



Best wishes for the festive season

As 2023 rapidly draws to a close, we can all be justly proud of what Manna Institute has achieved this year.

Beyond the traditional metrics of research success – grants and publications – we have a lot to celebrate from the past 12 months as we have dedicated ourselves to impactful research for regional Australia. New partnerships, new projects, new ways of thinking, new perspectives and even new mini-Manna members.

Our team welcomed two new additions. First Project Administrator Ruthie's daughter Daphne Mae Rule (14 October) and then, a fortnight later, Dr Mia Schaumberg's daughter Phoebe Mia Eyles (31 October). While Ruthie is on parental leave we welcomed Kat McKai into the PA role, and Professor Mathew Summers has taken on the Chief Investigator role at USC.

There have also been promotions and awards to celebrate, with Tracy Kolbe-Alexander's (USQ) promotion to Professor and Belinda Cash's (CSU) promotion to Associate Professor. And our First Nations representative Shay-Lee Coulson has been recognised at the National Rural and Remote Health Awards and by the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (see page 6). Congratulations to all three of you.

Also commanding media attention this year were Associate Professor Sarah Wayland, who appeared on the SBS *Insight* program in August (a two-part series on seeking justice) and made several television appearances during Missing Person's Week. HDR candidate and Lived Experience representative Darren Wagner recorded an episode of *Insight*, too, in November. This exploration of survivor's guilt will be screened in early 2024.

Continued ...

Monthly overview

The Manna project office thanks everyone for their hard work and commitment to Manna this year and wishes you all a relaxing and joyful holiday break. A reminder that the Manna Institute project office will be closed over the Christmas and New Year holiday period – from **December 22, 2023 until January 2, 2024**.

Everymind's Life in Mind newsletter.

How Manna Institute is addressing rural suicide.

[View article here.](#)

We are delighted to report that Dr Mia Schaumberg, Manna Institute CI from UniSC, has safely welcomed a healthy baby girl. Phoebe Mia Eyles made a very fast entrance on October 31. All are doing well and thoroughly enjoying their baby bubble. Welcome Phoebe!



Best wishes for the festive season (continued)

The growth of Manna's reach has been inspiring as our extension and engagement scales new heights. Some 17 students are now actively participating in our newly established HDR Community of Practice, expertly led by Dr Dan Wadsworth. This opportunity for cross-institutional connection is helping to give our doctoral candidates a sense of belonging and expansive professional networks. They will continue to reap the rewards of this co-operation for months and years to come, and offer our new students commencing in 2024 a great foundation upon which to commence their higher degree candidature.

In the spirit of learning from each other, Trunk Line has continued to shed light on how Manna researchers take care of their own health and wellbeing, through the series Finding the Sun. Never has it been more important, as the work of the institute gathers pace. Keep an eye out for stories about two of our aspiring novelists – Belinda Cash and Sonja Diab – in the months ahead.

As the calendar year ticks over, I am excited by what's on the horizon for Manna. In 2024 we will be welcoming new HDR students and researchers across their career trajectories, continuing to bolster our collaborations with communities, and delving more deeply into the ongoing mental health workforce challenges facing regional Australia, plus much more. Of course, one of our priorities will also be securing sustainable long-term funding.

But, for now, I encourage you to take advantage of this time to reflect on your own personal achievements and to enjoy some precious downtime to recharge. Thank you for your contributions to Manna and our important work.

I wish you and your families a relaxing holiday season and look forward to seeing what, together, we can accomplish in 2024.

Manna Institute Director, Professor Myf Maple

Finding the Sun

Professor Alison Calear, The Centre for Mental Health Research (CMHR), ANU

"One of the things I like to do to support my mental health and wellbeing is to spend time in nature, by going for a walk, taking a hike in the bush, or having a picnic with family and friends.

Most weekends I go for a walk with a close friend that I have known for over 30 years. This provides me with the opportunity to connect and unwind, as well as get some much-needed time in the fresh air and sunshine after a busy week in the office.

I also enjoy going for long walks and hikes with my family. My sons really enjoy being in nature and exploring local nature reserves and parks. I cherish this time with them, as they are growing up quickly."

