

# Celebrating 15 Years

*Of Research Excellence In Rural  
Ageing And Aged Care*





# JOHN RICHARDS CENTRE FOR RURAL AGEING RESEARCH 2007-2022

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# Vice-Chancellor's Preface

I am delighted to introduce this celebration of the remarkable achievements of the John Richards Centre for Rural Ageing Research, and its generous benefactor, John Richards OAM, over the last 15 years.

La Trobe University is deeply committed to rural and regional communities. The Centre has become a cornerstone of our regional research program and is an essential part of our Albury-Wodonga campus. Its work has a positive impact on many communities across regional Victoria and Australia.

The John Richards Centre for Rural Ageing Research is the only research centre of its kind that specialises in rural ageing research and program development. We are proud to help John Richards OAM to fulfill his vision to establish a research centre that is dedicated to developing and implementing programs that make a difference to the wellbeing of older people living in rural areas.

The Centre exemplifies what the University hopes to achieve through the work of its Research Themes, particularly our research program on 'Healthy people, families and communities'. It provides evidence to support programs that are widely used in the community and plays an important role in advancing knowledge and promoting positive change in policy and practice, and in people's lives.

The Centre's programs addressing rural aged care workforce and health delivery issues are effective because of the way that the Centre works in collaboration with aged care service providers and consumers in rural and regional areas to bring about improved outcomes for older people and their families and carers.

The Centre has made a significant contribution to La Trobe University's research over a sustained period. It exemplifies our social inclusion mission through its work to ensure that no-one is disadvantaged because of where they live.

A generous donation from John Richards OAM enabled the creation of the Centre at La Trobe University. We are also grateful for the sustained contribution and support of the Victorian Government Department of Health over the years, including support for the establishment of the initiative in 2007.

On behalf of the La Trobe University community, I congratulate everyone involved with the Centre on their achievements over the last 15 years. The Centre's record of impactful research has certainly realised John Richards' vision to support ageing in country Victoria and beyond.

The University is very pleased to be home to a Centre that is so deeply committed to work that has a positive impact in the community. We look forward to seeing the Centre continue its work to benefit older people living in rural areas for many years to come.

**Professor John Dewar AO**  
Vice-Chancellor, La Trobe University

# Director's Foreword

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the John Richards Centre for Rural Ageing Research. It is a significant milestone and I feel privileged to be part of the Centre since 2014 and leading the Centre in the past six years.

I would like to use this foreword to acknowledge those who have contributed to the growth and success of the Centre during the past decade and a half. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it has taken a team to nurture and grow the Centre over the past fifteen years.

The Centre was made possible through the vision, commitment and generosity of our benefactor, John Richards OAM, who wanted to improve the lives of older rural Australians. John ensured that his philanthropic gift was matched and grown through partnerships with La Trobe University and the Victorian Department of Health. There are many people who were instrumental in setting up, and contributing to the subsequent success of, the Initiative, and now John Richards Centre. Dr Guin Threlkeld was appointed as Interim Acting Director alongside Professor Annette Street as Interim Chair until Professor Jeni Warburton's appointment as the inaugural John Richards Chair in 2008. These appointments laid the foundation and set the structure for the John Richards Initiative's success in those early years. La Trobe University's ongoing support strengthens the Centre and I particularly would like to thank Professor John Dewar AO, Professor Susan Dodds, Professor Rob Pike, and Professor Ashley Franks.

I would like to acknowledge invaluable input from Chris Puckey from the Victorian Department of Health, Professor Rhonda Nay, Professor Hal Swerissen, Professor Jane Farmer, Professor Richard Speed, Professor Keith Nugent, Professor Virginia Lewis, Professor Bill McGuinness and Professor Lisa McKenna from the School of Nursing and Midwifery.

Professor Pamela Snow and Gerald Brennan were instrumental in establishing the John Richards Centre for Rural Ageing Research within the La Trobe Rural Health School which provided an excellent fit with the JRC's focus on rural research. While we have maintained our base at the Albury-Wodonga campus, our team has expanded since 2017. We now have clusters of staff and students located in Bendigo, Mildura and Melbourne campuses. The ongoing support from our colleagues under the leadership of Professor Jane Mills, Dean of the La Trobe Rural Health School, is critical to our success.

I would like to thank Peter de Koeyer who served as chair of our Reference Group over the past decade. It's beyond the scope of this brief foreword to mention individual members of the Reference Group during the past fifteen years. As is the nature of such bodies, there has been turnover of membership, but the underlying constant has been support for the Centre. Industry partners and rural communities have been critical to the success of the Centre. Again, there are too many to mention individually. We wish to continue these partnerships in improving the lives of older rural Australians in accordance with John's original vision.

As we celebrate our 15-year anniversary, I would like to acknowledge the tremendous contribution by staff and students who co-produce innovative research for older adults in rural communities. The success of the JRC is a testament to their passion, hard work and creativity. I hope you enjoy reading the journey of the JRC and thank my dedicated team who collated this report.

**Professor Irene Blackberry**  
Director and Chair, John Richards Centre for Rural Ageing Research



# Who Is John Richards OAM? A Brief Biography

## A fully engaged life

John Richards OAM is an exemplary businessman, who spent a large part of his working life in the news agency business. Therefore, there is much poetic symmetry that he started life in a house attached to the Carnegie News Agency, which was owned by his parents. John was the second born child, and this place in the family afforded him the opportunity to develop the work and care ethic that was to become an overarching motto for his life.

*"Number two in the family, it's the one that gets the most work, particularly when you've got the littler ones! My younger brothers are 10 years younger than me. It was my job to be looking after them all the time. Richard is the oldest, then me, Margaret, Glen, and the twins, Peter and David. Being the only girl with 5 brothers, Margaret was spoiled!"*

Although John grew up in Melbourne and was educated at Malvern Grammar School, he developed a passion for rural living and agriculture in his early life. During his last 2 years of secondary school John studied Agricultural Science one afternoon a week, at the Burnley Agricultural College. After leaving school John wanted to find work in a rural area, but his mother was adamant that would not happen; she said "you're not going to the country. You're going to have to stop in town!" John then looked for work in Melbourne.

*"Jobs weren't easy to get in 1952-1953 because there were still so many people coming home from the war and taking up the jobs. There weren't many jobs for school leavers. I ended up getting work at the Newmarket Saleyards. I was classified as a clerk. My job involved handling animals as well as doing clerical duties at the auction sales. It was good, I quite enjoyed it. At least I was with animals. It had a rural atmosphere attached to it which was good. But as I went along towards the end of the year, I saw a job advertised for a Jackeroo*

*and I applied for it. I was lucky, I got it. There were a lot of applicants for it. It was in New South Wales, not very far from Albury actually, in Gerogery."*

John enjoyed the life of a jackeroo. In a surprising echo of his childhood and adolescence, John's "jackarooing duties included being a babysitter for the manager's kid." John cares deeply for other people and accepted this task without complaint. John's kind and considerate nature was also demonstrated in his next career move.

*"I was up at Gerogery as a jackeroo for a year, and then of course I had to register for National Service. I thought it would be difficult for my boss if I got called up to do my National Service because they wouldn't give you much notice that you get called for duty; they usually only give you a month's notice. I didn't want to make life difficult for my boss, so I resigned so that the boss could get somebody else to work. I went into national service; I did my 3 months there. I was in the armed corps. I used to drive a tank."*

After completing his National Service, John resumed a career in agriculture. "I was managing a property out at Ballarat and then my parents bought a property and I worked there too." Unfortunately, John's career in agriculture was derailed when he experienced a farming accident.

*"I was loading hay on the back of a truck. It was a very windy day and it got blown off and landed on my back. And I was in a pretty bad way. I took myself into hospital in Ballarat and I had a choice of two specialists: one kept you on your feet all the time and the other one put you in bed. I went for the one that kept you on your feet! I nursed my injuries and got through that, but I wasn't making a full recovery, so I went to another specialist in Melbourne, who said "well I'm sorry but you better give that farming up". It was a disappointment to me."*

John turned to a friend who had a recruiting business, for advice about what he could pursue next in his career.

*"He got me a job in superannuation, mostly investment based. It was in the very, very early days. And I did enjoy that. It was really good. The job started in Melbourne, and I was only in it for a couple of months, and they were short of somebody in Sydney. So, they sent me to Sydney for a couple of weeks, but I stayed there for 6 years!"*

After several years working in superannuation, John decided that he needed a new challenge, as he was no longer achieving what he wanted. He dabbled for a short while in real estate and even began attending night school at Melbourne Tech, now RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology), to gain his real estate licence. However ultimately, John surprised himself by making a move into the news agency business.

*"I finished up at a news agency in Brunswick in Sydney Road. My father wanted me to go into the news agency before, working for him. But I said, "no, I will make my own way in life thank you very much" I thought being a news agent was the last thing I wanted, but then I thought, "well my family did well very well out of it", and other members of the family were involved in the business too. So that sort of sealed my interest in it. I thought "I'll give that a go for 10 years and then I'll be pretty right". The news agency business I got had been on the market for about 5 years, and nobody wanted it. So I thought, well, that's the one for me to try!"*

After a few years, the opportunity to run a news agency in Yarrowonga arose. John jumped at the chance to live in a rural area again and pursue his longstanding interest in agriculture.

*"People said, "what do you want to go to Yarrowonga for?" I said, "I'm just shifting up Sydney Road that's all!" Of course, the added attraction was that I was interested in rural affairs and in agriculture, they were two of my likings. Anyway, I put in for the news agency and I got it, and that was 50 years ago. And I've been very happy with it ever since. Of course, I've developed my agricultural interests too in this area. I had properties. I finished up with a couple of thousand acres over the river in Mulwala and I did have a block down on the river too. That was my first one. I got that because I did like fishing. That was good."*

*"I did have another interest along the way too, there was someone who had the site of the caravan park, but they weren't getting far with it for lack of finance, so I got involved in that. I ended up buying and developing it, and the original owners continued on as my managers."*

John went on to manage the Yarrowonga News Agency for 28 years. He made his home in Yarrowonga and settled into a busy life, filled with work, life-long learning, caring and service to others and his community, and philanthropy

## Keep on keeping on: Stay busy and involved in life

John is happiest when he is busy. John's advice for a fulfilled life is to "be busy - keeping your mind active and always find something to do of a positive nature, rather than just filling in time for the sake of it." During his working life, John not only chose full-time, meaningful employment, he also had side businesses, and participated in professional activities, community activities, and hobbies – travel, farming, and fishing.

*"I was very active in business organisations. I was treasurer and vice president of the state organisation of the news agency and very involved with the federal body too. I've been very interested real estate. I got involved in agriculture. I got very involved in politics for a while. I was president of the local federal area, which was very active. I served some time on the Victorian Hospital Association too. I had a share farm for 40 odd years. There has always been something to come and fill my time. Or somebody would come and tap me on the shoulder."*

*"I think I was trained for a life of being active and busy because my father, being a news agent, was always very active and busy. I just followed in his footsteps to make my own way in life, and I've done just that. He worked 6 days a week. I've always worked long hours, sometimes 13 or 14-hour days. I couldn't close the door because I provided a service to the public and they expected me to be providing the service."*



Image Above: John in his Malvern Grammar School uniform, November 1947



Image Right: In the shearing shed, 2006

John has always been willing to work hard and to be involved in the life of others, to help them, to improve life, and to provide the services that the community relied on. John's biggest passion in life is "people".

*"My interest in people started from school. I didn't want to be on my own. I wanted to be involved with them. The news agency business enabled me to come in contact with most people living in the town on an individual basis, probably more than anybody else really on a regular basis. Well, you knew a lot of their families too. And their children too, you had them working for you. In those days we used to employ paper boys or girls or both. It was all part of the getting to know you feature."*

John continues to keep himself busy as he ages.

