



## **Student Research Opportunities**

Training the future leaders of mental health and substance use research



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SYDNEY**  
—  
Matilda Centre

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# What is the Matilda Centre?

The Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use (the Matilda Centre) delivers research programs to prevent, treat and reduce substance use and mental disorders. The work of the Matilda Centre is built upon the success of the formerly-known NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence in Mental Health and Substance Use (CREMS).

With a focus on prevention, treatment and epidemiology, our research increases knowledge exchange and develops strategic partnerships with the aim of increasing the knowledge base around the effective prevention and treatment of mental and substance use disorders. In addition to making the findings of our research available in the scientific literature, an integral component of the Matilda Centre is the translation of these research findings into educational curricula, training programs and clinical resources, as well as resources for the general public.

The Matilda Centre also recognises the importance of providing postgraduate students with the necessary training and skills to develop as the future leaders of substance use and mental health research.

## Why study at the Matilda Centre?

### Objectives and benefits

Research students within the Matilda Centre have access to world-class specialised training in the prevention, treatment, and epidemiology of mental health and substance use disorders. These opportunities provide students with the foundations upon which to build their own successful programs of research. Working alongside peers and internationally recognised research leaders in research institutions around the world, students receive training in a variety of methodologies used to undertake mental health and substance use research. In addition, students have the opportunity to enhance their leadership, management, and research skills in a supportive and collaborative group.

The **benefits** of pursuing research studies within the Matilda Centre include:

- Access to world-class research supervision and training opportunities
- Development of a strong professional profile and career trajectory
- Increased confidence and skills as researchers
- Ongoing professional and personal development support within a collaborative and friendly workplace
- Opportunities to attend and present at national and international conferences
- Facilitation of collaborations with senior academics, peers and service providers in the community
- Access to ongoing monthly meetings with peers to share ideas and develop skills appropriate to PhD stage.



*The Matilda Centre PhD Group 2019  
(L to R): Siobhan Lawler, Peter Clay,  
Logan Harvey, Sam Lynch, Jack  
Wilson, Jennifer Debenham, Lucy  
Grummitt*

## Overview and purpose of the Matilda Centre PhD group

The Matilda Centre PhD group is coordinated by two PhD students (currently Sam Lynch and Logan Harvey) on a two-year rolling term, in collaboration with two academics (currently [Dr Katrina Champion](#) and [Dr Christina Marel](#)), who facilitate meetings. The group is overseen by a member of the Matilda Centre Executive ([Prof Katherine Mills](#)). The purpose of the group is to provide PhD students within the Matilda Centre with support, skills and training to help them through their PhDs, and is delivered through meetings and workshops tailored specifically to the needs of its members.

## Meetings

Monthly meetings provide members with the opportunity to meet, share ideas, openly discuss any issues and troubleshoot difficulties. In addition, students have the opportunity to practice presentations, attend specialised workshops, and be exposed to a diverse range of ideas and approaches. Students who are not physically located at the Matilda Centre can join meetings via our videoconferencing facilities.



PhD group meeting, 2019

Some examples from recent meetings held in 2019 – 2020 are below:

<b>Workshop topic</b>	<b>Date</b>
Statistical approaches	June 2019
PhD processes at the University of Sydney	July 2019
Conferences and events	August 2019
Writing workshop	September 2019
Networking	October 2019
Grant writing workshop	November 2019
Online training	March 2020
International postdoctoral experiences	May 2020
Writing papers efficiently	July 2020

## Feedback from current PhD students

### Logan Harvey

*I had worked as a Clinical Psychologist for a number of years before deciding to pursue a PhD based on my clinical work. I approached several universities and researchers, but my decision was rapidly made after making initial contact with the team at The Matilda Centre. I was quite surprised not only at the enthusiasm for my research, but also the level of support and opportunities on offer. I now have a team of supervisors guiding my research, each with their own strengths and areas of expertise. I have opportunities to develop my own research pathway while continuing my clinical work, and have a large team of other students, research assistants, and academics readily available for help when needed. The team at Matilda bring a lot of energy to their research, and their commitment to high quality research is rapidly helping me establish my research skills and career.*



### Rachel Visontay

*I had been working as a research assistant at the Matilda Centre for almost three years before I decided it was time to take the plunge and apply for a PhD. Getting that experience working on a range of projects with different teams of people helped me zero in on a topic I was excited about and supervisors that were a good fit. I feel lucky to work in such a supportive, collaborative environment – the Centre is brimming with academics, research and support staff who have so much expertise and experience, and who are so generous with their time. I'm constantly provided with opportunities to further my learning in the areas I'm interested in and the skills I want to develop. It's also great to be able to share the experience with a big group of other students going through the same highs and lows!*

## Ivana Kihás

*I started working as a Research Assistant with researchers from the Matilda Centre in 2013 and moved to Europe in 2016. In 2017, my supervisor contacted me about a PhD opportunity in an area I was very interested in. It was a wonderful feeling knowing that even after you leave, the people you worked with have you in mind for opportunities. Without any hesitation, I decided to move back to Australia and began my PhD with the Matilda Centre. Having previously worked at the Matilda Centre where I made friends with colleagues who pursued PhDs before me, I knew there was nowhere else I would do a PhD. The supportive nature of the Centre is like nowhere else. There are countless opportunities to grow, learn something new every day, ask questions whenever they arise, and receive constructive feedback as frequently as you ask for it. The Matilda Centre has a wonderfully unique approach to work and mentoring in that every staff member works together to help one another. I am so grateful for the opportunity to do a PhD with the Matilda Centre and would highly recommend this Centre to anyone who is considering a PhD.*



## Student research opportunities with the Matilda Centre

Each student is guided throughout their research degree by a supervisory team consisting of at least two academic staff members (see section on [models of supervision](#)).

