We are very pleased to announce that our first CREMS National Conference was a huge success! The Conference took place on the 20th of August in Melbourne, in conjunction with The Mental Health Services (TheMHS) Annual Conference.

The National Conference featured a full day program designed to showcase our innovative research on ‘What’s new in the treatment of Comorbidity’. Members of CREMS presented on a variety of topics including online interventions for comorbidity, trends in substance use among Australian women and innovative treatments for substance use disorders and comorbid mental health conditions to an audience of clinicians, researchers and consumers from across Australia.

The audience feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with registrants indicating that their participation in the Conference will directly and positively impact their work. Registrants noted that the Conference provided ‘very interesting material’, a ‘much better understanding of the comorbid landscape and interventions available’, and that they will now ‘work towards a closer partnership with Drug and Alcohol services, seeking to integrate mental health services’.

Thank you to all those who participated and made the day such a success.
Harms associated with alcohol and cannabis use account for a significant amount of the burden of disease worldwide. Traditionally, alcohol and cannabis use and related harms are more prevalent among men than women. However, there is emerging evidence to suggest that this is changing with females “catching up” to their male counterparts in rates of alcohol and cannabis use - and associated harms. If this is indeed the trend it may require a reconceptualisation of our approach to prevention, early intervention and treatment.

A/Prof Tim Slade and I, along with colleagues Ms Zoe Tonks, Dr Wendy Swift and Prof Maree Teesson, have spent the past few months gathering evidence from around the world to examine the issue of the closing gender gap in alcohol and cannabis use. We identified and screened over 1200 studies and considered a range of indicators or alcohol and cannabis related harms including prevalence of use, harmful or risky use, heavy episodic or binge drinking as well as onset of use and prevalence of abuse and dependence. We assessed studies in terms of their methodological rigour and ranked them on the strength of their evidence. We included data on all available outcomes in all available age groups and mapped the data onto five year birth cohorts dating from 1895-1990. The final estimates include data from 80 studies in more than 55 countries around the world.

Detailed analyses of these data are underway but what we have found so far indicates that the gender gap may indeed be closing when it comes to prevalence of drinking. When we looked at cohorts born in the early part of last century for example, men were on average, between 2.5 and 3.5 times more likely to drink...
alcohol than women. For cohorts born in the 1990's this ratio is close to one - men and women are almost equally as likely to drink. Patterns for binge drinking appear to be fairly similar and while we didn't focus specifically on Australia, indications so far are that Australian trends are likely to be in line with global ones when it comes to gender convergence.

**So does it mean women are drinking more than men?**

Several studies have reported that although the prevalence of drinking and binge drinking have increased among both men and women born after World War II, these changes have been greater for women. While there is some evidence that these increases may be slowing down in recent cohorts - we are not at the end of the story on the closing of the gender gap. Many of the birth cohorts that have experienced these changing drinking patterns are only now in their 20's, 30's or 40's so we don't have information on drinking as these men and women progress through various life stages. We also don't know whether we will continue to see these changes among the most recently born cohorts who haven't yet reached the age of risk for alcohol use, and related problems.

The next phase of this project will focus on gender convergence in cannabis use as well as other indicators of alcohol related harm such as heavy drinking, prevalence of abuse and dependence and problems or consequences of drinking. New Australian data will also be available over the next 12 months which will allow us to take a closer look at the gender gap in Australia and consider the implications for research, prevention and treatment. For now, the results highlight the importance of continued surveillance of drinking patterns of both men and women to monitor the changing landscape of substance use and related harms in the general population.

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**THE CREMS SYMPOSIUM AT THE ASPR CONFERENCE**

We are very excited to announce that **Ms Miriam Forbes, Dr Megan Hobbs, Dr Natacha Carragher**, and **Dr Matthew Sunderland** will be presenting research from our Epidemiological stream of research in a symposium at the Australian Society for Psychiatric Research (ASPR) Conference in Melbourne, 4-6th December. They will be presenting innovative research on ‘Expanding the broad structure of psychopathology and exploring its public health implications’, a particularly pertinent topic given the recent announcement of the DSM-5 revisions.