*"It's very important to keep physically active. I walk at 6.30a.m. My average is 4 kilometres a day, but I often do 6 or 7 kilometres. I still have a certain amount of business activity. I certainly have some investments which occupy my time and keep my mind active and are something to look forward to thinking about what is coming up tomorrow and what you didn't do yesterday and the community around you. I was still president of the hospital and very active in it into my 70s. You've got to keep your brain active."*



Image Left: John with his niece, Emma Marchant, on the farm at Mulwala, 2011

Image Right: John with his nephew, Sam Marchant, at Sam's graduation, 2010

## My business is my pleasure, and my pleasure is my business

John has kept busy throughout his life through his work. John's introduction to the world of work started as a boy.

*"Because my parents were news agents, I was the spare paperboy. I used to do that to help out. We didn't call it work, but I suppose that is what it was. Even as little kids, my siblings and I were involved in it. We used to ride up to the street to do paper rounds and worked in the shop after school."*

John learned more about business at school, and he showed a special aptitude for it.

*"I liked economics and accounting; they were my favourite subjects at school. In fact, I won the economics prize in my final year of school!"*

John does not separate business from life. He has always sought opportunities to be involved in all aspects of life, to learn from others, and to have a wide variety of experiences.

*"My work was my interest, and my interests were my work."*

*Mostly my trips overseas involved business. I experienced a different way of life and expanded my own knowledge. The whole world was open to me to explore."*



## A lifetime of learning

John is a lifelong learner, but he did not follow the standard means of broadening his education. John learned about life, work, and people, by plunging headlong into living and taking everyday opportunities for learning. As John engaged in everyday work, community, and social activities, he would say to himself: oh, am I interested in that? Is there any future in that for me? Not from a selfish point of view, but for learning and improving my own capacity.

John made his own opportunities for learning through travel. He enjoyed travelling, and his colleagues often called on him for this. During his time with the superannuation company, if his colleagues "needed someone to go anywhere outside of Melbourne, they got onto me – 'you do it John' they said."

*"I took myself overseas. I saved up my fortnight's leave, to put a bit more research into employee benefit plans, because I was associated with these organisations, particularly the Employers Federation in Victoria and New South Wales. I thought, well, I will go and have a look at what happens in other countries. So, in 1964 I packed up. I was away for 13 weeks, in England, Holland, and I went across to Canada and the United States. I visited many organisations and banks. They were very, very good to me. I came back well educated."*

*"I've been around the world many times. They've all been great experiences. I've been to China twice, to look at the developments in rural areas that had taken place. I went to meet people and meet contacts from all around the world and saw various aspects of local life, as part of my business and community activities."*



## A lifetime of service

Throughout his life, John has taken on many roles of providing service to others. He has contributed to improving the lives of rural people.

*"I was the chairman of the Central Murray Development Corporation, set up by one of the governments and involved six shires: there was Yarrowonga, Corowa, Berrigan, Cobram, Nathalia, and Numurkah. We were very successful and saw great development. One of our large successes was the establishment of the natural gas pipeline into Yarrowonga."*

John has also served in professional and community organisations.

*"I was state vice president of the News Agency Association, and had a very strong Australia-wide interest in that."*

*I also got very involved in the Sun Tour for about 10 years. The team approached me and I became the manager of the Yarrowonga team. That was a very interesting experience."*

*I was also involved in the Landcare movement and grew 200 acres of trees. I had land that was subject to water inundation, so I planted trees on it. It still does me good to drive past the trees and see that they are doing very well."*

John also served as president of the Yarrowonga District Health Service board of management.

*"I got invited to seek election to the hospital board of management, and I thought, 'what do I know about health? I don't know anything about that.' But I knew the Minister for Health and I thought, 'well he had no previous experience in health at the time, so I can't say I'd be the only person that knew nothing of it!' Anyway, I got very interested in it and I served on the board here at Yarrowonga for 28 years and saw the gross expansion of health services in this area."*

Image Left: John at a Yarrowonga Hospital function, 2006

John was very effective in his role with Moira Healthcare Alliance. As part of this role, he was instrumental in facilitating the building of a new hospital at Yarrawonga and expanding their aged care services.

*"Aged care had only just started at that time. We created one of the first dementia units. I had an application in to develop our aged care facility and they said, "no, the government's got no money for that." They said, "if you'd like to establish a dementia wing, we would be very much in favour of that." Seeing as they would support that and they came up with the funds, we built a new dementia wing - and that has even expanded since those days in the early 90s, and then we built the aged person's nursing home."*

## Love for rural life

John has an abiding passion for rural living and the rural lifestyle, which like many of his other passions, began in his boyhood.

*My family had a holiday house down at Mornington and we used to go there for school holidays, but I wasn't all that keen on the beach. I developed a relationship with my country cousins, and I preferred visiting them for most of the school holidays. I used to help on the farm and enjoyed it. I liked being up there in the September holidays because they'd be shearing. My job was being the roustabout and I'd have to go across to the homestead and get the "smoko" as they used to call it: the morning and afternoon tea. I remember the first day coming back, there was no milk in the billy of tea. "Oh", I said, "there's no milk". And my uncle said "oh, you've grown up now, you don't have milk in your tea anymore." So, I had to develop a taste of no milk in my tea!*

Fishing was a favourite leisure activity of John's. He was invited by a friend to go fishing on the outer Barrier Reef. The fishing trip turned into an annual event for John and his friends.

*"I was very keen on fishing. We would camp on the boat and fish for a whole week. I went up there every year for 25 years. It was a great experience. There was about 15 of us. You wouldn't see land for a week. You were 100 miles out to sea, and the ships would be passing you by. It was a wonderful experience. We caught fish and froze them. You could bring them home and they'd last you for 3 months. To go out fishing and enjoying time with friends was great. We had professional people as well as ordinary people like me."*



Image Above: John and his fish off the coast of Cairns, 2011

## You've got to give something back

John is a very generous and humble man. His philosophy about philanthropy is that *"if you get something out of it, you've got to contribute something back to it, other than just paying your taxes."* John's altruism is also motivated by his abiding interest in and caring for people, and his passion to improve the world.

*"I was motivated to see the organisations achieve their objectives, and I wanted to help others improve their lives. My father and grandfather exemplified this, and I thought I should do the same, or better."*

*"I wanted to do something for my fellow countrymen. I had a very serious accident about 60 years ago and I was taken to the Royal Melbourne. I was in a very bad way and was there for some time. I had more to do with life than pack up. Every now and then, I donate to the Royal Melbourne to show my appreciation."*

John has also been generous to his local community. As well as his generosity in supporting aged care, John also supports young people's education in agriculture.

*"I have funded 3 scholarships that are in perpetuity, and I feel I have done something for mainly local people, and I have given young people an opportunity to further their experience. I've taken pleasure in that because I get a lot out of the town, and I've given something back. It's all contributing to the wellbeing of people in general."*

Image Right: Professor Adrienne Clarke (La Trobe University Chancellor) John Richards OAM, Dr Guin Threlkeld, 2015.

## Legacy for the future: The John Richards Centre for Rural Ageing Research

John is always looking for ways to contribute back to the community and to improve the lives of others. Building on his interest in health and aged care, he developed the idea of a research centre to improve the lives of older people.

*"People's lifespans have extended. Older people can live well at home for longer and keep their independence. That's what keeps me going and I still enjoy that feature of life. At that time research in aged care was seen as an area of neglect. I was very concerned for aged people in rural communities. If we could move in that direction that would make everybody's life better. That's how I became interested in developing the John Richards Initiative. I thought well, I will do something for the future."*

*"I had contacts in the government and organisations and had somebody who developed a soft ear for what I had in mind and that was Tom Keating, who headed up North East Regional Health in Wangaratta at the time. I had a discussion with him about what I wanted to do. Anyway, he came up with a proposal which I thought was akin to what I had in mind, and he arranged the association with La Trobe University, and we went on from there."*

*"Guin Threlkeld started the John Richards Initiative in its infancy and then it developed when Jennifer Warburton was appointed as the first professor and then Irene Blackberry came along. And they have all contributed enormously to it. They haven't seen it wither on the vine. They've expanded it all to cross borders. I think our location in Albury-Wodonga was ideal for that situation being on the border; we could appreciate the differences there. It's good to see that the JRC has continued to develop over time."*



*“Communication is one of the accomplishments of the JRC: making people more aware of ageing in rural areas. I’m sure older people have benefitted from the facility and training that people have had in the aged care sector. They were the poor cousin before, and now they’ve been lifted up into the forefront, both in regional centres and rural towns; that’s been its broad focus. We had an offer from metropolitans that wanted to take over, but I said “no”, so that the rural focus was not lost. The rural focus is very important. People in rural situations have got to be provided for.”*

*“I think the JRC is in capable hands, and I’ve been very happy with the development of it. In the next 10 years I hope the JRC will do more of the same and keep expanding. It would be great to expand opportunity for health professionals to learn. You need the best advice from healthcare workers. JRC is expanding in the direction of helping professionals provide excellent care. In 50 years hence, I hope the JRC is still considering their purpose in life and expanding to accommodate the changes that have taken place.”*

## Winding back, but keeping on

In recent years, as John reached his mid-eighties, he has felt the need to scale back his participation in business, agriculture, and community life. *“I had two falls and they both took me to hospital, and I finished up with a pacemaker and had to give up my driving licence.”* John treated these setbacks as he has done with many frustrations and challenges in his life: he is optimistic and pragmatic and never gives up. John was unable to drive, *“so I’ve developed my legs a lot since!”* As John has aged, he has slowed down in pursuing his passions, but he has not stopped.

*“You have to learn to live with the ageing process, but you wonder what can happen next. This ageing process is a creeping one, you get fenced in in so many ways. I don’t want to stop working, even now. You can’t do what you used to do. You’ve got to use more mental power.”*

*“I don’t have the involvement with the JRC now that I did in the early days, in its establishment. I’ve got to have an overview of it. In the early days I was very involved at the ground level, but I’m not as much actively involved now as I used to be. I feel you have to stand back and let younger ones take over.”*

*“I’ve achieved what I have today, by me whipping myself along. You’ve got to see where opportunity lies and where you can improve it too. You keep on keeping on”.*



# A Reflection On The John Richards Centre's Journey Over The Past 15 Years

## Incubation

The John Richards Initiative (JRI) was originated from John Richards' vision that his philanthropy could make a difference and improve the lives of older rural Australians. Before it became a reality, the idea was incubated for more than a year through discussions between John, the Department of Human Services (DHS), and La Trobe University (LTU).