Staff members at the Matilda Centre are available to contribute expertise across a broad range of topics relating to mental health and substance use, spanning the epidemiology (understanding patterns and prevalence), prevention and treatment of these conditions. See pages 9-28 to browse individual Supervisor Profiles. Academics at the Matilda Centre are available to provide supervision for research programs including:

- PhD
- Masters of Research
- Masters of Forensic Psychology
- Masters of Clinical Psychology
- Masters of Public Health
- Doctor of Medicine (MD) placement students
- Honours

For PhD students, thesis submission may be in the form of a traditional thesis, or a thesis with publication, which encourages students to publish research papers throughout their candidature. For more information about thesis format, see [Thesis Submission](#).

## Getting started and developing your research ideas

### Developing your research area

In Australia, PhD awards are based on a written thesis reporting the results of a three-to-four-year research program. Similarly, Honours, Masters and MD programs involve a thesis and/or research component.

Students are often drawn to Masters or PhD study because they have a passion for developing knowledge, thinking critically, and the process of research. For some, there may also be a particular topic or issue that motivates or interests them. When starting to develop your ideas about a potential research topic, it is useful to consult with an academic with expertise in your area of interest to help refine your ideas and consider whether the topic is likely to be feasible as a Higher Degree Research project. They can also offer advice about methodological approaches or statistical procedures you might consider. It is common to feel nervous about choosing a topic area, worry about choosing the

“right” topic, or feel uncertain about whether the topic will continue to motivate you in 3-4 years’ time. The good news is that your research questions are not written in stone, and your project will develop and evolve over time.

## Talking with potential supervisors

An important part of the process of beginning a PhD is finding a supervisor who is interested in your research questions and has the skills and expertise necessary to support your candidacy. One way to find out whether an academic has research interests and experience that fit well with your interests is to browse their biography, research and conference publications. It is a good idea to arrange an initial meeting with potential supervisors to get a sense of whether they are likely to be a good match in terms of research interests, expertise, personality and style of working. For some advice on things to consider when selecting a supervisor, have a look at this thoughtful blog post: [How to Choose Your Supervisor](#).

In pages 9-30 we have provided biographies, research interests and expertise of the academics available for research supervision at the Matilda Centre. We would encourage you to contact us individually if you would like additional information about getting started with a research degree.

Below are some suggested points of discussion with a potential supervisor:

- Tell them about yourself, what motivates you to pursue research study, and what experience you have had in the past
- If you have a research topic in mind (you might not, and that’s ok too), discuss your ideas and consider together whether the proposed project is likely to be feasible within the timescale and will make a meaningful contribution to the literature
- Find out about the potential supervisors’ working style, research area, skills and expertise that might fit with your project and provide you the opportunity for training and development.

If we are not able to provide the support or expertise you need, we will happily point you in the right direction. Don’t be afraid to come and meet us for an informal chat, we’re friendly!



*Jennifer Debenham presenting at the 2019 3 Minute Thesis Heats for Sydney Medical School*



*Audience at the 2019 Three Minute Thesis Heats for Sydney Medical School*

## Supervision models

Before applying for a higher research degree or a scholarship, you will need to find a supervisor and develop a research proposal. Most universities require students to contact a researcher and secure their agreement to supervise prior to submitting a formal application for admission. At the Matilda Centre we not only seek the best HDR students to work with us, but we also ensure that students have appropriate supervision and support. We therefore have an assessment process, prior to the standard University of Sydney enrolment process. If you and the Centre decide to continue towards a formal application with the University, the material you prepared for the Matilda Centre would be applicable to your University application.

Research students (whether PhD or Masters by research students) are required to have at least two current academic staff or affiliates of the University of Sydney as part of their supervisory team, one of whom will be designated as the lead supervisor. Your supervisors can come from the same faculty or department as you, or from a different departments and/or faculties, as long as they have relevant expertise to your project and are listed on the University of Sydney’s supervisor register. It is also possible to have an academic external to the University as part of your supervisory team.

Research supervisors are responsible for ensuring that there is adequate support, resources, information and guidance available; they report progress to the relevant head of department; and ensure conduct is within the relevant guidelines determined by the Academic Board. There are advantages to having both senior and more junior career academics involved in research supervision: while senior staff are more established and offer the benefits of broader professional networks and expertise, early career researchers have more recent experience of the process of completing a PhD and may have greater availability to provide you with training and support.



(L to R): Briana Lees, Daniel McFadden and Siobhan Lawler, working in one of Matilda Centre's shared spaces

## Scholarships and support

Full-time research students are often eligible to apply for University and Australian Government scholarships. They provide a living allowance so that you can commit to full-time study. Scholarships are granted on the basis of academic merit, which includes your undergraduate grade point average and extra research attainments. PhD scholarships are usually for three years and Masters scholarships for two years. Note however that annual scholarship stipends vary depending on type and source. Fees vary according to institution, so potential students should clarify the fee structure at their chosen institution.



Logan Harvey and Peter Clay in one of Matilda Centre's PhD 'pods'

A scholarship may also include:

- A relocation allowance
- A thesis allowance
- A full tuition fee scholarship (international students) overseas student health cover (international students).

