



Pictured: Kisani Upward, First Nations artist-in-residence, Manna strategy workshop, Southern Cross University Gold Coast campus. Image: Simon Scott Photo.

Chief Investigator check-in

Professor Sonja March



Sonja recently hosted the online Research Project Opportunity Seminar, attended by almost 40 Manna representatives. The 20 projects demonstrated the rich variety of research being undertaken through the institute. It was great to see so many Manna researchers presenting their research and providing opportunities for others to get involved.

Sonja has also received a number of inquiries from Manna's Lived Experience representatives about joining a working group for short courses. The outline for the first short course – Mental Health Program Evaluation in Regional Settings – has been developed and will include examples of different evaluation strategies and frameworks, and advice on how frameworks can guide program planning and implementation, effect policy change and attract funding. Consultations with the working group will inform the course's full development and we invite suggestions on real case examples to attach to the modules.

Manna's first UniSQ-based HDR student is working with Govind and Sonja on the evaluation of a trauma-informed support framework and mental health program for regional Queensland schools.

Finally, Sonja has just returned from the International Congress on Child and Adolescent Psychopathology, where she led a symposium of five Australian researchers highlighting innovations in child and adolescent mental health practices.

Monthly overview

This month's webinar – on **Thursday 7 September** – explores the topic of **Co-design what does it mean?** Moderator Sarah Wayland will lead this discussion, with special guests across industry, academia and Lived Experience. Don't miss it!

So long, for now, to Ruthie Rule, our wonderful Manna Institute project administrator, who leaves us this month in preparation for the arrival of her second baby in October. We will miss your brilliance, joy and friendship, and look forward to seeing you in a year. Best wishes Ruthie, Brandon and Daisy on your new arrival.

Manna Institute strategy workshop



Images: Simon Scott Photo.

It's a wrap

“Engaging and exhilarating” is how Manna Director, Professor Myf Maple, has described our 2023 strategy workshop, hosted by Southern Cross University at Cooloongatta last week.

“Everyone was so heavily engaged, demonstrating their commitment to the success of Manna,” Myf said. “It was a time for us to appreciate Manna’s potential and to recognise that we are part of a truly collaborative effort that has community, Lived Experience and First Nations perspectives at its heart.”

The three-day event welcomed Manna’s Program Leadership Group, partners, Chief Investigators, Early and Mid-Career Researchers, First Nations and Lived Experience representatives, and some of its 31 newly appointed senior researchers. A series of formal and informal conversations provided great opportunities to learn, network and develop new ways to contribute to our institute.

“It was a chance to reconfirm our goals; that, together, we want to see a mentally healthier regional Australia and that Manna can contribute to achieving that,” Myf said. “Rather than seeing that goal as overwhelming, there is a preparedness to take on the challenge.

“It was also pleasing to see how engaged the Deputy Vice-Chancellors Research are, individually and collectively. This strong institutional support will be the making of Manna.”

The 50 people attending the workshop received updates on the suite of exciting research projects underway. But simply being in the company of like-minded colleagues brought its own rewards.

“I heard people say that in Manna they have found their tribe, that they don’t feel so alone in their research, and that’s powerful for people who often work in isolation in regional universities,” Myf said. “There is so much we can do virtually, but time together, face-to-face, fosters trust and future collaboration. Mental health researchers form an important part of the broader health workforce, and feeling part of a team, even when working alone, is so important for success.”

New ideas and strategies were not the only outcomes of the workshop. Gifted artist-in-residence Kisani Upward, a Kamlaroi/Wiradjuri Yinaar PhD student with UNE’s School of Health, beautifully captured its key messages. “Kisani’s contribution was absolutely fabulous,” Myf said. “Her narrative, of what Manna represents and how our forest ecosystem works, was a strong, affirming expression of our interconnectedness.”

We asked Myf to reflect on Manna’s key achievements to date

- Bringing people together and building networks, regardless of where an individual is in their research trajectory, is “100% Manna’s most valuable contribution”, according to Myf. The strong commitment to staying the course, beyond the current funding cycle, reflects how greatly members value the institute’s important work.
- Recognising and promoting research that considers the needs of communities, critiqued by those with Lived Experience and First Nations peoples, serves as a national example.
- Inspiring trust among researchers and within research projects that leverages individual expertise has the potential to benefit entire populations.
- A continued focus on financial sustainability, diverse funding arrangements and support from individual institutions and RUN, underpins all future research projects.
- Strategic planning capitalising on Manna’s strengths will be concentrated on flagship projects under its four work streams (Child, Youth and Family; Ageing, Disability and Chronic Disease; Physical Health; and Distress and Suicide) over the next six months.