*John was interested in making a philanthropic gift that would make a difference to the experience of older people in regional communities. John was really astute; he wanted to ensure that anything that he gave was multiplied through partnerships. If he was to make a donation, he wanted La Trobe University and Department of Human Services to match it, to multiply the resources and so there was buy-in and connection from Department of Human Services (Guin Threlkeld)*

*I was involved right from the very start. I was the Manager of Policy and Analysis in the Aged Care branch in the Department of Human Services. Tom Keating, who was the local Regional Director at that time, went directly to the Minister with a proposition to establish something at La Trobe University in Albury-Wodonga. The Minister's Office referred it to our branch. I was involved in analysing the proposal to see whether it was a good idea. And I continued my association up until my retirement (Chris Puckey)*

## Launch of the John Richards Initiative into Aged Care in Rural Communities

The JRI was launched on 11 May 2007 by the Honourable Gavin Jennings, Minister for Community Services to be based at La Trobe University Albury-Wodonga campus. During his speech, the Minister noted:

*Mr Richards' vision is to support aged care in rural and regional communities, and he has helped realise that vision through a generous personal donation. With matching contributions from the Bracks Government and from La Trobe University, the funding for this initiative will total \$1.5 million over five years. This significant funding platform will provide leverage for research grants and further contributions of funding from other sources. The John Richards Research Initiative into Aged Care in Rural and Regional Communities provides an opportunity for research into rural aged care workforce issues that may otherwise not be available. It will allow for local research into specifically rural issues and enable a research team to be based at the Wodonga campus of La Trobe University. All older Victorians requiring access to aged care services must have appropriate choices available to them. Appropriate choices depend very much on quality research and evidence-based solutions, which is what the John Richards Initiative is about (as recorded by Chris Puckey).*

*John Richards is the hero of the John Richards Centre. He had a vision and was prepared to invest millions of his own dollars in realising that vision. Alongside him was Prof Tom Keating. Tom had a real love of rural and regional Victoria. He*



*had the health and government networks and knowledge to take John's dream to the next level. I had the privilege of going with John and Tom to meet with the Minister. Not all Ministers are equal. Gavin Jennings was a great Minister. He listened, understood and importantly was prepared to match his interest with dollars. An amazing collaboration was born between philanthropist, La Trobe University and government and the John Richards Initiative was launched. The vision and commitment could have failed in the wrong hands but JRI had the best hands. The leadership and staff have, from day one, built on John's dream and made it a reality. The local region, Victoria more broadly and the international community have been the beneficiaries. John you are a legend and my hero. What strides health research and practice could make if we had more generous people like John and government Ministers like Gavin prepared to support initiative and philanthropy. I applaud the JRI and the staff who are capitalising on the Initiative to improve healthcare (Rhonda Nay).*

## A strong foundation

Dr Guin Threlkeld was appointed as the Interim Acting Director and Professor Annette Street was appointed as the Interim Chair. Working collaboratively with John Richards, the JRI Reference Group, and representatives from health, aged care, and community services, the structure and focus of the JRI gradually took shape and began its work.

*I'd worked a bit with Annette Street and was impressed by her research and organisational savviness and her understanding of how you get research off the ground, not just project by project, but in a programmatic way. We had conversations with all and sundry. We met with all sorts of people. We did lots of spruiking about the establishment of the JRI and listening to views about what the Initiative might achieve and what the hot topics were. Hal Swerissen came up and gave a Faculty of Health Sciences Dean's lecture on population ageing; there were a lot of conversations triggered by that. Out of all of that mix, Annette came up with the first structure where there were 3 streams of work: workforce, healthy ageing in place, and aged care (Guin Threlkeld)*

*The reference group had a lot of people on it and almost everyone came with their own agenda. There was a lot of high hopes. I sat down with John and worked through what the donation could cover in terms of salaries, starter grants, and research scholarships. John's donation was a very substantial amount of money, but we know that research is expensive and there's long lead in times to get the levels of funding that can make a centre sustainable. (Annette Street).*

## Building and maintaining the momentum

Professor Jeni Warburton was recruited as the first John Richards Chair in October 2008. Jeni set about building on the solid foundation provided to her by Dr Guin Threlkeld and Professor Annette Street.

*I applied for grants based on my expertise around ageing and community. There were a lot of opportunities around health services, delivery of services, community, and social capital. We were only limited by time and availability of staff. Chris Puckey invited me to Melbourne to meet with the Department of Human Services and they offered me a large grant to do something in residential aged care. We did that. We did a good job. Out of that we had sufficient funds to do the project well and facilitate 2 PhD students to undertake their studies. It was clear that to grow, we needed projects, staff, and PhD students, to help build momentum. So, we worked with staff across other disciplines at La Trobe Albury-Wodonga, who were either already involved, or had an interest, in ageing research. As we built our reputation, and accessed some grant funding, we were able to employ more staff and attract more PhD students (Jeni Warburton).*

*Getting a funding base for the aged care research beyond John's contribution was really important. You really needed to keep the momentum. The leader is constantly having to develop new grants because you've got to keep funding the centre, you've got to keep funding the positions and there is a sense of doing the research while finishing up other research and publishing research at the same time as you're applying for more grants. Getting the structure in place so there were outcomes coming out so people could see they're publishing. Just being able to use the name out there when you're presenting at international conferences or other sorts of events (Annette Street).*



Image Above: PhD student Mary Taylor and Professor Annette Street

## Funding in perpetuity

There was a vital achievement in 2012, when funding for the JRI was secured in an ongoing capacity. Professor Jeni Warburton noted that “a lot of centres come up and then go away over time”. Safeguarding recurring funding has given the JRI an enviably stable base for sustainability.

*There was an independent 5-year review by La Trobe University and Department of Health Services in 2012 at which time both organisations agreed to continue their funding since substantial work was being completed by the JRI. Sometime after, John reorganised things so he could guarantee funding for the centre in perpetuity, whereas previously monies had been given in 5-year grants. When John funded in perpetuity, he asked DHS to do the same, but that's not something that Departments do, they aren't able to make that sort of commitment. However, there are some activities that Departments fund which are effectively in perpetuity. For example, if they build a new hospital, they cannot stop funding the hospital. We were able to convince the people at the time that the funding should become recurrent and ongoing – so it's the next best thing to perpetuity. It's the same basis on which hospitals are funded. There are other centres the Department has been funding, but they don't have a letter that says, 'it's recurrent, ongoing funding' (Chris Puckey)*



Image Left: Mr Chris Puckey, Professor Jeni Warburton, and John Richards OAM

## Overcoming challenges

Challenges faced during the formation, consolidation, and growth of the JRI included finding a place within LTU governance structure that was a good conceptual fit, attracting high quality and experienced staff, and building productive working relationships. Initially, the JRI was “part of the Australian Institute of Primary Care and Ageing (AIPCA) under Professor Rhonda Nay. Although we were part of the AIPCA, because their projects and partners were based in Melbourne, rural issues were not a focus, and it was hard to build collaborations” (Jeni Warburton). Next, the JRI was situated under the umbrella of the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Bundoora campus.

In 2014, Associate Professor Irene Blackberry joined the JRI, bringing with her significant expertise in health services and ageing research. Her appointment was made based on the 2012 external review of the need to grow health services research and a succession plan. Upon Professor Warburton's retirement, Irene successfully applied for the Director and Chair's position in 2016.

Recruiting high quality and experienced staff to work in a rural and regional area was reported to be challenging. Guin Threlkeld noted that “in this area of Albury-Wodonga there is less than 50% the higher education participation rate of Melbourne, so it's a very different environment to be recruiting people from or to. Staffing challenges are significant.”

*It became clear that it would take some time to procure a professor with a strong research background in rural aged care research who was prepared to live in the Albury-Wodonga area. They would get international applicants but not everyone was ready to live in a rural area. Some people were interested in the position but when they came to Albury-Wodonga to have a look it was a little bit smaller than what they'd anticipated. Most people did their research with the Bundoora campus (Annette Street)*



Another hurdle that has been faced while developing the JRC, is establishing partnerships with other organisations.

*Everybody wants to be your friend, but not everybody wants to be your partner and make the commitment and put some money up. Actually, getting to partnering with organisations in a much more mature way has been a big challenge. But it has happened; for example, the partnership with Border Medical Oncology has been a really significant step. Then all the partners that have come on board with the Collaborative Research Centre (CRC) bid - I think that bodes so well for the future whatever the CRC outcome - it is building those really productive partnerships (Guin Threlkeld)*

Transformation at La Trobe University in 2014 and the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic created novel challenges that required adaptation within a research centre where all staff are research only funded by external research grants.

*"For the past years, there was a lack of social connection because we could not travel, and we had to work from home. There was a lot of uncertainty of our future. However, we have been quite resilient and managed to navigate all of these challenges together. We are growing stronger as a team and continue to perform well" (Irene Blackberry).*

Image Above: Dr Pauline Savy, Dr Melissa Kennedy, Ms Turi Berg, Ms Fiona Jones, Professor Jeni Warburton, and Dr Rachel Winterton

## Consolidating and expanding

### Transformation to become an independent research centre

In 2018, the JRI was transformed from a Research Initiative to a Research Centre. The JRC was relocated from the Australian Institute of Primary Care and Ageing (AIPCA) at School of Nursing and Midwifery to be part of La Trobe Rural Health School. Chris Puckey considered this to be "a really good move", as there is excellent congruence with the JRC's focus on rural research.

*An important milestone was when we transformed from the John Richards Initiative to become the John Richards Centre for Rural Ageing Research. We became an independent centre, the first research centre in the regional campuses of La Trobe University and the first research centre for the La Trobe Rural Health School. This is a significant milestone and a recognition of the growth of the JRI over the past decade where we demonstrated four-fold increase in research income and staffing (Irene Blackberry)*

*It was great to have John accompany me to see firsthand when our research was presented at an international ageing conference in Japan in 2019 (Irene Blackberry)*

## Achievements

The JRC was given a strong foundation by John Richards, Department of Human Services, and La Trobe University's generous and astute investments. Since its establishment, there have been achievements in securing highly competent staff and students, and in forging partnerships at local, state, national, and international levels, which have culminated in building the Centre's standing and reputation.

Regarding staff and students, Guin Threlkeld reflected that "getting Annette Street on board lifted things from Day One. There weren't many people around who had such a good sense of how to set up a program of research, not just get some money for research projects." Jeni Warburton revelled in seeing the first PhD student go all the way through her course and graduate. Chris Puckey felt it was satisfying to watch the centre grow its academic staff and "seeing staff go on to be well recognised themselves and holding senior academic positions". Annette Street mused that there

has been significant leadership by the Centre Directors: "The appointment of Irene has been pivotal in bringing a breadth of expertise and associations. She's built on the work that Jeni Warburton did and has been able to expand further." Irene Blackberry has greatly valued "having a supportive and collaborative research team. It's quite an unusual model to operate a research centre where are based in a large and dispersed geographical area. It's quite unique to have a multi-disciplinary team working across so many campuses and yet we all work together well to achieve John Richards' vision. For staff to connect across all of the regional and the metro campuses is critical to the success of the John Richards Centre".

That the JRC aspired to create and maintain a vital academic position was clear from its establishment.

*It was an accomplishment that a Chair was appointed for the JRI as it gave considerable academic standing to the centre. It was a negotiation point between the Department of Human Services and the University. If the Department of Human Services funded the Chair with their contribution, then the University agreed to fund a second full-time senior academic staff member. We felt that it was important. We wanted a centre that would have that degree of impact (Chris Puckey)*

Gaining and completing large and significant grants has also contributed to the development of the JRC's academic reputation, such as an Australian Research Council Linkage grant led by Professor Jeni Warburton and Medical Research Future Fund grants led by Professor Irene Blackberry. The quality of the work of the JRC has also been recognised in non-academic arenas: "seeing the work quoted in the Royal Commission. Seeing staff members called to give expert evidence in the Royal Commission; the work was recognised there. Research that has an international standing but that is impactful in that way" (Guin Threlkeld).



Image Above: Colleagues from Kyushu University, Japan with John Richards OAM, Professor Irene Blackberry, and Mr Nick Bisley

## Ongoing contribution

The work of the JRC, with its spotlight on ageing, delivers crucial information for individuals, communities, services, and governments.