**Examples of some available scholarships include:**

- [Research Training Program \(RTP\) scheme](#) (formerly known as Australian Postgraduate Awards)
- [Australian Rotary Health Post Graduate Scholarships](#)
- [National Health and Medical Research Council PhD Scholarships](#)
- [Australian Indigenous and Health Professional Scholarships Heart Foundation](#)

The Matilda Centre also offers scholarships from time to time depending on funding availability.

Additionally, researchers may be associated with an existing project that includes funding to support a research higher degree student. It is worth asking potential supervisors if any such opportunities exist. Similarly, many PhD students within the Matilda Centre have the opportunity to supplement their stipends by working on related projects as research assistants.

## Communication

All Matilda Centre PhD students are members of the Matilda Centre PhD group and provided with a copy of this Handbook. Members communicate via email and at monthly meetings, with those located off-site welcome to attend meetings remotely via Zoom. Students are encouraged to use email to generate informal discussions or seek advice.

## Annual Feedback Survey



Outcomes of the Matilda Centre PhD group are annually assessed via a feedback survey. At the end of each academic year, members are asked to confidentially respond to a short, electronic survey. This information both evaluates the annual progress of the program and informs revisions and refinements to the program.

## Contact us

Visit our [website](#) for more details about the Matilda Centre and research opportunities. Do not hesitate to contact individual Matilda Centre members directly (see contact emails on individual staff pages); we'd be happy to meet with you to discuss possibilities for supervision.

For general questions about this handbook or student research opportunities, please contact Dr Katrina Champion ([katrina.champion@sydney.edu.au](mailto:katrina.champion@sydney.edu.au)) or Dr Christina Marel ([christina.marel@sydney.edu.au](mailto:christina.marel@sydney.edu.au)).

For more information about applying to do a research degree at the University of Sydney, see <https://sydney.edu.au/study/find-a-course/postgraduate-study/postgraduate-research.html>.



[TheMatilda\\_USyd](#)



[TheMatildaUSyd](#)

## Potential supervisors and contact details

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*We are grateful to the previous Early Career Researcher Training Program coordinators for their assistance with the development of this Handbook*





### **Dr Emma Barrett**

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney

#### **Background**

Dr Emma Barrett is a NHMRC Emerging Leadership Fellow and Forensic Psychologist at the Matilda Centre and Honorary Senior Fellow at the University of Wollongong. She is the Program Lead for Trauma and Crime Research at the Matilda Centre. Dr Barrett holds a Masters in Forensic Psychology (UNSW) and a PhD in Public Health and Community Medicine (conferred 2012, UNSW). Her PhD research examined 'Hurt people who hurt people' - relationships between post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance use and aggression. Dr Barrett is currently leading a program of research that aims to understand and address the psychological and criminological consequences of trauma exposure across the lifespan. In recognition of her outstanding track record and the international significance of her work, she has received a number of awards including the prestigious Australian-American Fulbright Scholarship in 2016.

#### **Research interests**

- Psychological consequences of trauma
- Trauma informed care
- Development and evaluation of interventions for trauma related comorbidity (e.g., PTSD and substance use)
- Substance use prevention and early intervention
- Understanding links between mental health, substance use and crime
- Mental health and substance use treatment in forensic settings

#### **Methodological expertise**

- Randomised controlled trials
- Intervention development
- Longitudinal analysis (including GEE analysis)
- Data linkage

To find out more, visit Emma's [profile](#) or contact [emma.barrett@sydney.edu.au](mailto:emma.barrett@sydney.edu.au)

### Dr Louise Birrell

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney



#### Background

Dr Louise Birrell is a Research Fellow within the Matilda Centre at the University of Sydney. Dr Birrell's research examines the links between alcohol use and mental health in adolescents. She has extensive experience trialing substance use and mental health prevention programs and conducting systematic reviews of substance use related mobile apps and app development. Dr Birrell will commence an Australian Rotary Health funded Postdoctoral Fellowship in 2019 to develop a smartphone app for adolescents to support their friends with mental health or substance use problems.

#### Research interests

- Anxiety disorders
- Mood disorders
- Adolescent alcohol use
- Adolescence
- School-based prevention
- e-Mental Health

#### Methodological expertise

- Development of e-health tools
- Analysis of large-scale epidemiological data sets (e.g. discrete-time survival models)
- Design and coordination of randomised controlled trials, particularly in school settings
- Analysis of longitudinal data
- Latent variable modelling (e.g., latent class analysis, parallel latent growth modelling, growth mixture models)

#### Potential Topics

I am available to supervise honours, masters, PhD and undergraduate student placements related to any of my research interests listed above. Some examples of potential topics are listed below:

- Development and evaluation of a mobile app to help adolescent support their peers with mental health and/or substance use problems
- Reviewing the evidence on effective peer mental health and substance use programs targeted at young people
- Systematic review of e-health apps
- Examining trends and/or links between adolescent alcohol use and mental health

Projects would suit undergraduate or postgraduate students with an interest in these research topics.

To find out more, visit Louise's [profile](#) or contact [louise.birrell@sydney.edu.au](mailto:louise.birrell@sydney.edu.au)



### **Dr Marlee Bower**

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney

#### **Background**

Dr Marlee Bower is a Research Fellow at the Matilda Centre who is interested in the broader social determinants of mental health, particularly in understanding loneliness and isolation amongst marginalised individuals and how this relates to the built environment. She has a Bachelor degree in Psychology (Hons) at the University of Sydney and completed her PhD in Community Psychology and Translational Health Research in 2019 from the Translational Health Research Institute (Western Sydney University). Her thesis provided an intersectional analysis on the experience and effects of loneliness amongst people with a lived experience of homelessness within the Greater Sydney region. Marlee has experience working on evaluations of services for people experiencing homelessness, including housing, healthcare and psychosocial supports, and has worked in homelessness strategy at a state government level. She has also worked in research and policy for an independent statutory government agency providing oversight of adult correctional and Juvenile Justice centres in NSW.

