

# ARCSHS STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2019



Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society



# MISSION

The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS) is a centre for social research into sexuality, health and the social dimensions of human relationships. It works collaboratively and in partnership with communities, community-based organisations, government and professionals in relevant fields to produce research that advances knowledge and promotes positive change in policy, practice and people's lives.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION

In this Strategic Plan 2016-2019, ARCSHS has determined its key strategic direction as striving to become *the leading centre in Australia in sexuality research*.

This will involve the evolution of an established, high-performing centre of excellence into an internationally recognised, inter-disciplinary research centre. For ARCSHS, this strategic direction will mean continuing to strive to answer the difficult and relevant questions of the day, and deliver evidence, programs and recommendations that promote change.

ARCSHS will seek to contribute to positive public discussion of sex and sexuality, acceptance of gender equality and diverse sexualities, inclusive and appropriate service delivery, and government policy that supports healthy sex, sexuality and relationships.

# AIMS

This strategic direction will be achieved by pursuing the following three aims:

- Aim 1: Build new knowledge
- Aim 2: Build research impact
- Aim 3: Build a strong research centre.



# HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Centre was founded in 1993. Since then, ARCSHS has become the major player in framing the agenda on, and delivering the evidence to understand, sex and sexuality in contemporary Australia, particularly in relation to health, education and social justice.

Through surveys of the general population, the Centre has helped track patterns and practices during the life course and over time. ARCSHS also looks specifically at aspects of health and wellbeing with diverse sexuality and gender minorities, including same-sex-attracted and gender-questioning young people, older people, and the intersection of sexuality with other issues such as disability and mental health.

ARCSHS is one of four national centres funded to undertake strategic research as part of Australia's national response to HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections. This includes research that directly informs indicators in these strategies relating to the quality of life of people living with HIV and sexual health among young people.

The Centre uses an inter-disciplinary approach to research, and includes staff with expertise in sociology, psychology, anthropology, cultural studies, history, gender and sexuality studies, education, political science, public health, and community education.

ARCSHS has unique expertise in community-engaged research, particularly working with marginalised and difficult-to-reach communities. The Centre uses a partnership approach at all stages of the research process, including prioritisation of relevant community participation in formulating research questions, designing and conducting research, and in the dissemination and application of results.

The Centre specialises in using research findings to produce training and educational resources for practitioners and to advise policy development. ARCSHS provides invaluable and highly used resources and training for teachers, health practitioners, and community and aged-care workers. The Centre works in partnership with government, service providers and community organisations to influence and change policy to reflect the latest evidence and achieve better outcomes.





# ACHIEVEMENTS

The Centre has maintained a funding base of between \$4 and \$5 million per year from a range of sources including national competitive grant funding through the Australian Research Council and National Health and Medical Research Council, contracts and consultancies with state and federal government departments, and grants from non-government organisations, philanthropic organisations and industry.

ARCSHS employs around 30 effective full time staff, and has impressive academic links in Australia and abroad through adjunct academic appointments. The Centre has a higher degree research program, with an average of 20 postgraduate students enrolled each year, and a strong record of supervision to completion.

ARCSHS generates a significant research output. Over the life of the previous three-year Strategic Plan, this output included on average each year:

- 60 peer-reviewed journal articles
- 2 books/chapters
- 10 monographs and reports
- 80 presentations at national/international conferences.

ARCSHS research outputs are highly regarded, and this was recognised through a ranking of 5 (well above world standard) in the 2015 Excellence in Research for Australia evaluation.

The Centre has a strong history of collaboration across disciplines and institutions with other researchers and research centres. ARCSHS staff participate actively in a range of national and international academies and learned societies. There is a high level of participation in academic journal editorial and reviewer roles.

ARCSHS engages strongly with government and others partners in the non-government sectors relevant to our research. Staff hold over 20 positions on Commonwealth and State/Territory government committees, and 60 positions on the boards and steering committees of community organisations.

