

Trunk Line

Reimagining mental health in regional Australia

February 2024 / Edition 8



Manna Institute's UniSC team (left to right): David Duncan, Jesse Baker, Danna Lee, Professor Mathew Summers, Dr Mia Schaumberg and Dr Dan Wadsworth.

New year ... new Manna solutions

In mid-December the Federal Government released the Mid-year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO). It highlighted important reforms to the Australian mental health system. This included further investment in existing and new digital services to ensure 24/7 access to mental health support and further investment in services for First Nations Australians and children and young people.

So, as we move into 2024, what are the implications for rural and regional communities, the mental health workforces that support them and the work of our institute? Manna Director Professor Myf Maple shares her thoughts.

"The government's priorities – to improve access to health services, expand digital mental health service system navigation, and extend education and training opportunities for regional students, including those studying health disciplines through new regional study centres – are important steps in developing a mental health system that is equitable and accessible," Myf said. "Much of the research and training Manna has underway focuses on equity and access and aligns with key elements of the government's directions in mental health care.

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Welcome to 2024!

We hope everyone had some refreshing time out and feels ready to take on what will undoubtedly be a big year for Manna Institute.

On **February 21 from 12-12.45pm AEDT** join Director Professor Myf Maple as she outlines the exciting year ahead and the many opportunities and events that will culminate in our conference in December. It's a wonderful chance to reconnect and focus on our most pressing priorities.

[Register here](#)

New year ... new Manna solutions (continued)

"Precision targeting is needed to ensure that resources are available to support everyone who needs support at the time they need it. However, mental ill-health isn't always easy to identify early, and there is still shame and stigma related to being mentally unwell, and this is particularly pronounced in regional areas."

Myf said that ensuring there are many entry points into support, like the digital gateways announced, helps to open access.

"However, an unintended consequence of the government's extension into 60-day prescribing is that community pharmacists who know their communities really well have less face-to-face contact with people with mental health concerns."

In late 2023 the National Mental Health Commission released the *Curiosity, Compassion and Care* report based on extensive research by the University of New England. It drew on the first-hand experiences of more than 3,400 people.

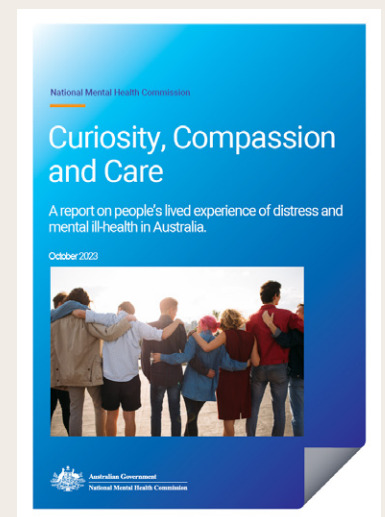
Curiosity, Compassion and Care highlighted the need for:

- A whole-of-community, whole-of-service approach to mental health;
- Services that increase connectedness;
- Early responses to distress;
- The monitoring of disconnection and transition; and
- A move away from describing mental ill-health as a single event.

"Manna's work focuses on these five key areas, exploring innovative ways to address peoples' needs, as well as the barriers to accessing appropriate care," Myf said. "Our projects demonstrate the power of place-based translational research and preventative interventions for the most vulnerable in regional communities."

A disappointment in the MYEFO announcement was the cessation of the Regional Research Collaboration scheme that funded the establishment of Manna Institute.

"The removal of this initiative is hugely disappointing. Initiatives focused specifically on regional Australia and those who live, work and play outside our cities have demonstrated time and again that our needs are different, and so are the solutions needed to address inequities," Myf said. "Manna Institute will continue to advocate for regional Australians across many platforms as we extend our reach and continue to explore diverse funding to ensure the continuation of our important work."



Manna success

Their contributions to Manna and beyond, and subsequent higher profile, has earned three of our top-notch researchers much-deserved recognition.

At the University of the Sunshine Coast, Dr Dan Wadsworth has been recognised with two 2023 awards – a School of Health Research Excellence Award for Outstanding Early or Mid-Career Researcher and the university-wide Vice-Chancellor and President’s Award for Excellence in Research Impact (Early Career). Dan attributes this acknowledgement “in no small part” to the focus his Manna Postdoctoral Fellowship has enabled.

Over at Southern Cross University, Manna ECR Dylan Poulus has also been the recipient of an Early Career Researcher Award for Research Excellence, and Associate Professor Christian Swann was similarly recognised as a MCR.

Congratulations all three of you. We are fortunate to have you within the Manna family.