Thank you to all those who took time out of their busy schedules to attend the workshop and contribute so generously to the future success of Manna.



A winning team

Manna’s fabulous network is expanding, and fast.

We are thrilled to now welcome aboard our senior researchers – whose extraordinary breadth of expertise and experience will undoubtedly support the institute’s continued growth.

These talented researchers, drawn from each of our partner universities, have already begun to contribute to Manna’s leadership and training programs. They will help to develop the knowledge and skills of our ECRs and MCRs through workshops, panel discussions, seminars and the HDR

community of practise (and/or joint HDR supervision). And we have much to learn from them, especially when it comes to joint grant applications and project development.

Thank you for investing in Manna and our teams. We look forward to partnering with you in the months ahead.

Each month we will profile one of our senior researchers.

See Professor Julie Jomeen’s (SCU) on page 6.

Finding the Sun



Professor Chris Doran

We asked Manna Chief Investigator Professor Chris Doran how he maintains his mental health and wellbeing.

“I am very conscious of maintaining a healthy work-life balance. If you don’t make the time for your health and wellbeing, that time slips away. It’s important to me to switch off and engage with my family. Not just be there, but really engage.

I enjoy exercise, ranging from cycling and surfing to running and kayak paddling. The cycle to work is a 15 km round trip along creeks and through parks. It’s one of the highlights of my day as it allows me to think about what the day ahead will bring and to reflect on what I can do better the next day.

I also like to have targets with my exercise, and I’m currently working towards the Gloucester Tri Challenge this month, which I try to do every year. It’s like a triathlon, including 25 km off-road cycling, 11 km paddling down the Barrington River and a 10 km run through farm land. It’s a great community event and people come from all over Australia to be part of it.”

Run-down on research

An amazing variety of partnerships and projects are thriving beneath the expansive canopy of the Manna Institute.

And the beauty is, those opportunities will only continue to grow as more people and communities engage with our important research.

The webinar Professor Sonja March hosted in early August outlined 20 projects now underway on the themes of **Child, Youth and Family; Ageing, Disability and Chronic Disease; Physical Health; Distress and Suicide.**

You can find more information on the investigators, project summaries and research methodologies in this booklet or hear from the researchers themselves in a [recording of the webinar](#).

We have a wonderful network of experts now contributing to Manna's goals. Your enthusiasm for finding new solutions to old challenges is nothing short of inspiring.

And it's not too late for others to join in. We welcome research students eager to collaborate and learn with us, so please get in touch if you or someone you know is interested.

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.



Welcome new ECR Dylan Poulus (SCU)

What is your particular research area of interest?

I explore the mental health of people who play competitive video games (esports). Specifically, I focus on how we can use popular online esports to create awareness around mental health and build mental health skills. My research investigates the influence of personality (e.g., resilience) and psychological skills (e.g., coping) on stress and burnout among esports players. I have recently developed an online mental health intervention designed to build mental health awareness and coping skills.

How does your research impact rural, regional and remote mental health research?

Esports are played online and require only a basic internet connection, making them a great way to access people across Australia, including rural and regional populations. Rural and regional gamers aren't well-researched and present significant mental health research opportunities. My research will access rural and regional gamers to provide the first exploration of their mental health and help adapt and implement an online mental health intervention to support rural and disadvantaged youth and adults to promote positive mental health.

What do you hope to gain from this experience with Manna Institute?

This position will give me time to progress and accelerate my development as a mental health researcher. It supports my leadership development through mentee and mentoring opportunities and I look forward to mentoring HDR students and fellow ECRs and to be mentored by Manna MCRs and senior researchers. I am excited to collaborate with Manna's mental health experts.



Senior researcher spotlight

Professor Julie Jomeen
Executive Dean Health and Professor of Midwifery,
Faculty of Health, Southern Cross University (SCU)

Julie is a nurse and a midwife with over 20 years' clinical and academic experience in midwifery and maternity. She joined SCU in 2020 from the University of Hull, UK.

