murdoch.edu.au/News/Find-an-expert
	University of Western Australia	www.directory.uwa.edu.au/#research
	Edith Cowan University	www.ecu.edu.au/media/media-experts

3 How to fund research

Industry-funded research

- **Contracts/consultancies**—industry and constituency groups as well as government departments can employ researchers or hire consultants (including university researchers) to conduct specific projects, the outcomes of which are not always publicly available (more information is provided in a paper by Warwick Bruen on research consultancies available at www.aag.asn.au).

- **Research partnerships**—this can be in the form of informal collaborations, involvement in ARC funded Linkage or NHMRC funded partnership programs (see below) or more formal ongoing partnerships between industry and university groups (such as the partnership between the University of Queensland and Blue Care). Joint collaboration, requiring shared research aims and activities, can be beneficial for both parties in terms of increased access to people, expertise etc.

Government funded research

The Commonwealth has identified the four National Research Priorities (NRPs) which underpin the research support it provides. The NRP most relevant to ageing is 'Promoting and Maintaining Good Health' which includes the priority goal of 'Ageing Well, Ageing Productively' (see www.arc.gov.au).

The government provides support to research within Australia through two main bodies:

- **Australian Research Council (ARC)**
  The ARC has a range of funding schemes the most relevant of which are the *Linkage programs* (see www.arc.gov.au). They support collaborative research and development projects between higher education organisations and other organisations, including within industry, to enable the application of advanced knowledge to problems. The Linkage program aims to encourage and develop long-term strategic research alliances between higher education institutions and industry in order to apply advanced knowledge to problems, or to provide opportunities to obtain national economic or social benefits.

- **National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)**
  The NHMRC has a range of funding programs including research fellowships, career development awards, project and program grant schemes and strategic awards, including the recent Dementia Research Grants (with the Department of Health and Ageing) and Ageing Well, Ageing Productively grants (with the ARC). See www.nhmrc.gov.au/grants/types/index.htm for more details on the grant types provided by the NHMRC). Most recently, the NHMRC has introduced the partnership scheme which funds research collaborations in a similar fashion to the ARC Linkage scheme (see www.nhmrc.gov.au).

Commonwealth and state governments may also provide funding opportunities through relevant departments (health and health promotion, disability, family and community services, etc) and the state offices for ageing. The WA Government run lottery is also a major provider of research grants (see www.lotterywest.wa.gov.au).

Other funding sources

The following national organisations have provided ageing research grants or commissioned research:

Australian Rotary Health Research Fund
www.australianrotaryhealth.org.au

Brotherhood of St Laurence www.bsl.org.au

Council on the Ageing www.cota.org.au

National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre
www.productiveageing.com.au

Funding opportunities exist for ageing research related to specific diseases, treatments, or professional bodies — including:

Alzheimer's disease www.alzheimers.org.au

Arthritis www.arthritisaustralia.com.au

Brain Research www.brainaustralia.org.au

Stomal Therapy Nursing www.stomaltherapy.com

Wound Management www.awma.com.au

These non-government funding sources may be more accessible to community care organisations than the ARC and NHMRC schemes and may provide a useful source of funding for earlier stage research which can feed into larger research collaborations.

In addition, philanthropic trusts provide funds for research. The following trusts have a good track record of funding ageing research:

ANZ trusts incl. the Wicking Trust
www.anz.com/personal/private-bank-trustees

Grosvenor Settlement www.eqt.com.au

Hammond Foundation www.hammond.com.au

Helen MacPherson Smith Trust www.hmstrust.org.au

Jack Brockhoff Foundation www.brockhoff.info

Perpetual Trustees Australia Ltd www.perpetual.com.au

West Australian Nurses Memorial Trust www.wanursestrust.com.au

A number of new websites are also dedicated to locating philanthropic funding in Australia:

www.researchaustraliaphilanthropy.org

www.trust.com.au

www.philanthropy.org.au

Getting approval for research—navigating ethics committees

Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs) have been established to ensure that all research is compliant with the 2007 National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and must be registered with the NHMRC. HRECs have been established in most larger organisations involved in research (universities, government departments, area health services, large provider organisations etc). Smaller organisations without their own HRECs can generally obtain ethics approval through their partner university etc. Grant funding bodies will typically require evidence of HREC approval before funding is provided. The process of obtaining ethics approval is often time consuming as the committee may only meet infrequently and will often request changes to the research protocol (e.g. provision of greater information to the research participants, modifications to surveys, etc) before final approval is given. For more information on the operation of HRECs see www.nhmrc.gov.au

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Getting involved in community care research

The general aim of research involving students is to build the skills and experience necessary to allow the student to take up employment within the research, policy or practice arenas. The table below gives an overview of the major types of research involving students and the approximate duration of the research project. Students often progress through several of the following degree types with honours and masters projects laying the groundwork for more detailed research within a PhD. Generally the level of engagement with an industry partner and potential benefit increases in proportion to the duration and complexity of the research project. However, it should be noted that even in the case of short-term projects such as internships during undergraduate degrees, industry groups and researchers can benefit from the collaboration through exposure to new ideas and the building of relationships. In general, undergraduate and honours projects do not involve any costs for the industry partner whereas masters and PhD projects will usually involve the industry partner sharing some of the costs.

Degree type	Duration	Description	Project relation
Undergraduate degree	3 years	Some undergraduate degrees include research internships with community and residential care organisations.	Short-term specific projects
Honours	1 year full-time extension of the undergraduate degree	Provides the foundations of basic research methods through the completion of a short-term research project.	Approximately 6 months active research
Masters by coursework	1.5 years full-time or 3 years part-time	Combines coursework with a minor research project. These are typically taken by candidates who are seeking to qualify in a particular professional discipline but also provides some exposure to research.	Approximately 3–6 months active research often limited in scope (such as a review of the existing literature)
Masters by research	2 year full-time or 4 years part-time	Provides intermediate level training in research skills and practice with some research methods training and a more substantial research project. Can be used as a foundation for entry into a PhD.	Approximately 9 months full-time
Professional doctorate	3–4 years full-time, 6–8 years part-time	Designed to provide specific professional development for health professionals who wish to acquire the knowledge and skills required to assume leadership roles, e.g. program planners, clinical managers, and/or educators.	Approximately 2 years full-time
Doctor of philosophy (PhD)	3–4 years full-time, 6–8 years part-time	Designed to provide graduates with the opportunity to undertake in-depth study in a specialised area. The PhD degree is important for academic appointments as well as for research appointments in government and industrial research and development organisations.	Approximately 2 years full-time

If you are interested in a student researcher undertaking a specific project within your organisation then you should approach a relevant university or senior researcher (see above for suggestions on how to find a researcher). There is usually several months lead time before a research topic can be set up and a suitable student identified which means projects sometimes do not start until 12 months after initial contact. During discussions with university partners, it is important to negotiate critical issues like reporting timelines, access to findings etc.

If you have a longer-term interest in research you might want to consider completing one of the above research degrees yourself. This would provide you with the opportunity to conduct research of interest to you, develop expertise of use to your organisation, and build collaborations with other researchers. The Ageing Research Online website provided by the Department of Health and Ageing (www.aro.gov.au) provides a searchable database of ageing-related courses, many of which include a research component. The state divisions of the Australian Association of Gerontology would also be a good source of information on suitable courses in your region (see www.aag.asn.au for contact details).

Nursing staff employed in the community care sector have shown strong interest in Commonwealth supported places for Masters of Nursing Research at many institutions. This is a significantly cheaper degree as the fees are government-subsidised.