Dr Dan Wadsworth



Dylan Poulus



Associate Professor Christian Swann

First Nations Working Group

Update from Kisani Upward

This year the group will be dedicated to increasing First Nations representation within Manna and furthering the networking, scholarships and mentoring, and career and research opportunities it provides. Our group will also be designing an open source ‘Considerations Guideline’ for working and researching with Aboriginal communities in a culturally safe and respectful way.

Among the exciting events planned for 2024 is a Key Thinkers Forum, in partnership with Asthma Australia, the University of New England and Macquarie University. And the working group will participate in the NSW Aboriginal Mental Health and Wellbeing Workforce Forum on 5-6 June. **Keep an eye on the Manna website and social media pages for details.**



HDR Community of Practice

(CoP) update from Dr Dan Wadsworth

Our HDR CoP continues to grow, engage and support 20 students.

The group enjoyed a career planning workshop in December with Associate Professor Lee Stoner from the University of North Carolina, USA, to consider long-term career goals and personal branding. Popular Shut Up And Write (SUAW) sessions are underway – twice a week via Zoom – to provide dedicated writing time, accountability, networking opportunities and peer support.

Monthly seminar sessions resume this month (generally the first Monday), and the group is looking forward to the Manna mentoring program kicking off in 2024.



To learn more about the HDR CoP, contact mannainstitute@une.edu.au.

To contribute to a professional development seminar for the CoP, please **contact Dan**.

Manna Institute Research Mentoring (MIRM) program

The MIRM program aims to cultivate a vibrant and sustainable research community by fostering confidence, professional development and research skills among novice and emerging researchers. For experienced researchers, the learning exchange will provide fresh perspectives and innovative ideas, and a great opportunity to 'give back' to the research community.

Stay tuned for strategic matching of mentors and mentees from different universities as we further our inter-institutional culture of collaboration. We hope to inspire and develop a new generation of researchers, facilitate knowledge transfer, enhance the development of RRR research, and support the sustainability of the mental health research workforce.



Growing organically

We are thrilled by the growing interest in Manna Institute, as news of our people, projects and progress spreads.

This firm foundation now enables us to expand our network of researchers in 2024 and to explore additional opportunities for collaboration.

If you are a researcher interested in contributing to one of our four key regional mental health research streams, apply via **[Research Affiliate EO](#)**.

Research streams – 2024

Research efforts are gathering pace and 2024 promises to be a busy year as Manna’s teams work to secure grants to ensure our sustainability. Researchers will gather at our Manna Retreat in March (date to be confirmed) to report on their progress towards the following goals.

Children, Youth and Family

Dr Cassy Dittman

Aim: to advance understanding of the mental health of children and families in RRR Australia by examining their needs, the availability and accessibility of appropriate services, and how we can apply digital technologies and interventions.

2024 priorities:

- An environmental scan, involving information-gathering across multiple data sources (empirical literature, existing data sets, policy documents, stakeholder input and lived experience);
- A scoping review of existing literature;
- An audit of existing data sets and their access procedures, to identify suitable data for secondary analyses; and
- Identification of gaps in data collection and future directions and priority areas to set a framework for advancing research and practice.

Health and Wellbeing in Later Life, Disability and Chronic Disease

Dr Dan Wadsworth and
A/Prof Belinda Cash

Aim: to focus on creating, collating and sharing knowledge to support sustainable, community-led solutions that support mental health and wellbeing for older adults and their caregivers in rural and regional Australia.

2024 priorities:

- Expanding our flagship Rural Older Adults Mental (ROAM) Health Research program;
- Mapping existing partnerships and projects to identify opportunities to consolidate our research strengths and support strategic capacity-building;
- Publication of a scoping review exploring the implementation of evidence-based initiatives and a paper examining rural data collection practices;
- Promotion of a showcase demonstrating rural research case studies; and
- Development of a rural well-being toolkit that collates high-quality, rurally appropriate resources designed to empower individuals, families, communities and service providers.

Research streams – 2024 (continued)

Suicide Prevention and Distress

Professor Myf Maple

Aim: to identify pathways from distress to mental ill-health in rural regional Australia, and develop solutions appropriate for diverse communities and needs.

2024 priorities:

- Finalisation of our 'Outside the City' report on regional suicide prevention, informed by several workshops held across 2023;
- Prioritise partnerships to address the research priorities identified through the series of workshops and seek funding to commence work tackling these challenges; and
- Form a Community of Practice for those interested in suicide prevention in regional Australia, including health professionals, supporters, people with lived experience and researchers.