They will explore the hierarchical structure of psychopathology and how we can improve our understanding of the development, maintenance and treatment of psychopathology. The symposium represents a collaboration between leading researchers and clinicians at the University of NSW, University of Macquarie, University of Minnesota (USA), University of Iowa (USA), Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic (PA, USA), Stony Brook University (NY, USA), Columbia University (NY, USA), Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons (NY, USA), National Institute on Alcohol Abuse & Alcoholism (NIH, MD, USA). We wish them the best of luck! 
FUTURE RESEARCH: OBESITY AND SMOKING AMONG PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESSES

By Dr Louise Thornton

A key goal of the CRE in Mental Health and Substance Use is to facilitate collaboration and the sharing of knowledge between research institutions. In this issue, Dr Louise Thornton reports on the upcoming research planned between the University of Newcastle, the University of New South Wales and Northwestern University.

Originally from Newcastle, through CREMS and the University of Newcastle I was given the opportunity to move and work with Prof Bonnie Spring at Northwestern University, Chicago. In this position I am working with Prof Bonnie Spring, Prof Amanda Baker (University of Newcastle) and Dr Frances Kay-Lambkin (UNSW) to conduct research investigating smoking cessation and weight gain prevention among people with mental illnesses.

Tobacco smoking and obesity are significant health issues among people with mental illnesses. Studies consistently find that 50-90% of people with severe mental illnesses smoke and over 42% of adults with a serious mental illness are obese. Additionally, most people who stop smoking gain weight. In the US it is estimated that 80% of people who stop smoking gain weight and meta-analyses indicate that people gain an average of 4-5 kgs after quitting smoking.

Previous research by Prof Spring has shown that offering smoking cessation treatment first and then weight management treatment (in a sequential approach) can significantly and sustainably slow the rate of weight gain among people in the general population, as compared to a simultaneous approach offering smoking cessation and weight management treatment at the same time.

In collaboration with Dr Brain Hitsman (Northwestern University) and Dr Will Cronenwett (Northwestern Memorial Hospital), Prof Bonnie Spring, Prof Amanda Baker, Dr Frances Kay-Lambkin and myself are currently developing a grant proposal to be submitted to the National Institute of Health early next year.

Building on the team’s previous research, we plan to conduct a randomised controlled trial of a telephone based intervention among people with severe mental illnesses. The intervention will use cognitive behaviour therapy and
motivational interviewing techniques to address smoking cessation and weight gain prevention sequentially among people attending community mental health services in Chicago. Participants will be provided with nicotine replacement therapy and meal replacements to support changes they might make. Feasibility studies regarding the use of meal replacement products among people with mental illnesses and clinician perspectives are currently underway.

It is hoped that this project will not only generate information regarding effective and scalable methods for addressing smoking cessation and weight gain prevention among people with mental illnesses, but will also facilitate cross pollination of skills and ideas between the research units involved.

I am a doctoral candidate currently working under the supervision of Prof Maree Teesson, Dr Frances Kay-Lambkin and Dr Katherine Mills on my thesis examining Internet-based treatment for depression and alcohol use comorbidity in young adults.

I have worked at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre since completing my Honours degree in Psychology at Macquarie University in 2007. Since then I have worked on a range of projects relating to comorbid mental health and substance misuse at an epidemiological (NSMHWB2) and coronial level and within drug and alcohol services. I have previously worked on the development and evaluation of a set of national guidelines for the management of comorbid substance use and mental illness in the alcohol and other drug sector. I have been involved in the development and ongoing evaluation of a suicide risk assessment toolkit for drug and alcohol services. I have recently completed work on a report into the current state of comorbidity evidence and treatment for the National Mental Health Commission. I have also been invited to present my work at numerous national and international conferences, and have published a number of journal articles, book chapters, and reports.
Currently, my primary focus is the evaluation of the DEAL Project (DEpression and ALcohol), a program I designed in collaboration with my PhD supervisors Prof Teesson, Dr Kay-Lambkin, and Dr Mills. The program is a brief intervention targeted at 18-25 year olds with depression who are also drinking alcohol at hazardous levels. The program is completely online and comprises of four weekly hour-long modules, to be completed over a four-week period. The clinical content of the DEAL Project is modelled on an existing e-health intervention, SHADE, which is based on cognitive-behavioural therapy and motivational interviewing principles. SHADE has shown tremendous success in a number of RCTs led by Dr Kay-Lambkin.