*Older people need to know the JRC is doing work that is relevant to their lives, informed by the lives and experience of them and people like them and that it will make a difference to people coming behind them. It is important they know that their experience and the challenges and strengths and resilience they exhibit doesn't go unnoticed. Others are picking up the issues that they're experiencing. Validation of groups that are often overlooked and often don't have a voice. Not to say that the JRC should be speaking for older people, but that older people need to be aware that the issues they face are being taken seriously and taken further not just being overlooked as the trivial problems of older people. (Guin Threlkeld).*

### Centred on rural issues

The JRI was the first Australian research centre focused on ageing research in rural and regional communities. Its emphasis on rural/regional research and its location in the regional city of Wodonga, Victoria enables it to make a special and rare contribution to ageing research. Rural research is at the heart of the JRC.

*John thought we needed research designed to address the issues of ageing in rural communities rather than research that was designed through an inevitable and recognised bias towards metropolitan settings where there would be an arm tacked on about what's going on in rural and regional communities but where the norm was assumed to be the metropolitan setting. That was really important (Guin Threlkeld)*

*That was always John's vision that rural areas have a distinctive perspective, which has always been underrepresented, and particularly in aged care. That's not a good thing because rural communities by and large are ageing much more than metropolitan areas and designing programs to support aged people and particularly aged care can't be done in a way that's going to deliver fair outcomes if they don't take the perspective of rural people in. This perspective will only be heard and listened to if there is solid data to back the points of view and that's*

*where having the JRC counts. A rural voice will not be heard as loudly from a generalist organisation, so if governments are looking for advice on the lay of the land in rural areas then they should look to the specialists before they look to the generalists (Chris Puckey)*

*The JRC raises the profile of the quality of university beyond the city and that research doesn't all need to be city-based and that there is an advantage in place-based research. This would not be the same research if it was being done out of Melbourne even if the object of the enquiry was regional. If the researchers and original conception wasn't based in situ it would be a very different and less effective enterprise (Guin Threlkeld)*

### Translational research with real-life applicability

Another aspect of the nucleus of the JRC's research is that it centres very much on applied research that has a lot of pragmatic value. The JRC often completes research that arises from, is closely connected to, and is of significant value to its local rural/regional communities. *"It was very clear from day one that the Reference Group had ideas about outcomes and impact which would be a much more applied approach, and that was important" (Annette Street). "It makes a difference at the local level by letting people know that they're important – there's a whole university centre working on issues of importance to older rural people, at the state, national, and international level" (Jeni Warburton).*

*Lots of people who haven't had much contact with academia think it's all a bit airy fairy and removed from them, but they should understand that their wisdom as rural residents is going to be communicated to decision-makers that matter, far better through the efforts of the John Richards Centre (Chris Puckey)*

*A lot of the research we do is translational, and we work closely in co-designing research and solutions. We could create more structure to support this work, for example, work with the La Trobe Rural Consumer Panel to make sure all of the research we do involves consumers, and we get input from them right from the beginning to generate research ideas and then translate the outcomes into practice and policy (Irene Blackberry).*

## Future impact

JRC has successfully passed its second independent review and the research centre renewal in 2021. Now at its 15-year anniversary celebration, the JRC has developed into a vibrant research centre of excellence with distinctive characteristics. The key people who facilitated the creation, development, and consolidation of the JRC hope that in the future the JRC will:

- Keep going on the trajectory it has established for itself (Chris Puckey)
- Do more of all that it's doing now. I hope it will get some good funding, develop out, expand into different areas. There's so much opportunity, there's not limited opportunities, there's multiple opportunities. (Jeni Warburton)
- Make a major contribution to the experience of ageing being much better in the future. That it will contribute to the work of the Royal Commission being acted on. That it will assist to transform the stigma of ageing and the status of older people and particularly of older people in rural and regional communities. And it will contribute to greater health equity and greater equity in ageing (Guin Threlkeld)
- The JRC will continue to ask important questions, to listen to what's going on in older people's lives and to critique some of the current cultural narratives that frame ageing. That perceptions of older people by others and by themselves can be influenced by the quality of the work done and the questions JRC is prepared to deal with. The thing that makes the difference to excellent research is those innovative questions – The JRC needs to address those questions that no-one else has really looked at (Annette Street)
- Continue to be sustainable. Leverage the funding opportunities, policies of the new government, and changes in aged care due to the Royal Commission. Develop strong networks with other research centres internationally. The JRC is the only multidisciplinary rural ageing and aged care research centre in Australia and there are strong benefits for us to connect and work more closely with other rural ageing and aged care research centres (Irene Blackberry)

## Further development

The JRC team continually strive to create new opportunities for more collaboration and development to further the agenda of *"making a difference to older rural people"* (Irene Blackberry).

*The team at the John Richards Centre have supported a La Trobe University led Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) bid, and also internally within La Trobe University, we are involved in the establishment of the Care Economy Research Institute, which is one of two flagship Institutes at La Trobe University that will commence in 2023. There will be a lot of opportunity for the JRC team to expand our research within this flagship Institute. There will be a lot of overlapping research around aged care, the care workforce, rural health, and regional health services. Our global research profile will increase with such greater external visibility (Irene Blackberry).*



Image Above: JRC team members at the 2022 La Trobe Rural Health School conference in Bendigo (Artist: Nellie Green)

From left to right: Professor Irene Blackberry, Ms Kayla Royals, Dr Tshelo Rasekaba, Dr Naomi Paine, and Dr Stacey Rich

## Vision And Mission

### Our Vision

To be a global leader in rural ageing and aged care research that promotes equitable health and wellbeing outcomes for diverse older people in rural communities.

### Our Mission

To engage in research partnerships and knowledge exchange that is responsive and adaptive to societal, technological and environmental changes impacting on rural ageing populations.

## Key Research Areas



## Governance Structure





# Reference Group

The objective of the Reference Group is to facilitate links between the John Richards Centre and key stakeholders to provide strategic direction to the Centre. The terms of reference include:

- Contributing to the development of the research agenda;
- Informing the Centre about workforce development issues, including those relating to research, education and training;
- Disseminating information about the research undertaken by the Centre and providing a conduit in the wider community.

## Current Members

### Ms Maria Berry

Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN)

### Professor Irene Blackberry

Director and Chair, John Richards Centre, La Trobe University

### Mr Stephen Carroll

Senior Advisor, Community Partnerships, Ovens Murray Area, East Division, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

### Mr Andre Catrice

Senior Policy Officer, Chronic Care and Older People, Department of Health

### Professor Susan Dodds

Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice President (Research and Industry Engagement), La Trobe University

### Mr Tony Dunn (Chair)

CEO, Westmont Aged Care Services

### Dr Jane Fyfield

Aged Care Sector Advisor

### Professor Ngaire Kerse

Chair in Ageing Well, University of Auckland, New Zealand

### Professor Jane Mills

Dean and Head, Rural Health School, La Trobe University

### Ms Catherine Morley

Former Lead Executive Officer, Grampians Health

### Mr David Noonan

CEO, Albury-Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service

### Mr John Richards OAM

Founder, John Richards Centre, La Trobe University

## Past Members

**Ms Margaret Bennett** (2016-'17)  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Northeast Health Wangaratta

**Adjunct Associate Professor Janet Chapman**  
(2018-'22)  
Executive Director Regional  
Partnerships and Planning,  
Albury Wodonga Health

**Ms Sandra Davidson** (2008-'16)  
Manager, Older People Mental  
Health Service

**Mr Peter de Koeyer (Chair)**  
(2013-'21)  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Westmont Aged Care Services

**Professor Karen Dodd** (2012)  
Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences

**Ms Nicki Doran** (2020-'22)  
Commissioning and Systems  
Improvement, Department of  
Health

**Professor Jane Farmer** (2013-'15)  
Science, Health and Engineering  
College Pro Vice Chancellor,  
La Trobe University

**Ms Mary Fraser OAM** (2018-'19)  
Community member

**Dr Peter Greenberg** (2018-'20)  
Board Member, Wimmera  
Health Care Group

**Ms Ruth Harris** (2009-'17)  
Manager, Support Options,  
Upper Murray Family Care

**Ms Mary Hoodless** (2007-'08)  
Upper Murray Health and  
Community Services

**Professor Rachel Huxley** (2019)  
Associate Pro Vice Chancellor  
Research, La Trobe University

**Professor Teresa Iacono** (2019)  
Acting Head of Rural Health  
School, La Trobe University

**Professor Mandy Kenny**  
(2008-'15)  
La Trobe Rural Health School

**Mr David Kidd** (2018-'21)  
Director Community Health,  
Partnerships and Well Ageing,  
Northeast Health Wangaratta

**Ms Alison Koschel** (2013-'14)  
Albury Wodonga Regional GP  
Network

**Mr Trevor Marshall** (2009-'17)  
Primary Care Manager, Alpine  
Health

**Mr Richard McClelland** (2016-'17)  
North East Regional Manager,  
Murray Primary Health Network

**Professor Rhonda Nay** (2008-'12)  
Director, AIPCA, La Trobe  
University and Institute for  
Social Participation

**Professor Keith Nugent** (2018)  
Deputy Vice Chancellor  
Research, La Trobe University

**Mr Leonard Peady** (2007-'09)  
Chief Executive Officer, Gateway  
Community Health

**Ms Mayssa Powell** (2016-'17)  
Deputy Chair, Albury Wodonga  
Ethnic Communities Council

**Mr Chris Puckey** (2008-'19)  
Principal Policy Adviser, Older  
People Policy, Department of  
Health and Human Services

**Ms Donna Richards** (2007-'09)

**Ms Wendy Ross** (2011-'12)  
CEO, Moira Healthcare Alliance

**Ms Jeanette Ryan** (2007-'09)  
Executive Manager Care  
Services, Shepparton Villages

**Mr Lyndon Seys** (2018-'19)  
Chief Executive Officer, Albury  
Health

**Ms Joan Simms OAM** (2010-'17)  
Community member,  
Beechworth

**Professor Pam Snow** (2018-'19)  
Head of Rural Health School,  
La Trobe University

**Professor Annette Street**  
(2009-'11)  
La Trobe University

**Professor Hal Swerissen**  
(2008-'12)  
Pro Vice Chancellor Regional,  
La Trobe University

**Dr Guinever Threlkeld** (2008-'12)  
Associate Director, La Trobe  
Rural Health School

**Ms Amanda Tonks** (2020-'21)  
Director of Nursing - Illoura RAC  
Northeast Health Wangaratta

**Ms Lucie Wallis** (2018)  
Ageing, Albury Wodonga Ethnic  
Communities Council

**Professor Jeni Warburton**  
(2008-'17)  
Chair John Richards Initiative,  
La Trobe University

**Mr Terry Welch** (2008-'12)  
CEO, Yarrawonga Health Service

**Professor Evan Willis** (2008-'12)  
Associate Dean (Regions)  
Faculty of Humanities and Social  
Sciences, La Trobe University

# Staff

## Current Staff

Dr Hannah Barbour  
 Professor Irene Blackberry  
 Dr Kathleen Brasher  
 Ms Bronwyn Carter  
 Mr Fan He  
 Dr Sean MacDermott  
 Dr Bonnie Martin-Giles  
 Dr Naomi Paine  
 Dr Tshepo Rasekaba  
 Dr Stacey Rich  
 Ms Kayla Royals  
 Dr Clare Wilding  
 Dr Rachel Winterton

## Previous staff

Ms Turi Berg  
 Dr Marita Chisholm  
 Dr Samantha Clune  
 Ms Sue Cowan  
 Dr Bridget De La Haye  
 Ms Linda Gordes  
 Mr Shaun Hancock  
 Associate Professor Suzanne Hodgkin  
 Ms Lynne Horsfall  
 Ms Fiona Jones  
 Ms Monica Jones  
 Ms Karrie Long  
 Dr Rebecca McKechnie  
 Dr Melissa Moore  
 Mr Sam Moran  
 Dr Kerryn Pike  
 Ms Jennifer Pitman  
 Dr Ainsley Robinson  
 Dr Maureen Rogers  
 Dr Pauline Savy  
 Ms Caitlin Silvester  
 Professor Annette Street  
 Dr Guin Threlkeld  
 Dr Werner Vogels  
 Emeritus Professor Jeni Warburton  
 Dr Monika Winarnita  
 Ms Kim Young  
 Dr Ella Zaplin

