



The PATH through Life Project

2011 Newsletter

"Science to improve mental health and wellbeing across the lifespan"

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Collaboration with ACT Department of Health

On the 28th July, at the Centre for Mental Health Research, the publication, *"Mental Health and Wellbeing in the ACT: results of the Personality and Total Health (PATH) Through Life Project"* was launched by the ACT Chief Minister and Minister for Health, Katy Gallagher. This report was based on the results from the first and second round of interviews and was a collaboration between CMHR and ACT Health.

This report is available on: <http://www.health.act.gov.au/c/health?a=sendfile&ft=p&fid=1311818019&sid>.



From left: Dr Paul Kelly (ACT Chief Health Officer) , Ms Katy Gallagher (ACT Chief Minister), Professor Ian Young (Vice Chancellor ANU), Professor Kaarin Anstey (Director, Ageing Research Unit, CMHR)

Changes to the Centre for Mental Health Research

In January 2012 our current Director, Professor Helen Christensen will be leaving CMHR to take on the position of Director of the Black Dog Institute in Sydney. Because of the different types of research undertaken at CMHR we will be splitting into two separate centres. The *Centre for Research on Ageing, Health and Well-Being (CRAW)* will have Professor Kaarin Anstey as Director while Professor Kathy Griffiths will be the Director of what will still be called the *Centre for Mental Health Research*. The PATH Project will be part of CRAW.

Other news

This year two of our newest PATH researchers, Dr Liana Leach and Dr Sarah Olesen received NHMRC early career fellowships. Liana was also named as one of four ACT "Tall Poppies". This is an award from the Australian Institute of Policy and Science and was established to recognise and celebrate Australian intellectual and scientific excellence and to encourage younger Australians to follow in the footsteps of our outstanding achievers.

Information for the 20+ age group

This year we have asked all 20+ participants if they would complete the questionnaire online. We are aware that many of you have had problems with the software that we have used to run the survey. We would like to apologise for this and thank all those who have made the effort to either complete the questionnaire or to get most of the way through.

If you are having problems please either phone or email Karen (contact details above) as she may be able assist you in completing the questionnaire.

Information for the 40+ age group.

Next year we will be interviewing the 40+ age group again. For your convenience we will be offering most of the questionnaire online so that you can complete it in your own time. We will be using different software to that used for the online interviewing of our 20+ age group and anticipate that this online survey will be easy to complete.

Can you please make sure your email address is updated on the enclosed card and returned in the reply-paid envelope? Alternatively, you can email Karen with your contact information.

Some Research Highlights

In the last year a number of papers have been published on data from the brain MRI sub-study undertaken by a number of participants in the 40+ and 60+ age groups. These include studies on memory changes associated with tiny regions of damage in areas of the brains of the 40+ group as well as the association between the size of parts of the brain and performance on memory and concentration tests, on lifetime cigarette smoking, and also on extent to which people are right or left handed.

Research by Dr Tim Windsor and Associate Professor Peter Butterworth looked at the differences between the 40+ age group and the 60+ age group in their ratings of partner relationship characteristics. This showed that older adults (especially older men) have a greater tendency to maximize positive and minimize negative aspects of their partner relationships. The 40+ age group was more likely to report ambivalent, as opposed to supportive, relations relative to the older age group. Further longitudinal investigation will enable us to determine the extent to which different types of partner relationship evaluations have broader implications for well-being over the life course.

Further work by Dr Windsor and Professor Kaarin Anstey has shown that those in our oldest age group report the most frequent positive and least frequent negative social exchanges. This group is also better at avoiding negative emotions and maintaining positive emotions. The association between positive emotions and positive social exchanges is not as strong in this older age group as in younger ages, suggesting that the older age group is less dependent on positive social exchanges to maintain positive emotions. However, our older age group is still relatively young and this situation may change with increasing age.

Dr Lyndall Strazdins and colleagues have examined the relationship between symptoms of anxiety and depression and job demands, control and insecurity over a four year period. They found that improvement or deterioration in symptoms of anxiety and depression was related to corresponding improvement or deterioration in all three work conditions. This suggests that access to good quality jobs could help tackle one of the important health challenges of anxiety and depression.