#### **Research Interests**

- The effects of and treatments for loneliness, social isolation and support in vulnerable populations
- Criminal justice and criminology
- Translating mental health research for social policy and practice
- Homelessness, mental health and substance use

#### **Methodological expertise**

- Mixed methods research
- Qualitative methods – interviews, focus groups, thematic analysis across different epistemological frameworks
- Quantitative methods – Cross sectional studies using regression and ANOVA models & panel studies using repeated measures and multi-level modelling

#### **Potential topics**

I am available to supervise honours, masters, PhD and undergraduate student placements related to any of my research interests listed above.

To find out more, visit Marlee's [profile](#) or contact [marlee.bower@sydney.edu.au](mailto:marlee.bower@sydney.edu.au)

### Dr Katrina Champion

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney



#### Background

Dr Katrina Champion is an NHMRC Early Career Fellow/Senior Research Fellow and Program Lead of Healthy Lifestyles Research at The Matilda Centre, University of Sydney. She holds a PhD in Public Health and Community Medicine from UNSW Sydney (2016). Katrina's research interests include the development and evaluation of innovative digital resources to improve the physical and mental health of young Australians, multiple health behaviour change and school-based substance use prevention. From 2017-2019, Katrina spent two years with Prof Bonnie Spring in the Department of Preventive Medicine at Northwestern University in Chicago to further her research in these areas. Katrina is currently leading the Health4Life Study, a large multi-site cluster randomised controlled trial of an eHealth multiple health behaviour change intervention to reduce chronic disease risk factors among Australian adolescents (71 schools across NSW, QLD and WA).

#### Research interests

- Digital interventions to improve the physical and mental health of adolescents
- Lifestyle risk behaviours in young people (including substance use, smoking, poor diet, physical inactivity, sleep and sedentary behaviour/screen time)
- Clustering of risk behaviours and multiple health behaviour change
- School-based interventions
- Substance use prevention and drug education

#### Methodological expertise

- Development and evaluation of eHealth interventions
- Design and coordination of randomised controlled trials, particularly in school settings
- Longitudinal data analysis (mixed models)

#### Potential topics

- Applying the Multiphase Optimisation Strategy (MOST) to develop a healthy lifestyles intervention for parents and their adolescent children
- Examining risk factors for, and physical and mental health consequences of, engaging in multiple lifestyle risk behaviours
- Understanding covariation of risk behaviours and mediators of multiple health behaviour change (e.g., self-efficacy)

To find out more, visit Katrina's [profile](#) or contact [katrina.champion@sydney.edu.au](mailto:katrina.champion@sydney.edu.au)



### **A/Prof Cath Chapman**

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney

#### **Background**

Cath is Director of Research Development and Strategy at the Matilda Centre and Program Director of the NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence in Prevention and Early Intervention in Mental Illness and Substance Use which is a large collaborative research initiative led by the University of Sydney. Her research focuses on the epidemiology and prevention of mental and substance use disorders with a focus on using data from large scale population surveys, clinical trials and systematic reviews to improve research, prevention and treatment. Research interests include understanding changing patterns of mental and substance use disorders and harms, gender differences in the prevalence and emergence of substance use and other risk behaviours among young people, and the role of parents in the prevention of substance use and related harms among adolescents. Cath works closely with the epidemiology, prevention and Cracks in the Ice teams at the Matilda Centre.

#### **Research interests**

- Risk and protective factors for mental and substance use disorders among girls
- Changing patterns of mental and substance use disorders among young people including gender differences
- Service utilisation and barriers to care
- The role of parents in the prevention of substance use disorders

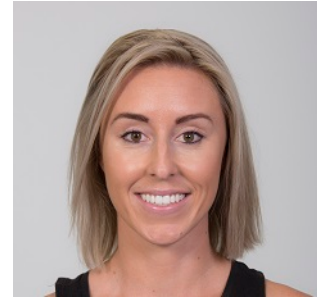
#### **Methodological expertise**

- Analysis of large-scale epidemiological data sets (e.g. discrete-time survival models)
- Design and coordination of randomised controlled trials, particularly in school settings
- Development of online prevention programs for parents and young people

To find out more, visit Cath's [profile](#) or contact [cath.chapman@sydney.edu.au](mailto:cath.chapman@sydney.edu.au)

### Dr Lauren Gardner

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney



#### Background

Lauren is a Research Fellow at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney. She holds a Bachelor of Psychology with first class Honours (2013) and a PhD in Psychology (2018) from the University of Wollongong. Her PhD focused on the cognitive and social factors underlying participation and dropout in organised youth sport. She is currently working on the *Health4Life* Initiative which aims to develop and evaluate the first eHealth program simultaneously targeting six key lifestyle risk factors (physical inactivity, poor diet, risky alcohol use, smoking, passive recreational screen time and poor sleep) for chronic disease among secondary school students. Lauren is also working on *Climate Schools*, a universal, online school-based program designed to prevent substance use, mental ill-health and related harms among adolescents.