## Affiliates

Dr Mark Ashcroft  
 Beechworth Health Service

Dr Carina Chan  
 La Trobe University

Dr Stephen Cousins  
 La Trobe University

Dr Wasek Faisal  
 Ballarat Regional Integrated Cancer Centre  
 Grampians Integrated Cancer Service

Dr William Keeton  
 La Trobe University

Dr Ali Lakhani  
 La Trobe University

Dr George Mnatzaganian  
 La Trobe University

Adjunct Professor Nicholas Morris  
 La Trobe University

Associate Professor Kerryn Pike  
 Griffith University

Professor Tonya Stebbins  
 La Trobe University

Adjunct Professor Christopher Steer  
 University of NSW  
 Border Medical Oncology & Haematology

Associate Professor Joseph Tucci  
 La Trobe University

Adjunct Professor Craig Underhill  
 University of NSW  
 Albury-Wodonga Regional Cancer Centre  
 Hume Regional Integrated Cancer Services  
 Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre

Ms Nicole Webb  
 Border Medical Oncology & Haematology

Associate Professor Raelene Wilding  
 La Trobe University

Dr Monika Winarnita  
 Deakin University

# Students

## Current Students

**Ms Jennifer Boak**  
 Improving Quality of Care Through Detection of Complexity Amongst Older People in the Community: ImPaCt study  
**Supervisors:** Professor Irene Blackberry and Dr Tshepo Rasekaba

**Mr Craig Gilbertson**  
 A Feasibility Study Exploring the Use of Virtual Reality to Alleviate Patient Fear of Needles During Medical Treatment  
**Supervisors:** Dr Clare Wilding and Professor Irene Blackberry

**Ms Rosa Goncalves**  
 Reducing disparity in cancer outcomes through Health Literacy in culturally diverse and socially disadvantaged cancer patients: Challenges and opportunities in the age of social media  
**Supervisors:** Professor Irene Blackberry, Professor Tonya Stebbins and Dr Wasek Faisal

**Mr Fan He**  
 One-Year Clinical Patient Outcomes Following Acute Ischaemic and Haemorrhagic Stroke in Albury-Wodonga: A 10-Year Retrospective Cohort Study  
**Supervisors:** Professor Irene Blackberry and Dr George Mnatzaganian

**Ms Carmela Leone**  
 Discourses relating to 'the right to the city' for people living with dementia and their carers, in a regional Australian setting; implications for a rights-based Dementia-Friendly Community  
**Supervisors:** Professor Irene Blackberry and Dr Rachel Winterton

**Mr Lucas Lloyd**  
 What effect does a nurse-led model of palliative care have on people living in rural residential aged care?  
**Supervisors:** Professor Irene Blackberry and Dr Sean MacDermott

**Mr Darren Midgley**  
 The evaluation of the Impact of Intergenerational Programs on Children in Long Day-Care and Older Adults Living in Residential Care  
**Supervisors:** Professor Irene Blackberry and Dr Sean MacDermott

**Dr Krishna Rachakonda**  
 Prevalence of polypharmacy among older adults with cancer in Mildura Base Public Hospital  
**Supervisors:** Professor Irene Blackberry, Dr Sean MacDermott and Associate Professor Joseph Tucci

**Mr Chris Harvey**  
 What effect does assertive holistic aftercare have on suicidality rates in a regional location?  
**Supervisors:** Dr Sean MacDermott, Associate Professor Fiona Gardner and Dr Carina Chan

*Image Below: Webster project research team and Advisory Group members*



## Previous Students (Internal)

### Ms Renee Schellhorn (2011)

Long term married couples relocating to residential care together

**Supervisor:** Emeritus Professor Jeni Warburton

### Dr Zoe O'Callaghan (2014)

Men on the land: The identities of baby boom farmers in the border country

**Supervisors:** Emeritus Professor Jeni Warburton and Dr Anne-Maree Sawyer

### Dr Steven Baker (2016)

Snow on the roof, fire in the belly: Fostering independence and resilience in elderly men

**Supervisors:** Emeritus Professor Jeni Warburton, Associate Professor Suzanne Hodgkin and Professor Janice Pascal

### Mr Md Babak Danyal (2017)

Development of SENDER app for dementia

**Supervisors:** Dr Torab Torabi and Professor Irene Blackberry

### Dr Heather Downey (2017)

Ageing Australia farming couples' retirement decision making in the contemporary context

**Supervisors:** Dr Guin Threlkeld and Emeritus Professor Jeni Warburton

### Dr Belinda Cash (2018)

A critical exploration of the systemic complexities impacting rural Australian spousal caregivers in later life

**Supervisors:** Associate Professor Suzanne Hodgkin and Emeritus Professor Jeni Warburton

## Previous Students (External)

### Dr Jo-Anne Manski-Nankervis (2015)

Professional roles and relationships in health models of care: A study of insulin initiation in Australian general practice

**Supervisors:** Associate Professor John Furler and Professor Irene Blackberry

### Dr Natasha Long (2018)

Wearing a social work hat: the experiences of social work professional identity development for graduates in the 21st century

**Supervisors:** Associate Professor Suzanne Hodgkin and Associate Professor Fiona Gardner

### Dr Samantha Clune (2019)

Health is a lot: the construction of health in relation to place, risk and crisis

**Supervisors:** Dr Rachel Winterton, Professor Timothy Marjoribanks and Professor Jane Farmer

### Dr Jozette Dellemain (2020)

Putting 'Rural' Into Case Management

**Supervisors:** Associate Professor Suzanne Hodgkin and Emeritus Professor Jeni Warburton

### Dr Diana Nabbumba (2021)

Examining responsibility allocation within the social care system for older people in rural Uganda: An ecological systems approach

**Supervisors:** Dr Rachel Winterton and Associate Professor Suzanne Hodgkin

### Ms Kylie Owen (2021)

Enhanced Supportive Cancer Care

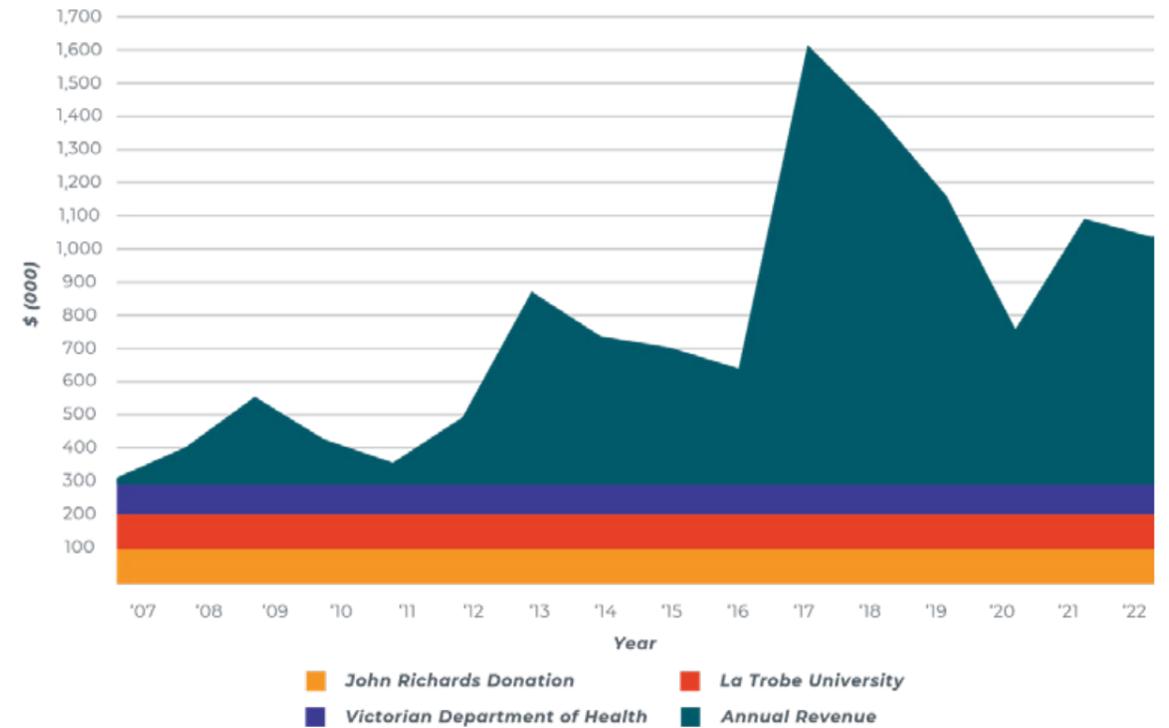
**Supervisors:** Professor Irene Blackberry, Dr Tshepo Rasekaba and Ms Kim Young

### Dr Tshepo Rasekaba (2017)

Telehealth for gestational diabetes mellitus

**Supervisors:** Associate Professor John Furler, Professor Kwang Lim and Professor Irene Blackberry

# Research Revenue



Closing balance (13/10/22) = \$1.6 Million

# Publications



The JRC produced 242 publications between 2007-2022 including 176 journal articles, 34 books, book chapters and magazine/newspaper articles, and 32 research reports.

# Milestones and Achievements (2007 – 2022)

The John Richards Initiative was launched on 16th May, by The Honourable Gavin Jennings, the then State Minister for Community Services

**2007**

Jeni Warburton was appointed John Richards Chair, Rural Aged Care Research

**2008**

**2012**

Successful five-year external review

**2014**

First PhD awarded

**2010**

First Annual JRI Forum

**2013**

First major external grant Australian Research Council (ARC)

**2015**

John Richards OAM awarded the Doctor of Science in recognition of contribution to rural ageing and health

**2016**

Irene Blackberry commenced as Director and Chair of Rural Ageing and Aged Care research

**2017**

The JRI hosts an International Symposium on Ageing and Old-Age in Asia-Pacific

**2018**

John Richards Initiative becomes the John Richards Centre for Rural Ageing Research and joins the La Trobe Rural Health School

**2021**

Five-year Centre renewal

**2020**

JRC contributes to recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety



## International Collaborations



# Highlights

## 2007

### Launch of the John Richards Initiative 2007

- Mr John Richards OAM approached Tom Keating, then Regional Director of the Department of Health North-East Region and shared his observations about gaps in aged care services within regional and rural communities, as well as experienced staff to research and develop these services.
- The John Richards Initiative (JRI) was launched on May 16, 2007, by the Honourable Gavin Jennings, then State Minister for Community Services. The vision and significant commitment to donation from Mr John Richards OAM was matched with funding from the Victorian Government and from La Trobe University.
- The establishment of the JRI was led by Professor Annette Street, Associate Dean (Research) in the Faculty of Health Sciences, who was appointed as the Acting John Richards Chair. Professor Street was instrumental in drawing together ideas that would eventuate in JRI receiving funding for springboard projects, website development, and recruitment of higher degree students.
- At its inception the JRI was part of the Faculty of Health Sciences at La Trobe University's Albury-Wodonga campus, where it remains today. The location of the JRI in a regional area, close to many small rural communities, was seen as critical in enabling staff and students for place-based study.

*Pictured Below, from left to right: Professor Hal Swerissen and John Richards OAM*



### Establishment of the JRI Reference Group

Dr Guin Threlkeld, then Director Health Sciences and Head of Social Work and Social Policy at the Albury-Wodonga campus led the development of a marketing plan for JRI. She also led the establishment of the JRI Reference Group as founding Chair.