ARCSHS also houses Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria (GLHV), an independent, state government-funded lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex health and wellbeing policy and resource unit. Its mission is 'to enhance and promote the health and wellbeing of LGBTI Victorians and to improve the quality of health care they receive'.

The Centre is an important provider of training, resources and workforce development programs, particularly in the areas of sexuality education, blood-borne viruses, and LGBTI inclusive practice. These programs have grown to provide training to over 4,500 people each year.

ARCSHS conducts an impressive program of public engagement through seminars and events, articles and appearances in the mainstream media, and a variety of other digital channels such as Facebook, Twitter, electronic newsletters, and *The Conversation*. Websites associated with ARCSHS projects have received over 10,000 visits and downloads a year.



# CONTEXT

ARCSHS is located within the College of Science, Health and Engineering and the School of Psychology and Public Health at La Trobe University, Melbourne. La Trobe University was founded in 1964 with the stated aims: 'to promote critical enquiry within the university and in the general community', and 'to aid by research and other means the advancement of knowledge and the pursuit of the benefits of its practical application'. La Trobe University has a long-standing commitment to high quality health-related research that aims to make a difference in terms of improving lives, health service delivery and policy development. This has been re-affirmed in La Trobe's most recent strategy 'Future Ready'. ([latrobe.edu.au/about/vision](http://latrobe.edu.au/about/vision))

Future Ready outlines a focus for La Trobe University on research excellence in relation to key world issues, including being 'the best in the world in specific areas of research that are fundamental to the future of human societies'. Other relevant objectives include a commitment to equipping students for 'the world of work and to make a difference to our communities' as well as attracting 'game changing partners' in a mutually beneficial relationship.

ARCSHS makes a substantial contribution to the research performance of La Trobe and the achievement of its research targets in terms of publications and research income, a successful postgraduate program aligned with an area of research focus, and strong research partnerships with other universities, government and industry. The Centre also contributes strongly to strategies at College level that prioritise research performance, as well as research impact and translation into practice, and the dissemination of research outcomes to effect change.

The Centre is led by a Director and Deputy Director, and has developed a staff of enthusiastic and committed researchers and project officers. Administrative, human resources and financial processes are supported through La Trobe University, while staff within the Centre provide support in project management, research development, grant preparation, and reporting. The ARCSHS Strategic and Scientific Advisory Committee plays an important role in providing high level oversight regarding scientific rigour and strategic direction.



# LA TROBE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH THEMES

La Trobe University's broader research strategy has recognised five Research Focus Areas (RFAs) as existing and potential strengths:

- Building healthy communities
- Securing food, water and the environment
- Sport, exercise and rehabilitation
- Transforming human societies
- Understanding disease.

An important purpose of the RFAs has been to encourage research collaboration across disciplines and areas of the university, and build external partnerships. As an interdisciplinary centre with a strong partnership approach, ARCSHS is well-placed to continue its work within this framework.

ARCSHS staff are members of most of the RFAs, as well as a number of the seven smaller Disciplinary Research Programs (DRPs) supported by the University. Staff have received grant funding through competitive rounds so far from the 'Building healthy communities' and 'Transforming human societies' RFAs. ARCSHS has also received funding through a DRP in International Development.

## ARCSHS RESEARCH THEMES

Over the next three years, ARCSHS will maintain and expand the following research themes as areas of established strength:

- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex health and wellbeing
- Blood-borne virus and sexually transmissible infections
- Gender, sexuality and social theory

In addition, the Centre will seek to develop the following as emerging research themes:

- School-based sexuality education
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Policy, community and health services.

Working internationally is a feature of much of ARCSHS' research, but particularly in the areas of HIV and viral hepatitis. This will continue to be a focus running through the research themes outlined above. The Centre has provided social research and capacity-building projects particularly in Asia and the Pacific and technical advice through relationships with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, World Health Organization, Joint United Nations Programme of HIV/AIDS, and the Coalition for the Eradication of Viral Hepatitis in Asia Pacific.



# ACHIEVING OUR AIMS

ARCSHS has developed a set of aims that show the links and relationships between its activities, and the changes that it seeks to bring about. How to understand and measure results will be discussed in greater detail in the sections below.

