

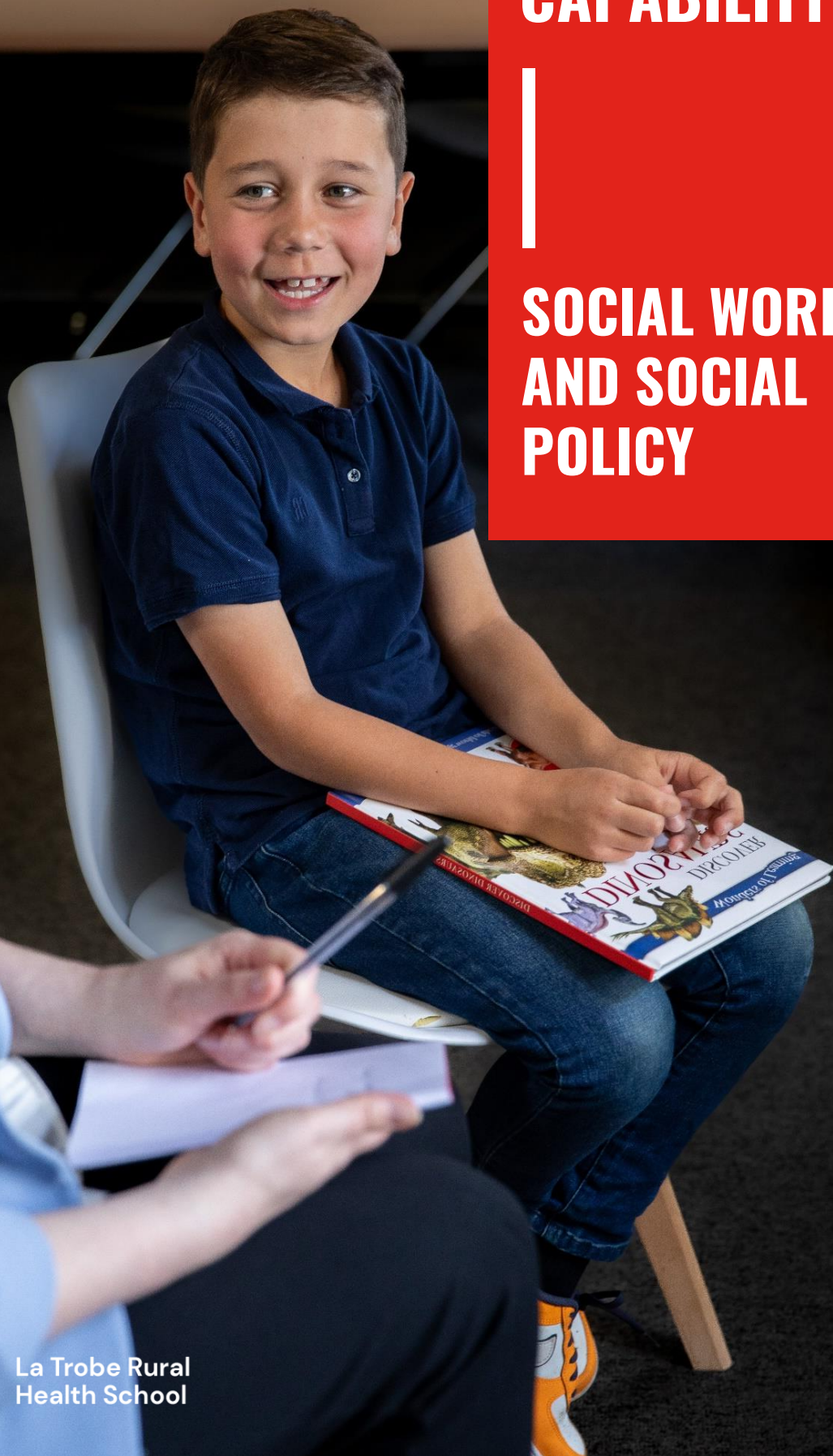


**LA TROBE**  
UNIVERSITY

School of Allied Health,  
Human Services and Sport

**RESEARCH  
CAPABILITY**

**SOCIAL WORK  
AND SOCIAL  
POLICY**



**LA TROBE**  
UNIVERSITY

La Trobe Rural  
Health School

# Acknowledgement of Country

LaTrobe University proudly acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands our campuses are located on.