#### Research interests

- Clustering of multiple lifestyle risk behaviours during adolescence
- Improving health and wellbeing through sport and physical activity
- Drug and alcohol prevention and education
- School-based prevention
- Internet-based interventions

#### Methodological expertise

- Design and analysis of cross-sectional and longitudinal survey data
- Structural equation modelling (e.g., mediation)
- Latent variable modelling (e.g., latent profile/cluster analysis, growth mixture models)

To find out more, visit Lauren's [profile](#) or contact [lauren.gardner@sydney.edu.au](mailto:lauren.gardner@sydney.edu.au)



### **Prof Frances Kay-Lambkin**

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney

#### **Background**

Frances is a Psychologist and Lecturer in the Faculty of Health, University of Newcastle, and Professor at the Matilda Centre. She is internationally recognised for her innovative computer-based interventions for mental health and substance use disorders. She has also worked in a clinical research capacity with people experiencing psychotic disorders, personality disorders, and substance use problems. Prof Kay-Lambkin has a strong publication and funding record. She is a Chief Investigator on several projects that are being conducted as part of the Matilda Centre.

#### **Research interests**

- Health equity
- Accessibility of psychological treatment
- Co-occurring mental health and substance use problems
- Computerized and internet-based treatments

#### **Methodological expertise**

- Randomised controlled trial development and coordination
- Psychological intervention development and evaluation
- eHealth tool development and evaluation
- Translation of psychological interventions into practice

To find out more, visit Frances' [profile](#) or contact [frances.kaylambkin@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:frances.kaylambkin@newcastle.edu.au)

### Dr Steph Kershaw

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney



#### Background

Dr Steph Kershaw is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use. Steph leads an innovative program of research and translation to reduce the impact of illicit substance misuse. Her research aims to improve the health outcomes for individuals, families and communities especially among vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Steph is currently Project Lead for *Cracks in the Ice*, a National Online Portal funded by the Australian Government Department of Health to develop and disseminate evidence-based resources about crystal methamphetamine ('ice') for the Australian Community. She also leads Australia's first project to develop and adapt culturally appropriate resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to reduce the impact of crystal methamphetamine use among communities.

Steph completed her PhD in 2015 at the University of South Australia, which focused on the impact of genetic predictors of opioid dependence on neuroimmune and endocrine markers in healthy adults. Following which, she undertook several appointments at the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva, Switzerland focusing on the impact of illicit drugs on public health, and the translation of evidence-based research into international policy outcomes.

#### Research interests

- Epidemiology, prevention and treatment of substance use
- Translation of evidence-based research
- National and international policies for illicit drugs
- Improving health outcomes for individuals and communities

#### Methodological expertise

- Design and analysis of randomised controlled trials
- Design, collection and analysis of online survey research

#### Potential Topics

I am available to supervise honours, masters, PhD and undergraduate student placements related to any of my research interests listed above.

To find out more, visit Steph's [profile](#) or contact [steph.kershaw@sydney.edu.au](mailto:steph.kershaw@sydney.edu.au)





### Dr Christina Marel

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney

#### Background

Christina is an NHMRC TRIP Fellow/Senior Research Fellow at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, where she is also Program Lead of Treatment and Translation of Complex Populations.

Her research focuses on improving our understanding of, and responses to, co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders in complex populations. This include projects examining the long-term patterns and predictors of heroin use and mental health and understanding individual periods of risk. She is currently coordinating the 18-20 year follow up of the NHMRC funded Australian Treatment Outcome Study (ATOS), which is the largest and longest running study to examine treatment outcomes for heroin dependence in Australia. She is also leading the third revision of the Australian Government Department of Health-funded *Guidelines on the management of co-occurring alcohol and other drug and mental health conditions in alcohol and other drug treatment settings*, and recently developed an accompanying online training program to facilitate their uptake into clinical practice.

#### Research interests

- Patterns and predictors of substance use and mental health conditions
- Heroin dependence
- Development of online training programs and e-resources to translate evidence-based research to clinicians
- Relationship between crime and substance use over time

#### Methodological expertise

- Quantitative methods, including longitudinal analysis (including GEE), finite mixture modelling (trajectory modelling)
- Mixed methods
- Qualitative methods, including interviews, focus groups, thematic analysis

#### Potential Topics

- Long-term patterns and predictors of heroin, other substances, mental health, and/or criminal involvement over time
- Workforce development and capacity building in relation to co-occurring mental and substance use disorders
- Translating research into practice.

To find out more, visit Christina's [profile](#) or contact [christina.marel@sydney.edu.au](mailto:christina.marel@sydney.edu.au)

### Prof Katherine Mills

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney



#### Background

Katherine is Professor, NHMRC Senior Research Fellow and Director of Early Intervention and Treatment Research at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use. Her research examines the cooccurrence of substance use and mental disorders, in particularly post traumatic stress disorder. Specifically, Prof Mills' program of work aims to i) improve our understanding of the relationship between mental and substance use disorders; ii) develop and evaluate innovative treatment responses; and iii) improve the translation of research into practice. Prof Mills has published widely in the area and has been an investigator on numerous grants. She has received a number of awards for excellence in science and research, and in recognition of the impact of her work on the community.

#### Research interests

- Mental Health
- Epidemiology
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Comorbid disorders
- Population health
- Drug related harm/addiction

#### Methodological expertise

- Epidemiology
- Clinical research
- Randomised controlled trials
- Design and analysis of longitudinal and repeated measures data
- Design and analysis of randomised controlled trials
- Development and evaluation of psychosocial interventions

To find out more, visit Katherine's [profile](#) or contact [katherine.mills@sydney.edu.au](mailto:katherine.mills@sydney.edu.au)



### **Dr Ashleigh Morse**

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney

#### **Background**

Research Project Coordinator at the Matilda Centre at the University of Sydney. She is coordinating a project to develop a stepped-care approach to disrupt the cycle of traumatic stress and substance use in the NSW public sector. She has a Bachelor of Psychology (Hons) and a PhD in behavioural neuroscience from the University of Sydney. Her PhD research investigated how cues in the environment drive reward-seeking, and the involvement of delta-opioid receptors in the ventral striatum in this process. She has also worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of California, Los Angeles, investigating how unique reward memories are encoded in the amygdala. Ashleigh then spent two years working with the Behavioural Insights Team in Sydney applying evidence and evaluation to public policy problems, from education to public health.

