



Keeping residential aged-care facilities accountable for improving mental health care



What is the focus of the research?

To co-design and create a standardised assessment tool that helps residential aged-care facilities monitor, evaluate and improve mental health practices and outcomes for residents with dementia.



Why is it important?

Half of Australians living in residential aged care have dementia, but current practices to manage the associated mental health issues are poor. Psychotropic medication is over-prescribed to treat depression, agitation and psychosis, while the use of physical restraints is common to prevent behaviours such as 'wandering'. Depression is widespread but often goes undiagnosed; the use of validated depression assessment tools across facilities is ad-hoc.



“

This project aims to improve mental health practices and outcomes for aged-care residents with dementia.”

– Dr Deborah Brooks

The Australian Government's Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission stated that first-choice treatment of changed behaviours and psychological symptoms of dementia should be non-pharmacological, person-centered care. It recommended that facilities perform comprehensive assessments of individual residents to address any unmet needs, while supporting the person, their family and carers. Unfortunately, this rarely happens.

Factors that positively influence the mental health of residents include organisational policy and procedures; the care environment; staff attitudes, skills and knowledge; and resources. This research project, led by Dr Brooks, will create the first benchmarking tool that measures mental health care management and outcomes for people (with and without dementia) living in residential aged care.

Dr Brooks and her team will build on previous research to co-design and create a Mental Health Indicator Care Tool (MHICare Tool) specifically for residential facilities, in conjunction with residents, family, staff and industry.

The MHICare Tool aims to achieve accountability, continuous improvement and resident-focused coordinated care. It will eventually be developed into a cross-platform software package that compiles indicator data using facilities' own documentation systems, to reduce the burden on time-poor staff, while improving quality of reporting.

If successful, Dr Brooks hopes the MHICare Tool will be used in residential aged-care facilities around Australia, so they can achieve real, long-lasting change that improves the mental health of all residents.



How will this happen?

Stage 1: hold focus groups and/or interviews to co-design the tool with people living with dementia, people living in aged-care facilities, families, carers and aged-care staff.

Stage 2: obtain consensus on specific indicators to include in the tool via 2-3 rounds of the Delphi technique, an independent panel of 60 experts that scientists use to answer research questions requiring consensus.

Stage 3: apply for further funding to pilot the new tool on a large scale across residential aged-care facilities in Queensland and New South Wales.



What will this mean for the future?

- Potential for residential aged-care facilities to have a standardised tool that measures and improves their mental health care practices.
- Better quality of life for all aged-care residents.



Who's undertaking the research?

Dr Deborah Brooks, The University of Queensland

Dr Brooks is a post-doctoral research fellow at The University of Queensland's Centre for Clinical Research. She has a background in psychology and health services research and has been involved in dementia research in Australia and the UK for 15 years. Dr Brooks' current work focuses on improving the quality of life and care of people with dementia and their families within community and residential aged-care settings.

She was previously awarded a Dementia Australia Research Foundation Consumer Priority PhD Scholarship.

The title of Dr Brooks' project is *Towards better mental health of people living with dementia in Residential Aged Care: Co-design of a performance measurement tool to aid organisational governance.*