The DEAL Project aims to provide young people with skills and strategies to monitor, manage, and challenge unhelpful thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. It incorporates a range of case studies, personalised normative feedback, mp3 downloads and weekly exercises, along with a summary section which compiles users inputted content.

To date, I have tested the feasibility and acceptability of a draft version of the program in focus groups of young 18-25 year olds and a series of interviews with clinical experts. Following this process, the program was refined accordingly to be relevant and valid to young adults.

The evaluation of the program takes the form of a randomised controlled trial (RCT) in which the DEAL Project will be compared with an attention-control condition (HealthWatch, developed by ANU). The RCT will consist of a four-week intervention phase and a 24-week follow-up. It will be conducted entirely online and Australia-wide amongst young people aged 18-25 years. The primary outcomes will be change in depression symptoms and alcohol use at 5, 12, and 24 weeks post-baseline. Secondary outcomes include change in general function and quality of life, anxiety/stress symptomatology, and a number of other depression alcohol related outcomes.

Results of this trial will inform the NHMRC-funded iTREAD RCT led by Dr Kay-Lambkin, on which I am an Associate Investigator.

Recruitment is currently underway and the project is looking for participants. To find out more about the program visit www.dealproject.org.au.
The efficacy of behavioural activation therapy for co-occurring depression and substance use disorder: The Activate Study

Project Members:
Prof Maree Teeson, Dr Joanne Ross, Dr Katherine Mills, Dr Sharlene Kaye, Prof Kathleen Brady, Dr Glenys Dore, Dr Frances Kay-Lambkin, Ms Phillipa Ewer, Miss Xanthe Larkin, Ms Sonja Memdovic, Miss Katrina Prior

Target Group
Individuals with a substance use disorder who are currently undergoing opioid replacement therapy or residential rehabilitation who are experiencing symptoms of comorbid depression.

Description
Almost one in five individuals with a current (12 month) substance use disorder (SUD) have a diagnosis of comorbid major depression. This comorbidity is associated with a more severe and protracted illness course, a higher risk of suicidal behaviours, and an increased risk of relapse in both depression and substance use problems.

While there has been limited research examining psychosocial interventions for comorbid depression and SUD, a treatment that shows promise is Behavioural Activation Treatment for Depression (BATD-R). BATD-R is a manualised treatment designed to systematically increase exposure to positive activities, and thereby improve affect and cognitions. While pilot work among illicit drug users in residential rehabilitation in the US has been promising in decreasing depression severity, there is a need for larger randomised controlled trials, with longer term follow-ups.

The Activate study is a parallel, single blind, RCT that is currently recruiting people undergoing treatment for substance dependence, who are also experiencing symptoms of depression. The primary aim is to determine the efficacy of 10 individual, weekly sessions of a modified version of BATD-R ('Activate'), in reducing depression symptoms and substance dependence over a 12 month period.

The BacALD Study: Baclofen in the Treatment of Liver Disease

Project Members:
Dr Kirsten Morley, Prof Paul Haber, A/Prof Andrew Baillie, Mr Warren Logge

Target Group
Males and Females with Alcoholic Liver Disease

Description
1 in 10 Australian adults consume alcohol at levels that are risky for liver disease. Alcoholic liver disease is the leading cause of alcohol-related death in Australia. Abstinence from alcohol is crucial in reducing morbidity and mortality associated with the disease. However, specific treatments for alcohol use disorders in those with significant liver disease have been lacking. There is recent clinical evidence to indicate that the medicate, baclofen, which is safe on the liver, has therapeutic value in alcohol dependence.

The University of Sydney is currently offering a 12 week treatment program for people with alcoholic liver disease. This includes:

- Medical assessments by our specialists plus monitoring of liver function symptoms
- 12 weeks of free medication
- Up to 8 brief counselling services

If you have been finding it difficult to cut down on your drinking and you suffer from (or suspect you may have) liver disease, you could participate in this trial. Participants will be reimbursed for their time and travel costs.