This initial Reference Group included community members and industry leaders. Their responsibilities involved contributing to the development of the JRI's research agenda. This included workforce development issues in research, education, and training, disseminating information about JRI's research and providing insights to the wider community.

#### • Members who contributed to the Reference Group in JRI's early years include:

- Professor Allan Borowski, Ms Angela Connors, Ms Sandra Davidson (*Manager Aged Psychiatry – Northeast Health Wangaratta*), Mr Peter Foreman, Ms Mary Hoodless (*Upper Murray Health and Community Services*), Dr Amanda Kenny (*Director, Faculty of Health Sciences, Bendigo Campus*), Mr Gerry Naughtin, Professor Rhonda Nay (*Director ACEBAC, La Trobe University*), Mr Chris Puckey (*Policy and Analysis, Aged Care Branch, Department of Health*), Mr John Richards (*Founder*), Ms Donna Richards (*Chief Executive Officer, Moira Healthcare Alliance*), Dr Luke Rumbold, Professor Hal Swerissen (*Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences and Pro Vice-Chancellor Regional Campuses*), Dr Guinever Threlkeld (*Director, Faculty of Health Sciences, Albury-Wodonga Campus*), Mr Terry Welch (*Director of Clinical Services, Yarrawonga Health Service*), Professor Evan Willis (*Associate Dean (Regions) Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, La Trobe University*), Mr Leonard Peady, Ms Jeanette Ryan (*Executive Manager Care Services, Shepparton Villages*)
- Consequently, JRI's research agenda was categorised into two broad streams:
    - Health and well-being of older people in rural communities
    - Health and aged care services in rural areas
  - The first research project undertaken by the JRI was titled "*Entrust U: Evaluative life review and Advance Care Planning*".

## 2008

### Appointment of Professor Jeni Warburton as Chair

Professor Jeni Warburton was appointed as the John Richards Chair of Rural Aged Care Research. Prior to moving to Victoria to lead the JRI, Professor Warburton was a senior researcher at a leading Australian research centre on ageing at The University of Queensland. As an internationally recognised researcher in ageing and social policy, Professor Warburton's research focused on promoting ageing well in the community with a significant impact and influence on the development of ageing policy and practice in Australia.

- Professor Jeni Warburton was a Lead Investigator in the Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage project titled "*Developing a collaborative approach to ageing well in the community*" from 2006 – 2009. This research developed and implemented a model of local collaboration in response to national policy goals regarding the community's capacity to age well. The model identified critical factors for sustainable collaboration between government, researchers, and local communities.

### Founding Stakeholders Forum

- Professor Jeni Warburton gave the keynote address in JRI's first major forum, titled "*Research into Aged Care in Rural Communities: What do we know and what do we need to know*". Her vision for the JRI was "*to develop a program of research making a difference to the lives of a diverse range of older people living in rural communities*".
- Presentations by JRI staff members, state government leaders, and regional service providers discussed the following topics: the impact of research on practice, policy challenges in rural ageing, approaches in advance care planning, participation and satisfaction in aged care management, challenges and successes in aged care standards, issues related to regional mental health services.

### International and local media

*The Age* published an article in the professional section on Professor Warburton's appointment. Her research was also featured in the 2009 Australasian Association of Gerontology Conference in Canberra, where 11 articles were produced for local papers across the country and broadcasted in two local ABC radio interviews.

*Pictured Below, from left to right: Emeritus Professor Jeni Warburton and John Richards OAM*



## 2009

### Expanding Partnerships

Much of the initial work undertaken by JRI was done in partnership with government and industry. Significant partnerships were developed during these early years, including with the Victorian Department of Health (Aged Care), local health services, local councils, and state and local non-profit organisations – many of whom are still involved in current projects.

### International and local projects

- The 3-year ARC Linkage project titled “Professionals providing skills as volunteers in rural areas” allowed local councils to encourage retirees with professional skills to assist with specific projects, with the goal of enhancing project sustainability.
- “The Eden in Oz” project explored the application of the internationally recognised Eden model of aged care service in a rural setting. This was conducted at the Tallangatta Health Service. A paper was published in the Australasian Journal on Ageing with recommendations made for future research.
- “The Life review and advance care planning in rural communities” project developed and tested a program of community-based Advance Care Planning. Aspects of the process were evaluated including benefits to older rural citizens, volunteer training and support needs, and cost benefits.
- “The Workplace Mapping: Rural Public Sector Aged Residential Care Facilities” project was a successful grant application funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services.
- *PhD scholarships*: The JRI was successful in receiving funding for a PhD scholarship from the Hume Region Victorian Department of Human Services. This scholarship, together with another scholarship funded by the JRI, provided funding for two full-time PhD students. The selected areas of study addressed ageing in rural communities and the health workforce, which reflected the priority research themes of the JRI at that time.

### Staff profile and academic partnerships

- In these early years, the JRI developed a growing staff profile, including postgraduate students, as well as a growing number of academic partnerships, such as with the Queensland University of Technology, and the Queensland Department of Communities, which resulted in an ARC Linkage Grant

“Valuing volunteers as a response to the rural skills crisis”.

- A number of La Trobe University academics were recruited as research associates of the JRI. This included Dr Guin Threlkeld and Dr Suzanne Hodgkin at the Albury-Wodonga campus, and Professor Annette Street and Dr Jeanine Blackford at the Melbourne campus. Other researchers partnered with JRI staff, and outcomes from these partnerships include the development of joint research projects, presentations at seminars and community events.
- Dr Rachel Winterton was appointed to the JRI as a Research Officer in 2009. Rachel was awarded a La Trobe University Faculty of Health Sciences Early Career Grant for research into the meaning of place for older people living in two rural communities in North-East Victoria.
- Dr Maree Peterson fulfilled a visiting Research Fellow role from the University of Queensland. She led the exploration of the internationally recognised Eden model of care project.
- Dr Pauline Savy was appointed as Project Manager of the “Workforce Mapping Project: Rural Public Sector Aged Residential Care Facilities”.
- Dr Jeanine Blackford was the Palliative Care Research Fellow and co-investigator in the “Evaluative Life Review and Advance Care Planning” project which was conducted under the auspices of JRI.

### Seminars showcase link between research and innovative practice programs

- A series of seminars were conducted in conjunction with partner organisations including Charles Sturt University, Melbourne University, St. Vincent’s Aged Psychiatry Service, University of Queensland, and the Queensland University of Technology. Participants came from a range of services including community health services, community support agencies, hospitals, and aged care residential facilities.
- Innovative practice programs were showcased, highlighting the links between research and practice.
- Topics addressed included the health benefits of social participation in later life, inclusive housing in the light of the rapid expansion of large scale segregated residential aged care, and skills shortages in rural areas and the new ageing cohort’s desire for meaningful and productive engagement.

### Rural and national media

- A press release on the ARC Linkage project “Professionals providing skills as volunteers in rural areas project” was released to coincide with the visit of Dr Patricia Obst from Queensland University of Technology. An article was published in the Border Mail, and Professor Jeni Warburton appeared on Win News.
- Professor Warburton published an article in The Retiree titled “Retirees find meaning in life through volunteering”. She was also interviewed for an InSite magazine article titled “Be active, be alive”.

## 2010

### First Annual JRI Forum

The forum titled “Who will care for older people in rural Australia?” was led by Professor Jane Farmer, Director of the La Trobe Rural Health School (LRHS), and Mr Greg Mundy CEO, Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA).

### Rural and state-wide media

Professor Warburton’s research was featured in publicity for the Sustainable Country Towns Conference (Bendigo). She appeared in an interview on ABC Radio, including ABC Bendigo, ABC Goulburn Valley, ABC Mount Gambier, and ABC Victoria drive program. Her research on rural ageing was also featured on Radio National’s Bush Telegraph program.



## 2011

### Partnerships enable research on rural issues

Partnerships, such as with the Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre and the La Trobe University Institute for Social and Environmental Sustainability, reflected on the breadth of research conducted under the theme Health and Well-being of Older People in Rural Communities. Professor Warburton undertook this research on water tariffs and their implications for rural seniors.

### Annual JRI Forum

The forum, titled, “Responding to Change: Issues faced by Older Farmers” involved keynote presentations delivered by Mr Neil Barr, Senior Social Researcher Department of Primary Industries, Ms Susan Brumby, Director of the National Centre for Farmer Health, and Ms Zoe O’Callaghan, JRI PhD student. Their presentations addressed health, well-being, and safety issues of ageing on the farm. An Interactive panel discussion with local stakeholders, presenters and practitioners was conducted, with findings from the panel discussion synthesised for publication.

### Local and national media

- The *Meals on Wheels* project was featured on *ABC Radio Drive*, receiving extensive publicity, including interviews by Professor Warburton on *Radio National Bush Telegraph*, an interview with *The Senior* magazine, and many local press articles.
- Ms Zoe O’Callaghan, JRI’s PhD student, was interviewed by the *Border Mail* in relation to her presentation at the JRI Ageing Farmers’ Forum.
- The JRI *Rapidly Growing Grey* project was publicised in regional newspapers across north-east Victoria.
- The JRI was featured in the La Trobe University advertorial in the *Border Mail*, and Dr Rachel Winterton conducted an interview about her research on older people and place.

Pictured Left: Emeritus Professor Jeni Warburton at “A Loving Spoonful” in Vancouver, Canada, as part of her research into *Meals on Wheels*

## 2012

### Five-year review achieves ongoing funding

- The five-year external review of the JRI (2007-2012) found that JRI was successfully translating research to influence and contribute to the local community, as well as gaining national and international recognition in the area of rural ageing research.
- Since establishment of the JRI in 2007, the generous contribution from John Richards was matched by ongoing support from both the Victorian Department of Health and La Trobe University. Support was originally provided over five years, but following this very successful review in 2012, all partners pledged ongoing support to the JRI.
- JRI became one of several research centres located under the Australian Institute of Primary Care and Ageing (AIPCA) in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, Faculty of Health Sciences. The co-location with other research centres emphasised JRI's regional and rural perspective to ageing research.
- The JRI grew to 7 staff and 7 PhD students.

### Research themes address needs of ageing farmers

Reflecting the first JRI research focus theme, 'Health and well-being of older people in rural communities', Ms Heather Downey, JRI's PhD student, commenced an investigation of issues facing older farmers in the Murray-Darling Basin.

### International and rural media

- "Calls go out to combat social isolation." Media reports covered Dr Winterton's presentation on rural ageing and social isolation at the International Day of Older Persons rural forum in Townsville. Hundreds of aged care Workers attended the forum, to discuss ways to better integrate older people into society. This event was covered by Seven Local News in Cairns, Bundaberg and Townsville.
- "Elderly fear water costs may ruin quality of life." Significant media coverage was achieved upon release of the findings of the water policy project, which showed the importance of water to healthy ageing, and the depth of understanding of water issues by older people. This project received publicity through Radio National, The Senior, WIN TV, local ABC Radio, and the Border Mail.

## 2013

### Launch of ARC Linkage Project ASPIRE

*Ageing Services and Supports in Rural Environments* (ASPIRE) was a large research project led by JRI researchers and funded through the Australian Research Council Linkage Program (2012 -2016), with contributions from the Department of Health and Human Services Victoria, Uniting Care Queensland, Southwest Hospital, Health Service Queensland and Roma Health Services. The research team included Professor Jeni Warburton, Dr Rachel Winterton and Dr Suzanne Hodgkin from La Trobe University, Professor Martin Bell and Dr Maree Petersen from the University of Queensland, and Professor Norah Keating from the University of Alberta in Canada. Ms Turi Berg was appointed as Project Manager.