A key relationship that runs through all of the Centre's work and is essential to achieving its aims is the involvement of partners.

ARCSHS research and training activities involve a wide range of populations and communities. The definition of these groups is based on social categories such as gender and sexuality, contexts such as school or work, belonging to a particular community such as the gay community or culturally and linguistically diverse or indigenous communities, living with or being affected by a disease such as HIV or prostate cancer, and experiential factors related to ageing or decisions on relationships and contraception. Definitions of these populations and communities are overlapping and ever-changing. Nevertheless, ARCSHS strives to maximise the involvement of these populations and communities as partners throughout the research process.

In addition, research partners include:

- Other researchers and research institutions
- Government departments
- Government advisory bodies
- Peak bodies
- Community and non-governmental organisations
- Service providers
- Practitioners and professionals
- Industry.

Partners are consulted and involved at every stage of the research process through a range of tailored strategies and relationships. This often includes the formation of advisory or reference committees for projects, programs or areas of research. However, it also occurs in an ongoing way through feedback from research participants, and relationships with organisations representing research populations or other communities. These participatory strategies are guided by a range of quality research and community engagement principles developed in the areas in which we research (such as the Great Involvement of People with HIV or GIPA principle).

ARCSHS also maintains collaborations with partners through its public engagement activities. The Centre involves itself in public debates and discussions that serve to sharpen ideas on the important questions to ask and answer.









# AIM 3: BUILD A STRONG RESEARCH CENTRE

The cornerstone of this Strategic Plan is ensuring that ARCSHS is a strong centre that supports and facilitates the work of staff and students in achieving its aims.

An important part of this over the next three years will be renewing research leadership. This will maintain and enhance the Centre's capacity to build a research program and its impact, attract external funding and support the development of scholarship among our staff and students.

A key factor in the sustainability of the Centre is securing predictable funding and effective support in operational functioning from La Trobe University. This also includes the development of the Centre's postgraduate program and other teaching options within the University.

ARCSHS will build on an already highly productive workforce capable of both independent and team-based work. The Centre aims to promote a positive internal culture that enhances activities through support and collaboration among staff, and promotes productive external relationships.

Across all its projects, ARCSHS ensures that activities reflect best practice in research and training, and comply with all necessary codes, policies and procedures required by the university and external funders. The Centre will continue to look for any opportunities to improve its effectiveness and professionalise its approach.

ACTIONS	MEASURES
Foster a productive and collaborative workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promotions achieved</li> <li>▪ Staff reported satisfaction with supervision, mentoring and support</li> <li>▪ Regular forums for collaboration and feedback</li> </ul>
Be effective, professional and sustainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recruit and retain research leaders</li> <li>▪ Management and governance structures have met and fulfilled their roles</li> <li>▪ Ongoing review and improvement in administrative and operational support</li> <li>▪ Staff retention</li> <li>▪ Effective data collection and monitoring against the Strategic Plan</li> </ul>
Secure funding and support from within La Trobe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clear funding model and support structures have been developed</li> <li>▪ University support for teaching and higher degree research programs</li> </ul>

# MONITORING AND REVIEW

This Strategic Plan is a key public document that outlines ARCSHS's mission, strategic direction, aims and expectations of performance for the period 2016-2019.

This period will be a significant period of change for ARCSHS, with a Federal election and the renewal of a large proportion of its Commonwealth funding due in 2016. 2017 will mark 25 years since the beginning of ARCSHS's association with La Trobe, which will also celebrate its 50 year anniversary in 2017. This year will also mark the development of a new strategic plan for La Trobe.

The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to set the direction that can see ARCSHS through the next stage of its development, and allow for ongoing analysis of performance and necessary adjustments along the way. It will be used internally as a planning tool and will be reviewed annually with input from all staff to track progress against key performance indicators and to revise plans for the coming year. A report from each annual review of the Strategic Plan will be provided to the Strategic and Scientific Advisory Committee. A new plan will be prepared by 2019.





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in Sex, Health and Society

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