We recognise that Indigenous Australians have an ongoing connection to the land and the University values their unique contribution both to the University and the wider Australian society.

We are committed to providing opportunities for Indigenous Australians, both as individuals and communities through teaching and learning, research and community partnerships across all our campuses and online.

We pay our respects to Indigenous Elders, past, present and emerging.

*Indigenous art by Dixon Patten of Bayila Creative*





## OUR VISION

To lead and enable a socially just world through high-quality, inclusive and impactful research.

## OUR FOCUS

Our research seeks to promote social justice for a range of individuals, groups and communities. Our research is aligned with our theoretical framework, with a focus on respecting First Nations People's knowledges. Our work encompasses the following fields of practice:

- child and family social work practice
- trauma informed practice
- green social work and the impacts of climate change
- mental health
- human rights and social inclusion
- alcohol and other drugs
- disability
- ageing
- rural social work practice
- housing and homelessness
- domestic and intimate partner violence
- social work practice and preparation for practice
- scholarship of teaching and learning in social work.

# RESEARCH CAPABILITY

## OUR OBJECTIVES

- To be a leader in research and education for social workers who will be the difference to individuals, families, groups and communities who experience marginalisation and social exclusion.
- To be known in Victoria and across Australia for conducting important evidence-based research relating to policy issues and for serious involvement of service users/clients in teaching and research.
- To contribute to the development of La Trobe University as a strong research and teaching university that remains closely connected to the community.
- We are constantly building on research strengths in the discipline, increasing collaborations across and within campuses, disciplines, and with research centres at La Trobe University, so we can conduct interdisciplinary research with a long-term perspective.

## OUR STAFF

Social Work and Social Policy staff have a range of practice experience and research expertise. Our staff have expertise in particular fields of practice that are the focus of their research. Most staff have completed a PhD, Doctor of Social Work, or Masters by research. Some of our staff are teaching specialists whose focus is the scholarship of teaching and learning. Staff based at our regional campuses are at the forefront of rural health and wellbeing research. We produce highly regarded peer reviewed publications in high impact journals, books and book chapters, and research reports.

## OUR GRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS

Our graduate research students (higher degree research students), including those enrolled in Masters by research, Doctor of Social Work and PhD degrees, undertake highly impactful research projects. Many of our students work closely with industry partners.

Their work spans the discipline's commitment to informing all levels of social work practice.

Our HDR students are engaged in projects spanning a breadth of research areas including:

- child and family social work practice
- trauma-informed practice with children and families
- disability service provision
- social work with First Nations communities
- alcohol and other drug interventions
- reducing coercion and restrictive practices in mental health care settings
- recovery oriented practice
- social work education
- sexual violence.

# STAFF PROFILES



**Sarah MacLean**

**Professor Sarah MacLean** is a Professor and Discipline Lead of Social Work and Social Policy and is affiliated with the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research at La Trobe University. She is a qualified social worker with a PhD in sociology. Sarah has published extensively on alcohol and other drug use. During 2019–2022 she was joint Editor-in Chief of Health Sociology Review. Sarah’s approach is strongly collaborative, and she has long term partnerships with staff in community agencies.

Key research interests:

- social and cultural role of alcohol in Australia
- experiences of alcohol and drug service provision for young people
- responses to gambling in First Nations communities.



