

## Basic Facts About WACHA

### Founding Vision

The Western Australian Centre for Health and Ageing (WACHA) aspires to be recognised in the field of ageing research as a leading national research organisation with an excellent international reputation. To lead by example in collaborative research, spanning the disciplines that affect health and ageing and to be a leader in translating research to further; research, policy, new health services and prevent disease.

### Background

WACHA initially arose in 2000 from joint funding from the Department of Health of WA and The University of Western Australia. WACHA partnered with the WA Institute of Medical Research in November 2006. Since its inception WACHA has raised over \$11.5 million in competitive research grants and contracts and is now one of Australia's most productive research centres in the field of health and ageing. WACHA's strength lies in its ability to collaborate extensively across disciplines both nationally and internationally; promoting cutting edge, translational research – turning ideas into action and educating the public and health professionals about health issues affecting older Australians.

### WACHA Today

WACHA is a not for profit, research centre. WACHA focuses on the science underlying the ageing process; the study of treatment and prevention of age related diseases to deliver a better and brighter future to our ageing population. WACHA fosters the development of rigorous research and strong leadership, with an emphasis on collaborative partnerships. Research at WACHA is conducted by up to 50 investigators and more than 60 visiting scientists, postdoctoral fellows, students and health professionals.

### Public Programs

One of WACHA's core objectives is to help the public understand both the potential of research and its implications. Programs include the Research newsletter which details WACHA's latest research findings, scientific talks and a series of lectures which run throughout the year.

### Selected Achievements

- The first to provide evidence of the benefit of memory clinics in reducing stress for older people with dementia and their caregivers, leading to the adoption of state run memory clinics in Victoria and Western Australia.
- The first to conduct Australia's largest study of residential care residents. This study demonstrated that vitamin D supplementation reduced rate of falls by 30% for people in residential care.
- The first to demonstrate that smoking is not a protective factor (as was commonly believed), but a risk factor for dementia.
- The first to show that physical activity reduces the rate of cognitive decline in later life.



## Core Programs

WACHA's overarching goal is to create new knowledge through novel research and translate it into improved health outcomes for our ageing community. Since its inception, WACHA has followed a philosophy that emphasizes the importance of combining innovation and collaboration, in order to address the complex challenges that we face in the field of health and ageing.

### WACHA operates three core programs:

**Healthy Ageing Program** to determine the factors that maintain good health with increasing age.

**Clinical Research Program** to determine the factors and mechanisms that lead to poor health with increasing age, as well as strategies to improve the health outcomes of older people.

**Health Service Research Program** to determine the optimal way of organising and delivering health services to older people – including those from ethnic minorities or who live in rural and remote areas.

## WACHA Fellows

One of the unique features of WACHA is its Fellows Program. This program, designed to nurture future leaders in science, provides exceptionally talented young scientists with the rare opportunity to be mentored and guided to set up independent research program.

## Leadership

WACHA is guided by a distinguished Board of Executives, chaired by Dr Penny Flett, CEO of Brightwater Care Group. The Board is composed of some of Western Australia's most respected health professionals; Dr Michael McCall, Ms Gail Milner and 2008 WA Citizen of the year Professor Peter Klinken.

## Contact Details

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## Achievements continued

- The first to develop a culturally sensitive dementia assessing tool for remote and rural Indigenous communities.
- The first to quantify the prevalence of B12 deficiency and hyperhomocysteinemia and demonstrate an association between higher levels of homocysteine and plasma levels of amyloid protein (Abeta40) in the blood.
- The first to discover, that vitamin B supplements have their maximal effect on decreasing plasma homocysteine in older people with B12 deficiency and hyperhomocysteinemia.
- The first to systematically show the association between heart failure and memory decline.
- The first to show that testosterone and estradiol have clinically significant antidepressant properties.