For information about these and other projects now recruiting, see our website.
Congratulations!

Congratulations to Prof Helen Christensen who was awarded an NHMRC John Cade Fellowship. This Fellowship is awarded to visionary, innovative research leaders with outstanding records of achievement in the mental health field.

Dr Emma Barrett was awarded an Ian Potter Travel Grant funding to present at the European Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies Congress in Morocco (Sept 25-28). Emma will present her research on ‘Post traumatic stress disorder, substance use and aggression: A longitudinal investigation and implications for clinical practice’. The Ian Potter Foundation is a major Australian philanthropic foundation that supports and promotes excellence and innovation. The Travel Grant enables promising early-career researchers to exchange knowledge with their peers through participation in professional development opportunities, such as major conferences.

Ms Erin Kelly has received an offer for the Research Excellence Award from Professor Laura Poole-Warren, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research Training) & Dean of Graduate Research of a University of New South Wales. Erin was awarded the scholarship to complete her PhD on ‘Bullying, substance use and mental health’.

Welcome to Dr Danielle Florida! Dr Florida is an Addiction Psychiatrist at Drug Health Concord with a background in General Practice and a Masters in Psychological Medicine. Dr Florida is joining CREMS to commence a Masters of Research. She will be undertaking a clinical trial piloting third wave group psychotherapies in comorbid clients.

Upcoming Workshops

Dr Natacha Carragher is organizing an Early Career Researcher Workshop at the Australasian Society for Psychiatric Research (ASPR) on Wednesday, 4th December 2013. A number of CREMS members will be speaking at the workshop, including A/Prof Tim Slade and Dr Frances Kay-Lambkin. See the conference website for more details.

Prof Maree Teeson and Dr Nicola Newton are travelling across Australia in a series of events on Kids and Alcohol, how schools can help reduce the harms. These events are for primary and secondary school leaders and health and community workers who want to learn more about reducing the negative impact of alcohol on families, schools and the Australian Community.

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RECENT PUBLICATIONS


UPCOMING SEMINARS/WORKSHOPS/EVENTS

23-26 October 2013
III INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON DUAL DISORDER, BARCELONA

6-8 November 2013
AUSTRALIAN SMOKING CESSATION CONFERENCE 2013, SYDNEY

22-23 November 2013
THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH INTERFACE CONFERENCE 2013, MELBOURNE

24-27 November 2013
THE AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY ON ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS (APSAD) CONFERENCE, BRISBANE

4-6 December 2013
THE AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY FOR PSYCHIATRIC RESEARCH (ASPR), MELBOURNE
MEMBERS

CHIEF INVESTIGATORS
- Prof Maree Teesson
- Prof Amanda Baker
- Dr Katherine Mills
- Dr Frances Kay-Lambkin
- Prof Paul Haber
- A/Prof Andrew Baillie
- Prof Helen Christensen
- Prof Max Birchwood
- Prof Bonnie Spring
- Prof Kathleen Brady

ASSOCIATE INVESTIGATORS
- Ms Leonie Manns
- Mr Trevor Hazell
- Prof Robyn Richmond
- Dr Cath Chapman
- A/Prof Tim Slade
- Prof Brian Kelly
- Dr Brian Hitsman
- Dr Leanne Hides
- Dr Pete Kelly
- Ms Marion Downey
- Prof Michael Farrell
- Dr Glenys Dore

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- Ms Sandi Steep

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- Dr Sharlene Kaye
- Dr Nickie Newton
- Dr Joanne Ross
- Dr Wendy Swift

RESEARCH FELLOWS
- Dr Emma Barrett
- Dr Ali Beck
- Dr Natacha Carragher
- Dr Matthew Sunderland

POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOWS
- Dr Heather Buchan
- Dr Christina Marel
- Dr Kirsten Morley
- Dr Louise Thornton

RESEARCH PSYCHOLOGISTS
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- Ms Jenny Gedes
- Ms Joanne Gilsenan
- Ms Sally Hunt
- Ms Julia Rosenfeld
- Dr Alynna Turner

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