

AI-powered palliative care receives ARIIA grant

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La Trobe University's PCAT tool helps frontline staff recognise when a person is approaching the final stages of life and better navigate complex care needs.



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A project to further develop a tool that combines evidence-based assessment and artificial intelligence to better evaluate a person's palliative care needs is among 10 co-design initiatives receiving accelerator grants, Aged Care Research and Industry Innovation Australia has announced this week.

Lead investigator on the AI-Powered Palliative Care Assessment Tool for Aged Care Workforce research project Professor Hanan Khalil said it was encouraging to be named a grant recipient.

"It recognises the importance of innovation in palliative care and provides us with the resources to refine, test, and implement the tool in partnership with the sector," Professor Khalil told *Australian Ageing Agenda*.

ARIIA program and research director Dr Rebecca Bilton said this year's field of grant applications was extremely competitive.

Projects are eligible to receive (<https://www.australianageingagenda.com.au/technology/innovation-grants-target-workforce-complexities/>) \$100,000 via one grant round, and must include a cash or in-kind matched co-contribution, and an aged care organisation and a research organisation.

Dr Bilton said winners were selected for the novelty of the innovations proposed, the fit with sector need, and the likelihood of translating solutions into real life contexts nationally.

"Above all else we want to make sure that our funding delivers results for the sector. Many of our previous grant winners have already commercialised or scaled their projects and are delivering solutions that transform the ways aged care providers manage and deliver their services and enhance their quality of care," she said.



Dr Rebecca Bilton (ARIIA)

"The ARIIA Accelerator Grants are also about an investment in workforce capability to augment the way care is delivered or where it is delivered. We need to support a new kind of aged care workforce that is flexible, agile and empowered. This can only come from a sector-wide culture of collaboration and innovation," she added.

Professor Khalil – Associate Dean of Academic Partnerships (Domestic) at the School of Psychology and Public Health at La Trobe University – said PCAT had the potential to benefit staff and the people they support.

"It's exciting to see this vision moving closer to reality, and we feel optimistic about the positive impact PCAT can have on patients, families, and the workforce," Professor Khalil told *Australian Ageing Agenda*.

The PCAT combines evidence-based assessment questions and artificial intelligence to help nurses and care staff systematically evaluate a patient's palliative care needs, Professor Khalil explained.

It guides users through a digital checklist and prompts them to record clinical observations and key indicators of decline before arranging patients by urgency and support needs to enable:



Professor Hanan Khalil
(supplied by La Trobe University)

- timely triaging
- better communication with families
- more consistent decision-making about when to involve specialist palliative care services.

By streamlining assessments and facilitating timely access to appropriate care, PCAT aims to reduce avoidable hospital transfers, improve communication with families, and support a more person-centred approach to end-of-life care, Professor Khalil told AAA.

"We developed PCAT in response to the challenges frontline staff face in recognising when a person is approaching the final stages of life and in navigating often complex care needs," she said.

"Many aged care staff report uncertainty about when to escalate care, which can lead to delayed referrals and unmet needs. Our goal was to create a simple, technology-supported solution that empowers the workforce to provide compassionate, proactive care grounded in best practice."

Staff from the partnering organisations – Sunraysia Community Health Services, Monash Health, Jacaranda Village and Regis Mildura Aged Care – will pilot PCAT in their services and provide feedback on usability and effectiveness.

The partnering organisations will also be co-designing the tool to ensure it reflects real world workflows and priorities, Professor Khalil said.

The other grant recipients include:

- Goldilocks Suit in partnership with ECH Inc, University of Adelaide, ThincLab, Shenzhen Qingather Biotechnology for the project 'Enhancing Quality and Access to Specialist Dementia Care Through Goldilocks Technology'
- The University of Melbourne in partnership with the Southern Adelaide Local Health Network for the project 'Music Attuned Technology to predict and treat agitation in people with moderate to severe dementia'
- Harbison Memorial Retirement Village in partnership with the University of Canberra and University of Technology Sydney to implement a post-diagnostic allied health program run by a rural aged care provider for people in the community with dementia
- University of Tasmania in partnership with Emmerton Park for the project 'Deepening connections: Cultural storytelling at the heart of respectful and safe care for Aboriginal people in residential care'
- Australian Multicultural Community Services in partnership with Swinburne University of Technology for the project 'Empowering CALD Home Care with AI: Minimising Paperwork, Maximising Workforce Capacity'
- Bolton Clarke in partnership with Queensland University of Technology to implement an aged care context-specific digital decision support tool to enable best-practice
- University of the Sunshine Coast in partnership with Suncare Community Services, Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing and University of California, Davis to deliver Homeara+: EnhancingHealth Smart Home Monitoring with Machine Learning to Support Ageing in Place and Regional Aged Care Workforce
- Deakin University in partnership with La Trobe University and Sundale for the project 'Identifying and reducing stress and job turnover in aged care workers using an innovative virtual-reality approach'
- Sound Scouts in partnership with Whiddon, Hearing Australia and Macquarie University for the implementation of the Sound Scouts Hearing Screening technology in regional Australia.

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