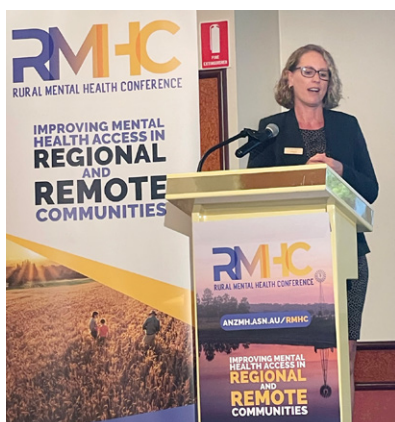


Rural Mental Health Conference

November 7-10, 2023 - Albury, NSW



Manna Institute was represented by 27 researchers at the recent Rural Mental Health Conference (RMHC) in Albury. The week started with pre-conference Manna workshops so our research streams could work on their program logic models and plans for 2024. Dr Dan Wadsworth conducted a very informative session for Manna's HDR Community of Practice.



Foregrounding Lived Experience

“We all have a lived experience and a story to tell. I have had a unique experience in life and have learnt something from it. I’m not healed or fixed; I’m on a journey. But because of my unique skillset as well as some qualifications, I am able to sit with and listen to people tell their stories.”

And that’s exactly what Manna’s Lived Experience representative and PhD researcher Darren Wagner did during the recent four-day Rural Mental Health Conference (RMHC) in Albury. Here he gives his take on the conference as well as the preceding Manna workshops.



The road to Albury with Darren

Attending his first RMHC was a great learning and networking opportunity, according to Darren, who also saw it as a chance to foreground the institute’s vital work.

“Manna’s physical presence at the conference was important, to get the word out – to say here’s who we are, how we can help and invite others to join us,” Darren said. “It gave all participants a map of what mental health looks like in rural and regional Australia, who the main players are, and where the challenges and gaps remain.”

Beginning the conference with dedicated Manna workshops to discuss our four research streams and HDR Community of Practice provided clarity and ideas. “Our members are starting to take ownership of their streams,” said Darren, who is most interested in distress and suicide prevention. “Being all together, in person and virtually, we were able to explore the connections between the streams and to see how we are all flowing in the same direction.”

“Geography prevented some people from attending, but there was something really special about meeting people who we had only seen as a little square for the past year, and sitting down and having lunch together. Deeper connections were made.

“There was a lot of cross-pollination and invitations to join other streams, but it is important to recognise that our Lived Experience representatives, like our First Nations representatives, are a finite resource. Moving forward, it’s vital to match Manna’s research projects and research needs, and to create a database not only of the research being conducted but also the people involved.”

Darren found the RMHC program itself inspiring. “Despite having a lack of funds or support, many great local health districts, public health networks, communities and initiatives are finding ways to address significant challenges,” he said. “I was listening and watching for how they are integrating lived experience into

research, policy development and community engagement, as a researcher and former service user and potential future service user.

“And there were all these great little nuggets of gold that we need to share – to consider what others are doing and how these resources and approaches might be applied elsewhere, so we don’t have to reinvent the wheel.”

Hearing directly from the users of mental health services was another highlight. “Poet Murray Hartin demonstrated that lived and living experience is about storytelling. Listening to Voices Theatre brought us face-to-face with performers who had unique challenges and experiences in engaging and receiving mental health services, often at the hands of unskilled service providers and services, which was confronting. These four people had the audience on the edge of their seats and quite a few people were emotional. It tied directly into my research [about the role of peer workers and how this emerging workforce might be expanded and made more sustainable in rural and regional communities].”

But then incidental conversations – one with a doctor of artificial intelligence – also broadened Darren’s research “over a cup of coffee” and fed straight into training he delivered the following week. “Attending conferences like this helps you to build a library of resources and a great network of contacts,” he said.

It was “quite the week” for Darren, who also squeezed in a last-minute flight to Sydney to take part in an SBS *Insight* program discussing survivor’s guilt, to be screened in early 2024. An SBS podcast on his research will also be recorded this month.

Thanks for the conference wrap Darren.

A unique perspective

Last week a large group of Manna researchers met for the first time to advance their world-first project to improve the physical health of people living with severe mental illness in rural and regional Australia. Lived Experience representative Paul Klotz was one of them.

How was the planning meeting?