Julie completed her PhD in the School of Medicine at the University of Leeds, UK. She led a Research Group for Maternal, Reproductive Health for over 10 years at the University of Hull, leading to successful grant funding from the UK National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and charitable organisations.

A key focus of Julie's work is perinatal mental health (PMH) and psychological health in child-bearing women, and ensuring that women with PMH problems, irrespective of location, have effective assessment and access to the right care at the right time by skilled

practitioners. This has led to strong collaboration in national and international research, service development work and practitioner training.

More recently, Julie has focussed on the conceptualisation of perinatal wellbeing and how such models might support women. She was on the management committee of an EU COST Action for Post-partum depression; a member of a second COST Action focussed on traumatic birth, and is co-applicant on a newly successful COST Action Maternal Perinatal Stress and Adverse Outcomes in the Offspring.

Julie has supported over 20 PhD students to successful completion and examined over 35 PhD theses during a career characterised by research leadership. She is a Visiting Professor at Soochow University, China, has served on several Australian grant awarding panels, and was Vice Chair of the NIHR Non-medical Clinical Academic Fellowship Scheme prior to leaving the UK.

Resources at hand



If you can't make it to one of our webinars or sessions, don't despair. We are continually adding to our [Resources page](#), to capture fact sheets and video recordings for you to read and view at your leisure.

You will find information relating to research partnerships and practices, leadership and health workforce issues, plus mental health. Our latest fact sheet, Ambiguous Loss 101, is up from Associate Professor Sarah Wayland. So, too, is a fact sheet on Pathways to Peer Support and slides on interdisciplinary research.

We are adding to Resources all the time, so keep an eye on this page for helpful advice and professional development opportunities. You may even have something to share from your own field of research, that could benefit other Manna members.

Webinar – Thursday 7 September, 12-1pm AEDT



Manna Institute webinars firmly cast the spotlight on rural and regional mental health.

The next webinar will tackle the intriguing topic of Co-design – what does it mean?

We'd be delighted if you could join us.

Please register in advance

Next month: Thursday 5 October, 12-1pm

Our topic for Mental Health Awareness Month is Content and connection: How we talk about mental health, suicide and missing persons in the media and its impact on rural communities?

Featuring special guests:

Shannon Calvert, Lived Experience Educator, Advisory Consultant with Roses in the Ocean – Industry;

Professor Tracy Kolbe-Alexander, Research Fellow Manna Institute (UniSQ) –Academic; and

Dr Tania Pearce, Lecturer in Health and Community Service (UNE) – Lived Experience.



Our webinar series is moderated by Associate Professor Sarah Wayland (UNE).

It explores topics relevant to and a priority for our state/ federal governments, service providers and communities. Three perspectives – of an industry representative or service provider, someone with Lived Experience and an academic – are shared and recorded during the first 30 minutes of each webinar (and available later for public viewing). Once the recording concludes, the floor is opened to questions for the panellists – a fantastic opportunity for our ECRs, MCRs and HDR students.

In the news



School of Computing, Mathematics and Engineering Dr Anwaar Ulhaq (Images: Charles Sturt University).

AI research to reduce mental health challenges in Australia

A leading Charles Sturt University artificial intelligence (AI) academic is working with mental health experts and others to transform mental health support in Australia.

[READ MORE](#)



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

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The Western NSW Research Network

WHRN 2023 Research Symposium

September 11 & 12

[Day 2 - On-line tickets available](#)

You are welcome to share your experiences and insights on rural mental health research practice, values, and policy.

The initiative is a collaboration between Charles Sturt University, the Manna Institute, and the University of Canberra Mental Health Policy Unit, in partnership with the International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership (IIMHL) – Rural Behavioural Health Collaborative.



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

September/October

September webinar **Thursday 7 September**,
12:00PM-1:00PM (AEDT)

October webinar **Thursday 5 October**,
12:00PM-1:00PM (AEDT)

November/December

November webinar **Thursday 2 November**,
12:00PM-1:00PM (AEDT)

Manna Institute pre-workshop **Tuesday 7
November**, Albury, NSW.

Rural and Remote Mental Health Symposium
2023, **Wednesday 8–Friday 10 November**,
Albury, NSW.

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

We want to hear from you!

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