### The ASPIRE team



Photo Above, from left to right: Dr Rachel Winterton, Ms Turi Berg, Professor Norah Keating, Dr Maree Peterson, and Professor Jeni Warburton

Photo Below, from left to right: Dr Rachel Winterton and Ms Turi Berg



## 2014

### Associate Professor Irene Blackberry appointed

Associate Professor Irene Blackberry joined the JRI from the University of Melbourne and the National Ageing Research Institute, bringing her background expertise in designing and conducting pragmatic RCTs in primary care and research into complex health issues such as diabetes, nutrition, peer education and primary care. Associate Professor Blackberry was recruited to develop a collaborative program of health services research to improve care among older people with complex chronic conditions in rural areas.

### First HDR student graduates

Dr Zoe O'Callaghan graduated with a PhD for her project titled, "Men on the land: The identities of baby boom farmers in the border country". Her project was supervised by Professor Jeni Warburton and Dr Anne-Maree Sawyer.



Photo Above, from left to right: Dr Zoe O'Callaghan, Mr John Richards OAM, and Professor Jeni Warburton

Photo Below, from left to right: Dr John Richards OAM and Professor Jeni Warburton



## 2015

### John Richards OAM awarded Honorary Doctorate

In recognition of his contribution to building knowledge around ageing and health, John was awarded the Doctor of Science (Honoris Causa) at the La Trobe University Graduation ceremony on 10 April 2015.

### Expanding international partnerships

Eight years after its establishment, the JRI had built strong collaborations and partnerships. These included local partnerships within the health system, with local Councils and services; nationally with some of the key ageing bodies and universities; and internationally, with some strong collaborations with researchers such as Professor Norah Keating from the University of Alberta, Professor Thomas Scharf from the National University of Ireland Galway, and Associate Professor Rene Melis from the Radboud University Medical Centre Nijmegen University in the Netherlands.

Photo Below Right, from left to right: Associate Professor Irene Blackberry, John Richards OAM, and Associate Professor Rene Melis

### JRI Visiting Research Fellow from University of Barcelona

Mr Rodrigo Serrat, PhD student from the University of Barcelona, received an Endeavour Research Fellowship for a project exploring older people's participation in political organisations. This project was conducted in collaboration with Professor Jeni Warburton and Dr Andrea Petriwskyj from the University of Queensland.

### Enabling the community care workforce in rural areas to address the needs of those ageing in place

This project was funded by an IRT Research Foundation grant, and was completed following interviews with TAFE educators, community aged care managers, and recent TAFE graduates.



## 2016

### Associate Professor Irene Blackberry appointed JRI Director and Chair of Rural Ageing and Aged Care Research

Following the retirement of Professor Jeni Warburton, Associate Professor Irene Blackberry was appointed as the new Director and Chair.

### Strategic directions reviewed

The JRI's research themes were revised to focus on two key areas:

- **Ageing in place:** age friendly communities, diverse population, rural wellness, rural migration, volunteering
- **Health and aged care services:** innovative models of care, workforce, shared decision-making, telehealth, technology, dementia care, diabetes, palliative care

### Launch of SMARt (Small Rural Health Research Team) Partnership

- The SMARt partnership brings together a group of Victorian remote, rural and community health services, with academic partners, to improve health outcomes for rural Victorian communities. The partnership sees remote, rural and community health services coming together to lead on the health policy agenda through development of evidence-based research, and application of that research to innovative practice.
- Partners and funding organisations in 2016 included, Heathcote Health; Cobaw Community Health Service (Macedon Ranges); Rural Northwest Health; Robinvale District Health Services; Edenhope and District Memorial Hospital; Kooweerup Regional Health Service; Kilmore-Hume Health, and Alexandra District Health.

### SMARt partners



From left to right: Dr Dan Douglass, Dr Hilary Davis, Professor Irene Blackberry, Mr Kevin Mills (on screen, top), Ms Catherine Morley (on screen, bottom), Professor Jane Farmer, Ms Vicky Shawcross, Ms Debbie Rogers, Ms Lois O'Callaghan

### JRI HDr student graduates

JRI PhD student Dr Steven Baker was awarded his PhD for the project titled "Snow on the roof, fire in the belly: Fostering independence and resilience in elderly men". Dr Baker was supervised by Professor Jeni Warburton and Associate Professor Suzanne Hodgkin.

Photo Below, from left to right: Dr Steven Baker and Professor Jeni Warburton



### JRI Annual Oration 2016

Presented by Associate Professor Rene Melis, the oration was titled "Healthcare Improvement Science: linking evidence to the art of caring".

### Rural Dementia Forum

This rural dementia forum hosted by JRI featured a keynote from Associate Professor Megan O'Connell from Saskatchewan University in Canada, titled "Technology for remote specialist dementia support for rural primary care providers".

### Invited presentations/Knowledge dissemination

- Professor Jeni Warburton "Wellbeing among older Australians in rural areas." Invited presentation at launch of Geographic Indicators of Wellbeing for Older Australians", National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) and Benevolent Society, Melbourne February.
- Associate Professor Irene Blackberry 'SENDER app' Service Navigation for Dementia in Rural Communities. Invited presentation to Alzheimer Australia Victoria Consumer Advisory Group March 2016.
- Professor Jeni Warburton "Volunteering: Engagement in later life". Invited keynote address, AAG Rural Conference, Dubbo, April.
- Professor Jeni Warburton "Workforce issues in rural community aged care". Invited keynote, AAG Rural Conference Dubbo, April.
- Professor Jeni Warburton and Dr Suzanne Hodgkin. "Building healthy ageing in rural communities". Presentation at Beyond City Limits Forum, La Trobe University Albury-Wodonga, 22 April.

- Dr Rachel Winterton "Exploring the nexus between rural citizenship and retirement migration: Reflections from the Australian context" Presentation to Trent University, Ontario, Canada.
- Associate Professor Irene Blackberry: invited keynote address, Old Age in Asia Pacific Symposium, Bangkok, June 29 to July 2.

## 2017

### JRI 10-Year Anniversary

- By 2017, the JRI team of 10 staff and 11 students had made significant contributions to rural ageing and aged care research, nationally and internationally, with a strong Category 1-3 track record.
- International and national collaborations extended across Australia, Canada, China, Ireland, Japan, Netherlands, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- Publications in leading peer reviewed journals and reports totaled 141.
- 50 research projects and consultancies had been completed.
- Grants received between 2012 and 2017 totaled to \$4 million.
- 100 National and International Conference presentations had been completed, as well as 50 invited and keynote presentations.

Photo below, from left to right: Professor Irene Blackberry, John Richards OAM and Mr Chris Puckey



### 3rd Annual International Symposium on Ageing and Old-Age in the Asia Pacific

JRI hosted the 3rd Annual International Symposium on Ageing and Old-Age in the Asia Pacific, with the theme "Advancing knowledge and sharing innovation in research into ageing in Asia-Pacific region".

- JRI partnered to organise the Symposium with Professor Masa Higo of Kyushu University in Japan, an expert in the relationship between population ageing, economic globalization, and risks and inequalities in later life, and Professor Thomas Klassen from York University in Canada.

Photo Right: Carer, Marg Rae, and Professor Irene Blackberry during the launch of the Verily Connect project

- The symposium covered a variety of subjects related to health and illness, formal and informal elderly care, work and retirement, intergenerational relations, financial security in later life, rural health, and death and dying. The focus was primarily on countries in East Asia (Japan, China and South Korea, Southeast Asia – Thailand and Indonesia, South Asia, and Oceania – Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea).
- The symposium brought together diverse health, community and aged care providers, researchers, educators and policy makers to share best-practice insights and build collaborations.
- In a time of significant sector reform and competition, the goal of this symposium was to highlight the role of collaboration, information sharing and partnerships in building better outcomes for consumers and sustainable, innovative and resilient organisations.

### Research themes

Research themes were revised and expanded from the previous two focus areas of Ageing in Place and Health and Aged Care Services, to include four focus areas:

1. Ageing in Place
2. Health and Aged Care
3. Workforce and Informal Care
4. Technology

### Verily project launch

Under the new research theme of Technology, a key grant in 2017 was from the Commonwealth Dementia and Aged Care Services, funding the "VERILY project: Virtual Dementia Friendly Rural Communities". Associate Professor Irene Blackberry was lead investigator in the project, partnering with Swinburne University, University of Newcastle, Flinders University, and Saskatchewan University. JRI's Dr Clare Wilding also worked on this project.

The VERILY project is a stepped wedge cluster clinical trial of innovative online technologies to support carers of people with dementia in 12 rural communities across Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia. In each community, three key initiatives were implemented and evaluated: volunteer-led support and mentoring hubs to assist older people to use online technologies; an integrated website and mobile app that assists carers of people with dementia to identify and engage local services and to connect to other carers; and online video-conference carer peer support groups.



*"Carers will be able to access positive support in various ways, for their loved ones, including creating a camaraderie between fellow carers. The feeling of isolation can be very debilitating, but with Verily Connect this can be reduced, giving the carer the strength required to care for their loved one living with dementia."*

**Jen, a volunteer participant, highlighted that verily connect helps carers connect with other carers.**

**Webster project launch**

Under the research theme, Health and Aged Care, another key grant for 2017 was the "Webster Rural and Regional Dementia Care Project". This three-year initiative was funded through the bequest of Gordon Webster by Sandhurst Trustees. This project was led by Associate Professor Irene Blackberry, working in partnership with Professor Jane Farmer from Swinburne University, Professor Pamela Snow from La Trobe University, and JRI's Dr Rachel Winterton. The project aims to improve dementia care pathways within rural and regional Victoria, with a specific emphasis on developing innovative and sustainable care.

**Visit by Honorable Ken Wyatt AO and local MP Cathy McGowan AO**

The Federal Minister of Aged Care and Indigenous Health, Hon. Ken Wyatt AO and then local MP, Ms Cathy McGowan AO visited JRI.

**JRI Masters student MD Babak Danyal graduates**

Mr Babak Danyal project focused on the development of the SENDER navigation and networking app for dementia in rural communities. Mr Danyal was supervised by Dr Torab Torabi and Associate Professor Irene Blackberry.

**Media features JRI 10-year Anniversary and key JRI projects**

- The JRI 10-year Anniversary celebrations featured in *The Border Mail*
- The JRI partnership with Northeast Health, on the WAVE Well Ageing Vision and Engagement project, featured in *The Border Mail*
- The JRI Virtual Dementia Friendly Rural Communities (VERILY) project featured in the *Senior Australian News and Research*
- The visit by Aged Care Hon. Ken Wyatt AO to the JRI, to discuss workforce development for aged-care, featured in *The Border Mail* and Win TV News
- John Richards' generous support of the JRI featured in *The Weekly Times*



Photo Top: Dr Rachel Winterton speaking at the Webster project launch

Photo Middle, from left to right: Hon. Ken Wyatt AO and Professor Irene Blackberry

Photo Bottom, from left to right: Cathy McGowan AO, John Richards OAM, Dr Guin Threlkeld, Professor Irene Blackberry, and Hon. Ken Wyatt AO

**2018**

**Launch of the John Richards Centre for Rural Ageing Research**

- The significant growth experienced by the John Richards Initiative over the previous decade culminated in the launch of the John Richards Centre for Rural Ageing Research (JRC) in 2018. This launch marked a pivotal stage in the history of the Centre, which became the first independent research centre within La Trobe Rural Health School (LRHS), one of the largest providers of higher education to rural Australia.