#### **Research interests**

- Behavioural neuroscience
- Substance use
- The neurobiological basis of substance use and mental health issues
- Translating evidence into policy
- Data science

To find out more, visit Ashleigh's [profile](#) or contact [ashleigh.morse@sydney.edu.au](mailto:ashleigh.morse@sydney.edu.au)

**Dr Smriti Nepal**  
The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney



### **Background**

Dr Smriti Nepal is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney. She holds a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (2010) from Tribhuvan University (Nepal), a Master of Public Health and Tropical Medicine (2014) from James Cook University, and PhD in Community Medicine and Clinical Epidemiology (2020) from the University of Newcastle. Her PhD focused on alcohol-related harm in the night-time economy, and the use of liquor licensing as a strategy to prevent alcohol-related harm in Australia. She is currently managing *Positive Choices* that is a national drug prevention initiative aimed at preventing drug use and related harm among adolescents by providing evidence-based drug education resources for school communities, parents and students.

### **Research interests**

- Alcohol epidemiology
- Drug use prevention
- School-based drug prevention
- Drug prevention among culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- Alcohol-related harm
- Alcohol and the night-time economy

### **Methodological expertise**

- Systematic review
- Design and analysis of natural experiment
- Design, collection and analysis of online survey research

### **Potential Topics**

I am available to supervise honours, masters, PhD and undergraduate student placements related to any of my research interests listed above.

To find out more, visit Smriti's [profile](#) or contact [smriti.nepal@sydney.edu.au](mailto:smriti.nepal@sydney.edu.au)



### **A/Prof Nicola Newton**

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney

#### **Background**

Nicola Newton is an Associate Professor and Director of Prevention Research at the Matilda Centre. She leads a large program of research developing and evaluating innovative approaches to the prevention of substance use, mental health problems and risky health behaviours in adolescents. Her main focus is on developing internet-based preventive interventions and improving the sustainability and translation of programs into schools. Nicola has worked extensively on the Climate Schools series for drug prevention, the first online programs shown to prevent substance use. She has contributed significantly to the body of knowledge around prevention and e-health interventions and received national and international recognition for her research.

#### **Research interests**

- Substance use prevention
- Mental health promotion
- Healthy lifestyles and chronic disease prevention
- Adolescent health
- Personality-targeted prevention
- E-health and new technologies
- Translation

#### **Methodological expertise**

- Cluster randomised controlled trials
- School-based trials
- Intervention development
- Online trials

#### **Potential Projects**

- Development and evaluation of effective interventions to prevent substance use and mental disorders
- Exploring the mechanisms of effective prevention
- Exploring the development and co-occurrence of substance use and mental disorders
- Development and evaluation

To find out more, visit Nicola's [profile](#) or contact [nicola.newton@sydney.edu.au](mailto:nicola.newton@sydney.edu.au)

### Dr Natalie Peach

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney



#### Background

Natalie is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Matilda Centre, University of Sydney. She currently works as the Project Coordinator on the COPE-A clinical trial, investigating the efficacy of integrated exposure-based therapy for co-occurring post-traumatic stress and substance use disorders in adolescents. She completed a combined Masters/PhD in clinical psychology at the University of Melbourne and Orygen Youth Health in 2017. Her PhD focused on phenomenological relationships between childhood trauma, PTSD symptoms and psychotic symptoms in young people with early psychosis.

#### Research interests:

- PTSD
- Childhood trauma
- Adolescent mental health
- Comorbidity
- Early intervention and treatment
- Psychosis

#### Methodological expertise:

- Cross-sectional studies
- Regression analyses
- Qualitative research

To find out more, visit Natalie's [profile](#) or contact [natalie.peach@sydney.edu.au](mailto:natalie.peach@sydney.edu.au)



### Dr Katrina Prior

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney

#### Background

Dr Katrina Prior is a Royce Abbey Postdoctoral Research Fellow within the Matilda Centre at the University of Sydney. Her research examines the interrelationship between mental health and substance use disorders to inform effective early intervention and treatment programs, for both young people and adults. Katrina currently leads a program of research that seeks to develop and trial an innovative online Cognitive Bias Modification program (i.e., a brain training program, known as the *Re-Train Your Brain* intervention), among young people with co-occurring anxiety and alcohol use problems, funded by an Australian Rotary Health-funded Postdoctoral Fellowship. This program of research builds on her experience in developing, coordinating, and evaluating other interventions in world-first randomised controlled trials, including an internet-delivered early intervention for young adults who drink to cope with anxiety (the *Inroads* study), and an integrated intervention for depression and substance use disorders (the *Activate* study).

#### Research interests

- Prevention, early intervention and treatment for co-occurring mental health and drug/alcohol use disorders
- Technology-driven interventions to improve the wellbeing of young people with comorbid anxiety and alcohol use disorders
- Risk factors and psychological mechanisms that initiate and maintain the anxiety-alcohol use comorbidity
- Implicit cognitive biases involved in addiction and anxiety disorders, and their treatment using Cognitive Bias Modification paradigms
- The complex relationship between sleep disorders and co-occurring mental and substance use disorders

#### Methodological expertise

- Design and coordination of randomised controlled trials
- Development of online interventions for young people
- Design, collection and analysis of cross-sectional and longitudinal data (e.g., generalised estimating equations)
- Analysis of large-scale epidemiological data sets

#### Potential Topics

I am available to supervise Honours, Masters, PhD and undergraduate student placements related to any of my research interests listed above.