**Lisa Brophy**

**Professor Lisa Brophy FASSA** is a Professor in Social Work and Social Policy at La Trobe University. She is also an honorary principal research fellow in the Centre for Mental Health and Community Wellbeing in the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health at the University of Melbourne. Lisa’s research and evaluation activities are highly participatory and contribute to making a difference for people who experience mental health issues and psychosocial disability. Lisa’s research activities have fostered strong interdisciplinary partnerships, working in collaborative research teams with academics from a range of disciplines and universities, across Australia and internationally. Her teams have also included people with lived experience and partner organisations.

Key research interests:

- recovery oriented practice
- reducing coercive practice and restrictive interventions
- loneliness and social inclusion
- improving the physical health of people who experience complex needs as a result of serious mental illness.



**Christine Bigby**

**Emeritus Professor Christine Bigby** works in partnership with service providers and people with intellectual disabilities investigating how rights can be translated into practice and services for adults and older people with intellectual disabilities. She has been at La Trobe since 1998 and founded the Living with Disability Research Centre in 2014. Professor Bigby has three core programs of research focussed on people with intellectual disabilities; the quality of practice in supported accommodation services, community participation, and supported decision making. Her research findings have led to recommendations for new practice standards, by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Commission, Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS.

Key research interests:

- social inclusion of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- supported decision making
- active support
- staff training programs for frontline workers and managers
- advancing social work research.



**Margarita Frederico**

**Emeritus Professor Margarita Frederico AM DSCi** is an Emeritus Professor in Social Work and Social Policy. Since 2004, she has been Principal Research Consultant with Berry Street Take Two an innovative specialist therapeutic service for children impacted by trauma from abuse. Publications in partnership with Berry Street, Child Trauma Academy USA, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and other organisations have influenced practice in relation to trauma. Margarita's research in child maltreatment and trauma has a translational focus in closing the 'know-do' gap between evidence and practice and informing policy. Her work is collaborative, and she engages with non-government organisations and governments locally and internationally. She is an Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) accreditation Chair for social work accredited education programs.

Key research interests:

- child trauma and child wellbeing
- children and families at risk in Australia and globally
- Aboriginal led programs for children, family and community wellbeing
- family violence and filicide.



**Fiona Gardner**

**Adjunct Professor Fiona Gardner AOM** was Discipline Lead for Social Work and Social Policy in the La Trobe Rural Health School (LRHS) between 2011 and 2023 and before that coordinated the Social Work team in Bendigo. Because of her experience as a social work practitioner and manager in a number of organisations in northern Victoria, she has a long-term commitment to access to social work education in rural and regional communities. Fiona is particularly interested in the use of critical reflection across disciplines in education, practice and supervision and has provided critical reflection workshops to a wide range of government and voluntary organisations. Her current research interests and publications include critically reflective practice in health and education, including for teachers and principals and embedding spirituality and religion in social work and health more generally.

Key research interests:

- critically reflective practice in supervision in health and social care
- reflective circles in schools
- the place of the spiritual and religious in health and social work practice.



**Maureen Long**

**Associate Professor Maureen Long** is an Associate Professor in Social Work and Social Policy located at the Bundoora campus. A qualified social worker, Maureen has undertaken many roles in the discipline over the past 17 years in the delivery of undergraduate and postgraduate qualifying social work programs, and as a higher degree supervisor. She has extensive experience in the child and family welfare sector particularly in the areas of family services, and out of home care working with families and young people who have experienced trauma. Maureen is an Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) accreditor for social work accredited education programs; and has strong community links through board membership of community service organisations.

Key research interests:

- children and families
- out of home care
- family preservation.



**Heather Downey**

**Adjunct Associate Professor Heather Downey** is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work and Associate Head of Campus at the Albury–Wodonga campus. As a regional academic she is uniquely positioned to examine relationships between people and the natural environment. Heather is affiliated with the Centre for Freshwater Ecosystems at La Trobe University and publishes on the myriad ways people engage with water. Water has significant implications for rural sustainability and liveability as well as individual and community health and identity.