Physical Health

Professor Tracy Kolbe-Alexander

Aim: To develop a comprehensive approach that will build on current knowledge and practice which aims to improve the physical and mental health of those living in regional and remote Australia.

2024 priorities:

- Publish a position paper on the intersection between physical and mental health;
- Create a systems map of the determinants of mental health in RRR;
- Establish and build on existing partnerships and stakeholders, including community-based organisations and inviting those with lived experience to join the group. This includes expanding the skills and programs matrix;
- Conduct an audit of existing research and potential areas for collaboration;
- Identify priorities/factors that can and can't be changed to inform future grant applications and capacity-building initiatives; and
- Introduce a quarterly research symposium to give members an opportunity to share their research or programs.



Growing mental health collaboration

Manna’s contributions to mental health conversations and policy are set to expand with the institute joining a national consortium of research translation centres focused on mental health.

We are thrilled to now be part of the Australian Architects of Mental Health (AAMH), established to address the fragmentation, duplication and inefficiency that has long plagued mental health care across the country. With a mission to “strive continuously and collaboratively to drive the establishment of clinical research and translation infrastructure, co-production, innovation and supports at a scale not previously available”, we are excited by what’s in store for 2024.

AAMH spans mental health research and translation initiatives representing a broad range of disorders, demographics and geographies. The idea is to develop a single voice for advocacy and priority-setting, to better serve the clinical needs of communities and, ultimately, improve health outcomes.

Members include the ALIVE National Centre for Mental Health Research Translation, Australian Early Psychosis Collaborative Consortium, Australian Eating Disorder Research and Translation Centre, the Growing Minds

Australia child and youth clinical trials network, and the Mental Health Australia General Clinical Trials Network. Collectively, we represent researchers, Lived Experience and First Nations representatives, carers, practitioners, clinicians, policy-makers and academics in the mental health space.

“Manna brings the all-important rural, regional and remote (RRR) perspective to this group,” said Manna Director Professor Myf Maple. “Our involvement swells our network and ensures that RRR needs are front-of-mind in national discussions and that all mental health research considers the needs of regional Australians.”

Manna presented with representatives from the five other consortium members at the SMHR conference in Perth in December, during a session aptly named Shifts in the Foundations.



Subscribe today

If you are not already on our mailing list,
then you’re missing out!

It’s a fantastic way to keep abreast of Manna
matters and to share in our progress.

Subscribe to Trunk Line today

Manna Institute’s Acknowledgement of Country

Manna Institute respectfully acknowledges the First Nations peoples as the continuing custodians of this continent and pays respect to Elders past, present and emerging. The institute honours their rich cultural heritage, beliefs and enduring relationship to the lands and communities in which we all live, learn and work.

UNE Healthy Campus initiative

We're thrilled to see the growing interest in UNE's Healthy Campus initiative, in collaboration with Manna.

With nearly 200 participants signed up, this groundbreaking research project aims to enhance the physical, social and mental wellbeing of the UNE community.

Lead researcher David Duncan (Manna ECR, University of Sunshine Coast) and the team are gearing up for the initial surveys in partnership with SportUNE to track the program's success. Insights gained from this project have the potential to benefit the wider university sector.

Participants will receive their next communications shortly and we will keep you informed about progress.



Members of SportUNE Sophie Barraclough, Jesse Turner and Caitlin Bryce.

Mental Health Innovation Challenge

Blue-sky thinkers: We Want You!

Manna members are invited to exercise their creativity as part of an Innovation Challenge being hosted by the Hunter New England and Central Coast Primary Health Network in partnership with the University of Newcastle and University of New England.

The challenge aims to deliver novel early intervention strategies and services that can be adapted and scaled to maintain mental health in our regions. It's an exciting opportunity to team with fellow researchers, lived experience representatives, carers, innovators, technology providers and entrepreneurs to learn, connect and bring your idea to life.

A series of events in February will then culminate in the main Innovation Challenge in March in Newcastle, and the chance for selected teams to share in prize money to help realise their visions. But don't delay. It all starts with an online information session and Q&A on **6 February from 1-2pm AEDT.**

[Register here.](#)

For more information, go to:
www.thepnhn-innovationchallenge.com.au

Who knows? Your collaboration could improve the lives of thousands in rural and regional communities across Australia.

Grow with us

Like the eucalypt species for which it is named, the Manna Institute has deep roots in rural and regional communities. Robust and fast-growing, it will serve as a vital resource and navigational aid, just as First Nations peoples have prized manna gums for centuries.