To find out more, visit Katrina's [profile](#) or contact [katrina.prior@sydney.edu.au](mailto:katrina.prior@sydney.edu.au)

### Dr Kylie Routledge

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney



#### Background

Kylie Routledge is a Research Fellow with the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use. She is leading a cluster randomised controlled trial of a computerised school-based alcohol and drug prevention program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, *Strong & Deadly Futures*. Kylie holds a PhD in Neuroscience (2018) from the University of Sydney, for which she examined the genetic and environmental contributions to wellbeing and non-clinical depression and anxiety in healthy adults. She also conducted a randomised controlled trial testing the effectiveness of an online brain-training tool in improving psychological wellbeing and reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression. Kylie has 15 years' experience in research-related roles, and most recently, spent two years working in domestic violence policy at the Department of Communities and Justice.

#### Research interests

- Empowerment
- Health and wellbeing promotion
- eHealth and internet-based interventions
- Prevention of violence against women
- Prevention or control of alcohol use
- Behaviour change

#### Methodological expertise

- Design and analysis of randomised controlled trials;
- Design and analysis of cross-sectional and longitudinal survey data;
- Twin studies

To find out more, visit Kylie's [profile](#) or contact [kylie.routledge@sydney.edu.au](mailto:kylie.routledge@sydney.edu.au)





### **Dr Ewa Siedlecka**

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney

#### **Background**

Dr Ewa Siedlecka completed her PhD in Social and Cognitive Psychology in 2020 at the University of New South Wales. Her PhD research investigated how emotions influence time perception and attempted to create a novel model explaining this relationship. Ewa's additional research experience includes statistical consulting for clinical trials in high schools, and working with major Australian industries to improve their social license and minimize the impact of industry activity. Ewa joined The Matilda Centre in 2021 as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow. She contributes to a project reviewing and updating guidelines for the management of co-occurring alcohol and other drug and mental health conditions.

#### **Research interests**

- Translational research
- Early intervention and treatment
- The role of emotions in mental health and substance use
- Comorbidity of mental health and substance use, particularly in younger populations
- Underlying predictors of mental health and maladaptive cognitions

#### **Methodological expertise**

- Quantitative research methods and analysis (including mixed models, multi-level modelling, longitudinal data, large data sets)
- Experimental psychology
- Multidisciplinary systematic reviews
- Emotion induction
- Physiological data collection

To find out more, contact [ewa.siedlecka@sydney.edu.au](mailto:ewa.siedlecka@sydney.edu.au)

### A/Prof Tim Slade

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney



#### Background

Tim is Director of Epidemiology and Biostatistics at the Matilda Centre. His research interests centre around the epidemiology and diagnosis of alcohol and drug use disorders, mental disorders and their comorbidity. He focusses on adolescent and young adult health and studies the influence of individual, peer and family factors on the emergence and development of alcohol use and mental disorders. Other interests include the development of school-based programs for the prevention of alcohol-related harms among adolescents.

#### Research interests

- Epidemiology
- Social Networks
- Biostatistics
- Diagnostic classification
- Youth alcohol use
- Alcohol dependence
- Depression and anxiety

#### Methodological expertise

- Epidemiology
- Biostatistics
- Social network analysis
- Latent variable analysis
- Machine Learning

#### Potential Projects

- Social networks and the spread of risky health-related behaviours in adolescents
- Examining the patterns and predictors of the emergence of DSM alcohol use disorder symptoms
- Trends over time in alcohol use and mental health
- Risk and protective factors for the development of substance use and mental disorders

To find out more, visit Tim's [profile](#) or contact [tim.slade@sydney.edu.au](mailto:tim.slade@sydney.edu.au)



### A/Prof Lexine Stapinski

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney

#### Background

Lexine Stapinski is an Associate Professor and Clinical Psychologist at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use. Her research focusses on understanding how alcohol and substance use disorders develop, and how we can intervene early on to reduce their impact and prevent escalation. In 2017 she was awarded Australian Rotary Health funding to develop and trial of the **"Inroads" program**, an online cognitive behavioural treatment program for young people who drink to cope with anxiety, stress or worries. She is the recipient of a 2017 NHMRC Translating Research into Practice Fellowship and leads the national **Positive Choices** project, which aims to improve translation of evidence-based drug and alcohol prevention. As part of this work she has established partnerships with Gilimbaa (Indigenous Creative Agency), schools and Aboriginal stakeholders to address the gap in culturally inclusive drug and alcohol prevention resources for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

#### Research interests

- Prevention & early intervention
- Patterns of alcohol and substance use in adolescence
- Culturally inclusive social and emotional wellbeing promotion for adolescents
- Inter-relationship between anxiety disorders and alcohol/drug use
- Integrating treatment approaches for co-occurring anxiety and alcohol use disorders

#### Methodological expertise

- Experimental Psychology (including psycho-physiological assessment, alcohol; administration studies)
- Latent variable modelling (latent class analysis, latent growth modelling, trajectory analysis)
- Psychological intervention development and evaluation (randomised controlled trials)
- Analysis of large epidemiological data sets (including procedures for handling missing data)