Key research interests:

- climate change
- environmental policy change
- recreational, environmental, cultural, and economic meanings of water.



**Tal Araten-Bergman**

**Associate Professor Tal Araten-Bergman** teaches in Social Work and Social Policy discipline and researches in the Living with Disability Research Centre. Her research focuses on the key determinants of human rights realisation for people with disabilities and their families. Within this area, Tal's work explores policy issues, evaluates program effectiveness, and examines practices aimed at enhancing the quality of life and social inclusion of people with disabilities throughout their life course. Tal's research activities have fostered strong interdisciplinary partnerships, collaborating with scholars and professionals across a range of disciplines, both nationally and internationally.

Key research interests:

- quality of life outcomes
- ageing with disabilities
- disability policy and practise
- family relations and dynamics across the life course.



**Kerry Bagley**

**Dr Kerry Bagley** is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the La Trobe Rural Health School (LRHS), Bendigo. With a strong commitment to social justice and inclusion, her research focuses on making mainstream systems and services more inclusive for disabled people, particularly in rural and regional areas. Kerry brings professional, research, and lived experience of disability to her work, emphasising interdisciplinary and collaborative team approaches.

Key research interests:

- education inclusion of disabled students in mainstream schools
- service system responses to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)
- socio-cultural understandings of FASD and alcohol
- interdisciplinary and collaborative team approaches to disability inclusion in rural and regional areas.



**Natasha Long**

**Dr Natasha Long** is a Senior Lecturer, field education coordinator and Discipline Lead at the La Trobe Rural Health School (LRHS) in Bendigo, on Dja Dja Wurrung Country. Natasha has been a social worker for over 30 years, with 20 years' experience in academia and 15 years' experience in the field. Building on her passion for social work and social work education, Natasha's PhD explored the experience of professional identity development for new graduates. Since completing her PhD, Natasha has focused on scholarship of learning and teaching research. Natasha is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA) and is passionate about providing engaging learning experiences for students and staff.

Key research interests:

- social work professional identity
- professional identity resilience
- social work field education
- students' experiences of education.



**Karen Holl**

**Dr Karen Holl** is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work and Social Policy at the Bundoora Campus, Wurundjeri Country. Karen is a social worker and family therapist with 35 years' experience in the community sector where the focus of her work has been supporting First Nation families and the practitioners and organisations that work with them. Building on this work, Karen's PhD explored how non-Aboriginal social workers navigate the issues that impact contemporary practice with First Nations people. Karen is experienced in working collaboratively with others to teach and support qualified and student social workers to create better outcomes for Aboriginal families by responding more ethically and effectively in practice.

Key research interests:

- social work practice with First Nations families
- children and families and complex trauma
- social work education.



**Fiona Smith**

**Fiona Smith** is a Senior Lecturer and Director of Field Education in Social Work and Social Policy at the La Trobe University Bundoora campus, Wurundjeri Country. Fiona is a social worker with 25 years' experience as a mental health social worker, and almost 10 years in academia. Fiona's Master of Social Work (Research) focussed on the development of professional identity for social work students completing mental health placements. Fiona's focus is on Scholarship of Learning and Teaching research. Fiona is passionate about critical mental health social work theory and approaches that create better outcomes for service users.

Key research interests:

- mental health social work (teaching and practice)
- professional identity development
- social work field education.



**Corina Modderman**

**Dr Corina Modderman** is a Senior Lecturer and serves as the Discipline Lead for social work across the four La Trobe Rural Health School's (LRHS's) regional campuses. Her academic role is informed by extensive international experience in child protection service delivery. As a researcher living and working in rural Victoria, she is the Deputy Director of the Violet Vines Marshman Centre for Rural Health Research. Corina brings a pragmatic approach and successful collaborations with industry partners. Driven by a commitment to social justice, she is determined to achieve better health and wellbeing outcomes for children and families in regional and rural communities.