I was nervous when I arrived and positive when I left. Historically, lived experience has been brought in after a research project is almost done, by which time all the decisions have been made. With this project, we are being consulted from the outset. There was a lot of conversation around taking a person-centred and person-led approach, which is really good, but I also like to say it's about being person-informed. That is a significant mindset shift and it's extremely encouraging to see Manna adopting this approach.

How do you see your role in the research?

This project is about taking a more holistic approach to health care.

I have diverse and complex physical and mental health conditions, as well as disabilities, and live in Bundaberg (Queensland), so I can provide a regional perspective. Having found my voice, I try to speak up for others who may not have the same capacity and confidence. I speak from a systematic and policy perspective but also from the perspective of what it's like to be the person being supported or not supported.

Unfortunately, mental health and physical health have been seen as two disparate worlds. It's about getting them interacting and collaborating with each other.

I will provide input into the design and implementation of the project, and hopefully help to engage other people with lived and living experience. It's a living process and we need to regularly assess our progress and tap into each other's incredible knowledge and experience.

What do you hope to achieve?

I want to help build a bridge to span the gap between academia and the community, to improve the quality and impact of research. Bringing about improvements to policy and the health system depends on cold, hard data. I hope we can provide a model of research, a gold standard for integrating lived and living experience that can be replicated in future projects.

I see part of my role as encouraging males to break down the archetypal stoic model, so they can better express their needs, emotions and frustrations, and seek support. I also want to instil hope and encourage other lived and living experience people to be involved and share their knowledge, insights and expertise. We are the experts in our own fields.

Historically, we have steered away from talking about mental illness and suicide prevention, chronic health and chronic pain, and the links. One of my mantras is to normalise these conversations.



A Rising Star shines

Congratulations to Goojinburra medical student and Manna First Nations representative Shay-Lee Coulson, who was named Rising Star in the inaugural National Rural and Remote Health Awards last month.

Shay-Lee is a valued member of Manna Institute’s Program Management Group and maintains a busy schedule as a mother of five and third-year medical student at UNE. The award recognises these contributions, in addition to her role as Indigenous representative with the UNE Medical Students Association, New England branch of the National Rural Health Students Network, and the NSW Medical Students Council. She also sits on UNE’s Student Consultative Committee. Phew!

Growing not only the number of Indigenous medical students but also the number who graduate is Shay-Lee’s primary objective. “It’s the healthcare disparities I witnessed growing up and the stories of what my family experienced that inspire me to break down health inequities wherever I can,” said Shay-Lee, who has Masters degrees in public and Indigenous health. “Academia is not designed for First Nations students, who have cultural obligations and family responsibilities and are often off Country, so holding space for them is important to supporting their success and elevating First Nations knowledges.”



Stop Press!

And in news just in, Shay-Lee has also been named the Australian Indigenous Doctors’ Association’s Medical Student of the Year. **Go Shay-Lee!**

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.



EVERYMIND

Tickets on sale

Prevention in Practice

Summit 2023

Wednesday 6 December 2023,
Newcastle, NSW

A new one-day event hosted by Manna partner Everymind that focuses on bridging the knowledge-to-practice gap in the prevention of mental ill-health.

[More details and secure tickets here](#)

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INSTITUTE

Webinar Series

Monday 19 February

12-1pm AEDT



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

Moderated by Associate Professor Sarah Wayland (UNE).

Register in advance: mannainstitute.au/webinars

SOCIETY FOR MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH CONFERENCE 2023

PEOPLE
and
PLACE

society for
mental
health
research

Society for Mental Health
Research Conference 2023

Theme: People and Place

29 November – 1 December 2023,
Perth, WA



Holiday viewing

Missed our Manna webinars this year? What a great opportunity to catch up on some compelling viewing over the break.

mannainstitute Webinar Series
Kicks off on 10 August
Regional Mental Health Workforce.

mannainstitute Webinar Series
Thursday 7 September
Co-design – What does it mean?

mannainstitute Webinar Series
Thursday 23 November
Content and connection: How we talk about mental health, suicide and missing persons in the media and its impact on rural communities?

Catch-up on webinars here



Important dates

29 November–1 December, Society of Mental Health Research (SMHR) 43rd Annual Conference, Perth WA.

6 December, Prevention in Practice Summit, Newcastle NSW.

Manna project office closed

December 22, 2023 until January 2, 2024.

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.

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/

We want to hear from you!

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