#### Potential Topics

- Exploring patterns and predictors of alcohol and drug use among young people
- "Drinking makes me more interesting...": Examining motives for alcohol use among young people
- Can we modify alcohol expectancies through brief intervention, and does this reduce alcohol-related harms?
- Understanding the inter-relationship between anxiety disorders and substance use

To find out more, visit Lexine's [profile](#) or contact [lexine.stapinski@sydney.edu.au](mailto:lexine.stapinski@sydney.edu.au)

### Dr Matthew Sunderland

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney



#### Background

Matthew completed his PhD at the University of Sydney in 2010. His PhD focused on novel methods to develop short form instruments when measuring common mental disorders in the general population. Since then Matthew has received a NHMRC early career fellowship to develop efficient diagnostic instruments for co-morbid conditions using underlying dimensional constructs (internalising, externalising, thought disorders) as the guiding theoretical framework rather than the existing categorical framework of the DSM. Matthew has also received NHMRC project grant funding to look at diagnostic bias in the epidemiological instruments when assessing major depressive episode in older Australian adults. This program of research seeks to improve how mental disorders are assessed in clinical and research settings in the future.

#### Research interests

- Psychiatric classification and diagnosis
- Comorbidity
- Old age psychiatric epidemiology
- Dimensional forms of assessment
- e-Mental Health screening tools

#### Methodological expertise

- Latent variable modelling (e.g., factor analysis, latent class analysis, factor mixture analysis, growth mixture models)
- Psychometrics and test construction
- Cognitive interviewing and survey research
- Analysis of large scale epidemiological and clinical data sets (regression, decision tree analysis, mixed models)

#### Potential Topics

- Establishing the predictive validity of broad transdiagnostic dimensions of psychopathology on treatment and prevention outcomes over and above categorical indicators (PhD/Masters)
- Development and validation of computerised adaptive tests to measure broad levels of comorbid mental and substance use disorders in adults and adolescents (PhD/Masters)
- Identifying factors that are associated with the transition from first experiencing panic attacks to panic disorder in the Australian population (Honours)

To find out more, visit Matthew's [profile](#) or contact [matthew.sunderland@sydney.edu.au](mailto:matthew.sunderland@sydney.edu.au)



### Prof Maree Teesson AC

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney

#### Background

Professor Maree Teesson is Director of the Matilda Centre, Director of the NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence in Prevention and Early Intervention in Mental Illness and Substance Use (PREMISE), and an NHMRC Principal Research Fellow at the University of Sydney. Maree is a National Mental Health Commissioner, an Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences Fellow, a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Social Sciences and a member of the National Health and Medical Research Council. Maree was announced as a Companion of the Order of Australia in the Australia Day 2018 Honours List, awarded a Westpac/Australian Financial Review 100 Women of Influence (Innovation) in 2015, and awarded an Australian Museum Eureka Prize for Outstanding Mentor of Young Researchers in 2014. Maree has made a major contribution to Australia's health and medical research effort in the field of mental health and substance use. In particular, she is known nationally and internationally for her research on the comorbidity between mental health and substance use disorders. Prof Teesson has a strong track record of winning competitive scientific grant funding and has published extensively. She maintains strong links with treatment services and is a founding member (since 1990) of The Mental Health Services Conference (TheMHS) Inc, the largest mental health services conference and learning network in Australia.

#### Research interests

- The epidemiology mental health and substance use disorders
- The effects of alcohol on brain development
- Digitally delivered prevention and treatment programs
- New treatments for individuals with comorbid mental health and substance use disorders
- Improving treatment delivery

#### Methodological expertise

- Intervention development and evaluation
- Randomised controlled trials
- School-based trials (cluster RCTs)
- Analysis of large cohorts: prevalence, patterns and disorder comorbidity
- Translation of psychological interventions into practice

To find out more, visit Maree's [profile](#) or contact [maree.teesson@sydney.edu.au](mailto:maree.teesson@sydney.edu.au)

### Dr Louise Thornton

The Matilda Centre  
University of Sydney



#### Background

Dr Louise Thornton is a research scholar at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use. She completed her PhD in 2012 at the University of Newcastle. Her doctoral research investigated tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use, and attitudes towards these substances, among people with and without mental disorders. Louise leads a program of research investigating the ways in which mobile technologies (e.g. mobile health apps, passive sensing technology) can be used to improve health behaviours among young people and people with mental health problems, and the accessibility of effective eHealth and mHealth interventions. She also leads the communication portfolio at the Matilda Centre and has an interest in how social media can be effectively used to promote and disseminate health research and recruit participants to research.

#### Research interests

- Health risk behaviours including tobacco use, excessive alcohol use, poor diet and physical inactivity
- Comorbidity between health risk behaviours and mental health problems
- The potential role of the Internet and mobile technologies to improve health and health research
- How patient engagement with drug and alcohol, and lifestyle, interventions can be improved

#### Methodological expertise

- Design, administration and analysis of survey research (particularly online)
- Design, collection and analysis of qualitative data
- Development of online and mobile e-health tools
- Randomised controlled trial development and coordination
- Psychological intervention development and evaluation

#### Potential Topics

Projects would suit an honours or post-graduate student interested in ehealth and/or health behaviour change.

- Use and quality of mobile applications to address health behaviours, mental health problems or substance use
- Accessibility and quality of mental health and/or substance use treatments online
- Cardio-vascular disease risk reduction among vulnerable populations e.g. people with mental health and/or substance use problems

To find out more, visit Louise's [profile](#) or contact [louise.thornton@sydney.edu.au](mailto:louise.thornton@sydney.edu.au)



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