Key research interests:

- rural health and wellbeing for children and families
- health outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care
- disclosure of child sexual abuse.



**Tessa Zirnsak**

**Tessa Zirnsak** is a Consumer Researcher and Research Fellow in Social Work and Social Policy. Her research focuses on coercion in mental health and social care systems and lived experience involvement in research. Early in 2024, she launched the "Taking Charge of Your Care" resource with the project's co-design group. This resource aims to support consumers to access physical health care in a landscape where doctors and specialists have limited time to help people living with complex mental and physical health needs.

Key research interests:

- lived experience engagement in research
- reducing coercive practice and restrictive interventions
- physical health of people living with mental illness.



**Jacqui Theobald**

**Dr Jacqui Theobald** is a Senior Lecturer for Social Work and Social Policy at the La Trobe Rural Health School (LRHS), based in Bendigo, Victoria. She is an experienced qualitative researcher affiliated with the Reducing Gender-Based Violence Research Group at Violet Vines Marshman Centre for Rural Health Research. Jacqui's approach to research is based on collaboration and she has established relationships with industry partners in the fields of gendered violence and women's homelessness.

Key research interests:

- good practice in domestic violence services
- sexual violence
- women experiencing pregnancy and homelessness.



**Alex Bhathal**

**Alex Bhathal** is a Lecturer in Social Work and Social Policy. Alex has 35 years' practice experience in child and family services. As a teaching-focussed academic, Alex is part of the SAFeST Start Coalition of researchers and practitioners who are building evidence to challenge and end the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in child protection. As a former child protection practitioner, in two jurisdictions, and former National Director of the Australian Associate of Social Workers (AASW), Alex also has a focus on education to build prevention and response skills amongst social work students in the field of child protection and family violence.

Key research interests:

- child protection
- family violence
- working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- social work education.



**Kimberlea Cooper**

**Dr Kimberlea Cooper** is a Lecturer in Social Work and Social Policy at La Trobe University. Kimberlea's strength is in collaborative research investigating social service systems, programs and policies from the perspectives of people who interact with them. Kimberlea is experienced in collaborating with industry partners, such as social service agencies, peak bodies, non-governmental organisations, and government departments on research designed to help us understand and transform our social services systems and policies.

Key research interests:

- out-of-home care, including foster care
- social service systems from the perspectives of carers, young people, families, and workers.



**Christine Cowan**

**Dr Christine Cowan** is a Lecturer and the Bachelor of Social Work (Honours) Course Coordinator in the discipline of Social Work and Social Policy. Christine's teaching areas include social work theory and skills for social work practice. Christine has over 30 years clinical experience in the health care sector with a focus on inpatient rehabilitation. Her doctoral research explored the psychosocial aspects of the lived experience of multiple sclerosis. Other research interests also include patient experiences of inpatient care; aged care; and social work responses to family violence in a hospital setting. Christine has previously worked as a social work team leader with expertise in providing clinical supervision to social work staff and students.

Key research interests:

- patient experiences of a hospital setting
- social work supervision and skills assessment teaching
- social work responses to family violence in a health care setting
- aged care.



**Lincoln Humphreys**

**Dr Lincoln Humphreys** is a Research Fellow at the Living with Disability Research Centre, La Trobe University. His research examines how to improve quality of life outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities through service delivery and staff practices. He has published research and training materials on Active Support and Practice Leadership.

Key research interests:

- active support
- practice leadership
- organisational culture
- quality of life outcomes.



**Rachael Sanders**

**Dr Rachael Sanders** is an Adjunct Lecturer of Social Work and Social Policy in the La Trobe Rural Health School. (LRHS) Rachael's research encompasses a diverse array of topics, unified by a commitment to evidence-based knowledge that supports a fair, just and equitable society. From 2012 to 2020 she was joint Editor-in-Chief of the academic journal *Children Australia*.

Key research interests:

- neurodiversity, with an emphasis on social justice, equity and access to support
- transition to parenthood and parents' connection with community
- social work education.