Finding the Sun

Professor Bindi Bennett

Professorial Research Fellow, National Centre for Reconciliation, Truth and Justice, Federation University, and First Nations Senior Researcher with Manna

"We live on 5 acres and I ride a lot. It's my thing.

My 10-year-old quarterhorse Bubbles is the quietest, sweetest, gentlest soul. When he first arrived, he had a lot of anxiety, and I have a lot of anxiety. Between us, we have managed to get regulated together and it's now a lovely partnership. I'd like to think I've helped him and he has definitely helped me.

I ride every second day, and once or twice a week we go for a long trail ride or have a lesson or do something different. Research has shown that horses improve your mood and self-esteem and can emotionally regulate you. From about 20 paces your horse also matches your heartbeat.

To get on a very large animal that has a mind of its own and can or could choose to hurt you, and doesn't, requires trust. Bubbles will often move his body to prevent me from falling off. It's a very trusting partnership.

I can't catch him if I'm not regulated; he will simply walk away. I have to stand and breathe and ground myself. Then, when I ride, I have to be in my body. It's my mindfulness practice. As an added bonus, he's one of my best friends, who I get to have fun with. We do stuff that we enjoy, and that gives me a serotonin and dopamine



rush, so it ticks all the boxes mental health-wise.

When I was a social worker, I used to joke that I told all my secrets to my horse. It's still true today; being in the saddle gives me time to think and process what's going on for me. It's a safe space and I find it quite healing. He's very generous.

Bubbles is extremely sensitive to moods and energy; all horses are very responsive to non-verbal cues. That's why a lot of people use them in therapy – you are 'talking' all the time. It's a constant give and take; sometimes he leads and sometimes I lead. As with any relationship, you have to give to the relationship to get from the relationship. I might give him a piece of licorice or a scratch or leave him alone. Sometimes we just spend time together. He's one of the loves of my life."

Prevention in Practice Summit

Report from Dr Marg Rogers

It was a wonderful opportunity to attend this one-day event in December hosted by Everymind, in partnership with members of the [Wellbeing and Prevention Coalition in Mental Health](#), [HMRI Healthy Minds Research Program](#) and [Manna Institute](#).

Four sessions focused on bridging the knowledge-to-practice gap in the prevention of mental ill-health and we heard from Australian leaders in practice, research and policy. Keynote speakers from a broad range of mental health fields included Everymind's Jaelea Skehan and Sally Fitzpatrick, and a panel of experts (including Manna's Sarah Wayland) comprising practitioners, policy-makers and researchers.

Sessions focused on addressing social and commercial determinants of mental health; effective prevention practice across systems and sectors; connecting whole-of-government and community action; and achieving impact.

The summit improved my holistic understanding of the sector.

I can now clearly see the intersection of research, policy and practice, as well as where impact is happening. As an audience member, I valued the opportunity to contribute ideas to the setting of national priorities in mental health practice and research, and to hear about best-practice examples.



Webinar Series Monday 19 February, 12-1pm (AEDT)



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Webinar Series

In February our webinar will explore the topic

Embracing change: the role of online technology in mental health support

We'd be delighted if you could join us. [Please register in advance](#)

If you missed any of our previous webinars, you can access all the recordings [here](#).



Featuring special guests:

Josh Wiseman,
Head of Data and Insights at Batyr;

Dr Anwaar Ulhaq,
Senior Lecturer - ICT (Artificial Intelligence) at CQU and Manna Institute MCR; and

Dr Anna Brooks,
Chief Research Officer with Lifeline Australia.



Support

Manna Institute is dedicated to addressing the mental health needs of Australians sensitively and respectfully. We appreciate that times of change can be especially challenging.

For support, contact:

Lifeline

13 11 14
www.lifeline.org.au

Beyond Blue

1300 22 46 36
www.beyondblue.org.au/
get-support

13YARN

13 92 76

Guyaa Dhuwi

www.gayaadhuwi.org.au/
if-you-need-help/



Important dates

February	March	April	May	June	July
<p>19 February Manna webinar 12-1pm AEDT</p> <p>21 February Director's 2024 Welcome 12-12.45pm AEDT</p>	<p>18 March Manna webinar (TBC)</p> <p>Manna Retreat (TBC)</p>	<p>15 April Manna webinar (TBC)</p>	<p>20 May Manna webinar (TBC)</p>	<p>HMRI Early Career Researchers Summit – Newcastle (TBC)</p>	<p>15 July Manna Round Table – Save the date</p>

We want to hear from you!

Please share your news of Manna achievements and opportunities via mannainstitute@une.edu.au.