**Phuong Lan Do**

**Dr Phuong Lan Do** is a Lecturer in Social Work and Social Policy at La Trobe University. Her research spans healthcare, community development, and inclusive practice, with a focus on culturally responsive approaches in multicultural contexts. She brings expertise in advancing equity and participation of people with disabilities.

Key research interests:

- culturally safe healthcare for multicultural communities
- disability inclusion and accessibility
- equity in health and social services.



**Rachel Le  
Rossignol**

**Dr Rachel Le Rossignol** is a teaching focused academic within the La Trobe Rural Health School. As a practitioner, Rachel developed and evaluated community projects using Action Research as part of the National Illicit Drug Strategy pilot programme. In her PhD, Rachel used Narrative Therapy to consider dominant social discourses around climate change.

Key research interests:

- integrating recent understandings of trauma into social work education and practice
- how to facilitate inclusive education and practice, particularly with neurodivergent populations
- creative practice approaches to social work.

# WORLD CLASS RESEARCH FACILITIES

## THE LIVING WITH DISABILITY RESEARCH CENTRE

The Living with Disability Research Centre is interdisciplinary but much of our work is aligned with the discipline of social work. The Centre conducts research that helps to improve practices, programs and policies that support the social inclusion of people with cognitive disabilities. Essentially, our research program is concerned with building a robust evidence base for the disability sector and the broader community to address the complex and multifaceted problems facing people with cognitive disability, their families and carers.

Our research aims to capitalise on our extensive partnerships throughout the disability sector.

Our research program has three broad, overarching themes: Enabling mainstream services to be inclusive, the effectiveness of disability services, and building an evidence base for community participation and social inclusion.

The Centre runs a free 2-hour webinar on new disability research every month. Webinar recordings, research papers and training resources are all available on our website

<https://www.latrobe.edu.au/lids>



# WHY CHOOSE SOCIAL WORK AT LA TROBE?



## 1st in Victoria

We're the best in Victoria and third in Australia for employer satisfaction, with a rating of 88.1 per cent.

Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT), 2023, [2022 Employer Satisfaction Survey \[PDF, 812 KB\]](#)



## Top 25 in Australia

Social Work is one of the top 25 high-growth industries in Australia with a projected growth of 23.2% by 2026.

Australian Government, 2022, [Employment Projections](#)



## Internationally recognised expertise

We have internationally recognised expertise in child and family services, mental health, and alcohol and drugs research.



## Leaders in research

La Trobe is currently ranked equal first in Victoria for the field of Social Work.

Australian Research Council, 2019, [Excellence in Research for Australia \(ERA\) Outcomes 2018](#)



# INDUSTRY RELATIONSHIPS

The Social Work and Social Policy Discipline partners with a diverse range of industry, clinical, community and health organisations to develop research that deliver real-world impact. Our Australian and international partnerships are integral to ensure that our research leads to valuable and impactful change in the health, wellbeing and performance of all communities. Students enrolled in our Industry and Clinical PhD programs are embedded with partners to ensure that their PhD research addresses industry-based challenges that will have immediate impact.

## OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE WITH OUR RESEARCH TEAM

There are numerous opportunities to partner with us on research projects and problem-solving initiatives, including:

- » Masters/PhD projects (2–3 years duration; may require some funding)
- » Honours projects (12 month duration)
- » Research placements for prequalifying students (500 hours of work-based placement)
- » Collaborative grant applications
- » Research consultancies
- » Professional education and short courses.

### CONTACT US

If you are interested in working together but don't know where to start, please just email or give us a call:

#### **Professor Sarah MacLean**

Discipline Lead, Social Work and Social Policy, School of Allied Health, Human Services and Sport

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P: +61 3 9479 1374

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## WANT TO KNOW MORE? GET IN TOUCH

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<https://www.linkedin.com/company/latrobealliedhealth/>

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