*"Research and evaluation provide the vital evidence to underpin convincing policy proposals. Systematic evidence about efficacy and cost efficiency of proposed approaches to address policy problems, is essential to gain support and funding."*

**Mr Chris Puckley, Principle Policy Advisor, Older People Policy, Department of Health and Human Services**

- By 2018 The Centre had 17 staff and 8 higher degree students and was collaborating with international research partners across 12 countries. The Centre expanded from its base in Albury-Wodonga to the Bendigo Campus, with Dr Rachel Winterton based at the Bendigo Campus.
- Being part of LRHS widens both the discipline skill-base to which JRC staff have ready access, and to the methodological expertise available within the school. The wide range of disciplines are relevant to healthy ageing and to aged care policy, workforce, service-provision, and research agendas pertaining to health needs of people ageing in rural communities.

Photo Below: Mr Francis Leach ABC, Dr Rachel Winterton, Ms Renata Singer, and Professor Irene Blackberry

**Launch of the STAR project**

Under the research theme, Workforce and Informal Care, a key grant for 2018 was *Scoping the Skills and Training Needs of Community Care Workers in Rural Locations*, funded by the Commonwealth Department of Industry, Science and Innovation. Dr Suzanne Hodgkin led the project, partnering with Westmont Aged Care Services, Alpine Health Services, Beechworth Health Service, Tallangatta Health Service and Corryong Health Service. JRC Research Officer Dr Pauline Savy worked on this project, developing training models that provide community care workers with fundamental skills appropriate to address client complexity.

**PhD student Ms Heather Downey graduates**

Dr Downey's project titled, "What are the factors impacting on ageing farming couples' retirement decision making in the contemporary context?" was supervised by Professor Jeni Warburton and Dr Guinever Threlkeld.

Photo Below: Dr Guin Threlkeld, Dr Heather Downey, and Emeritus Professor Jeni Warburton



**Joss Family Prize**

Professor Irene Blackberry was awarded the Joss Family Prize for demonstrated research excellence.

**Bold Thinking series**

This panel discussion, titled, "Forever Young: how can we age without getting old?" facilitated by ABC journalist and writer Francis Leach. Professor Irene Blackberry, Dr Rachel Winterton, and Ms Renata Singer, internationally acclaimed author of *Older and Bolder: Life beyond 60*, were panel members.



### Palliative Care and Ageing Seminar

- The Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG) Albury-Wodonga Rural Branch held a very successful professional development seminar on Palliative Care and Ageing at Albury-Wodonga Campus. Over 70 health care workers participated, and speakers presented updates regarding treatment, end of life options, hospice care and palliative care. This included speakers Dr Christopher Steer, Oncologist from Border Medical Oncology, Professor Meera Agar from the University of Technology, Sydney, and Ms Naomi Mason from Albury-Wodonga Health.

Photo Below: Dr Christopher Steer, Professor Meera Agar, and Ms Naomi Mason

### Annual John Richards Centre Oration

- The oration was titled, "Canada's Public and Private Pensions: Lessons for Others?" presented at the Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo and Bundoora campuses in conjunction with La Trobe Asia. It was delivered by Professor Thomas Klassen of York University Canada.



## 2019

### Expansion to Asia

The work of the Centre expanded internationally to South Asia and East Asia, including new collaborations with hospitals in India and China. This work was done alongside academics from Japan's Kyushu University.

- With the JSS Academy of Higher Education and Research and JSS Hospital, Mysore, this collaboration facilitated the project, "Exploring Digital and Health Literacy Among Older People in Rural India (Dahlia)".
- With the Second Affiliated Hospital of Kunming Medical University and Peking Union Medical College Hospital in China, this collaboration facilitated the project, "In-Hospital, 30-Day And 1-Year Mortality Following Stroke in Southwest China: A Five-Year Retrospective Cohort Study".

### Expansion to Mildura Campus

In 2019, Dr Sean MacDermott from La Trobe University's Mildura campus attained a Research Fund Area Grant to examine barriers to implementation of cognitive screening in rural health services. The funding application was in collaboration with the JRC and laid the foundation for formal expansion of the JRC to the Mildura campus.

- The Let's CHAT (Community Health Approaches To) Dementia Project on which Professor Blackberry is a co-investigator also commenced in Mildura in 2019. This is a National Health and Medical Research Council funded project which aims to improve the diagnosis and support of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have dementia; and their carers/families/communities. This project employs a Mildura-based researcher who is employed via the JRC.
- Such ongoing research collaborations and engagement with partners in Mildura has led to research projects involving Mildura Base Public Hospital, Mildura Private Hospital, Sunraysia Community Health Services, and Chaffey Aged Care. This has also resulted in four postgraduate students based at those partner organisations and supervised by JRC staff.



Photo Next Right Top: Professor Irene Blackberry and Dr Tshepo Rasekaba visiting JSS Hospital in Mysore, India

Photo Next Right Bottom: Darren Midgley, John Richards OAM, Professor Irene Blackberry, Lucas Lloyd, and Dr Sean MacDermott at Generations Early Learning Centre, Mildura.

### PhD students Ms Belinda Cash, Ms Samantha Clune and Ms Natasha Long graduate

- Dr Cash's project was titled, *"In sickness and in health: The experience of choice for older spousal caregivers in rural communities."* She was supervised by Associate Professor Suzanne Hodgkin and Professor Jeni Warburton.
- Dr Clune's project was titled, *"Health is a lot: The contribution of large health organisations to community health practices in risky places."* She was supervised by Dr Rachel Winterton, Professor Tim Marjoribanks, and Professor Jane Farmer.
- Dr Long's project was titled, *"The experience of professional identity development for social work graduates in the 21st century, given changes to the human services sector."* She was supervised by Associate Professor Suzanne Hodgkin and Associate Professor Fiona Gardner.

Photo Below: Dr Belinda Cash, Professor Suzanne Hodgkin, Dr Samantha Clune, and Dr Rachel Winterton

### Events: JRC Oration, partners and international guests

Professor John Pollaers OAM delivered the 2019 JRC Oration, *"Beyond The Royal Commission - An Aged Care Workforce For The Future"* addressed the implications of the findings from the report *"A Matter of Care"*, including key issues about how to better engage and enable workers in aged care. Associate Professor Suzanne Hodgkin also led a panel discussion on the future of the rural aged care workforce.

Assistant Professor Sonia Udod of University of Manitoba, Canada facilitated a workshop on clinical leadership at Albury Wodonga Health.

During Seniors Week Wodonga the JRC partnered with U3A, and guest speaker Mr David Kidd, 2018 Churchill Fellow of Northeast Health Wangaratta presented on the latest innovation in age-friendly health services.

JRC convened the rural dementia special interest group with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) National Institute for Dementia Research (NNIDR), in partnership with older people living with dementia, carers, academics, policymakers and service providers.

#### Media

On ABC News, Associate Professor Suzanne Hodgkin discussed the need for more training for staff and funding for home-based care

*Bendigo Advertiser* titled *"Isolated? Overwhelmed? Caring for someone with dementia? There's an app for that."* by Professor Irene Blackberry

*Border Mail* Professor Irene Blackberry wrote an opinion piece on the Issues facing Australia's ageing rural and regional population in an article titled, *"Where are the voices of rural older people?"*

## 2020

### Defining Scope of Volunteer Practice Within Health and Aged Care Services Project

Funded by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, and under JRC's research theme of Workforce and Informal Care, this project was conducted by Dr Rachel Winterton, Associate Professor Suzanne Hodgkin and Ms Kerry Mitchell. It identified the key competencies required to manage volunteers in health service settings.

- This framework was then launched in 2021 by the Honourable Luke Donnellan MP, then Victorian Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, and Professor Susan Dodds of La Trobe University.

#### Media

- *The Conversation*, *"Aged care isn't working, but we can create neighbourhoods to support healthy ageing in place"*, by Dr Rachel Winterton
- *"Let's make rural aged care more accessible"*, an opinion piece by Professor Irene Blackberry and Dr Clare Wilding, *Border Mail*
- *"Regional Trials Network to be expanded with federal government grant"*, by Professor Irene Blackberry, *Border Mail*

#### Grants peer reviewer

Professor Blackberry was in the MRFF INDIGENOUS HEALTH RESEARCH FUND – 2020 INDIGENOUS HEALTH RESEARCH grant assessment committee.

## 2021

### JRC Strategic Intent 2021-2025

By 2021 JRC had grown further to 27 staff and affiliates, 10 students, 35 active projects, 44 publications, 20 conference presentations and invited speeches, and 12 media publications. With international collaborations in Canada, USA, Ireland, England, Netherlands, Uganda, India, China, Japan, Singapore and New Zealand JRC continues to expand international collaborations around the globe, as well as a long-term track record of international peer reviewed publications. The JRC successfully underwent a renewal process to strategically plan for the next five years. This puts the Centre in a very strong position to continue and expand the current program of research.

### Care Economy Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) bid

- Professor Irene Blackberry led the Care Economy Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) \$130million bid, a ten-year collaboration of 94 industry partners to co-create best practice solutions for our growing social assistance and welfare burden, while positioning Australia as global leader in exportable care services, models, training and technologies.
- The bid successfully progressed through Stage 2 but was not successful in the final outcome, announced in 2022.

### PhD student Ms Jozette Dellemain graduates

Dr Dellemain's thesis was titled *Putting 'Rural' Into Case Management*. Dr Dellemain was supervised by Associate Professor Suzanne Hodgkin and Dr Heather Downey.

Photo Below: Professor Irene Blackberry, Ms Kim Young, Dr Jozette Dellemain, and Dr Heather Downey



### Designing an age-friendly, rural, multidisciplinary primary care model

- This project is co-designing an age-friendly, rural, multidisciplinary, integrated primary health care model for the Upper Hume Region of Victoria. The basis for the model is the Indigo 4Ms Framework which structures and prioritises care for older people in rural settings across four, evidence-based, interrelated core elements (the 4Ms): what matters, medications, mobility, and mental health.
- This project, which is funded by the Federal Health Workforce Program - Primary Care Rural Innovative Multidisciplinary Models, is developing the first unifying construct to guide an integrated approach to the care of rural older adults across the care continuum. It will formalise and standardise pathways for age-friendly primary care with an interdisciplinary, regional systems approach that encompasses diverse and geographically dispersed providers.
- Researchers include Dr Rachel Winterton, Dr Kathleen Brasher, and Dr Mark Ashcroft. Partners include Beechworth Health, Albury Wodonga Health, Upper Hume Primary Care Partnership, Gateway Health, Corryong Health, and Tallangatta Health Service.

### Consultations

- Researchers from the John Richards Centre featured in the final report of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (RCACQS). Dr Rachel Winterton was quoted in the final report, based on evidence she delivered as an expert witness at the Rural Aged Care Enquiry. Adjunct Associate Professor Suzanne Hodgkin was called as an expert witness to the Aged Care Workforce Enquiry and cited in the Final Report.
- Dr Winterton and Professor Irene Blackberry participated in an Australian Government Department of Health consultation on regional, rural and remote aged care provision, to address recommendations from the Aged Care Royal Commission.

### Events

The Parliament of Victoria visited the Albury-Wodonga campus. Professor Irene Blackberry gave a presentation on the work of the JRC to the Legislative Council members.

### Grants peer reviewer

- Professor Blackberry was invited as a member of the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) - Dementia, Ageing and Aged Care Mission -

2021 Dementia, Ageing and Aged Care Grant Assessment Committee (GAC).

- She was also invited to be in the NHMRC Council and Principal Committees 2021-2024 Triennium

### Commencement of new professional doctorate students in Mildura

Darren Midgley, CEO of Chaffey Aged Care commenced his Doctorate of Public Health and Lucas Lloyd of Sunraysia Community Health started his Doctorate of Nursing at La Trobe University's Mildura campus. Their projects are intergenerational care and palliative care in rural communities, respectively.

## 2022

In 2022 we are celebrating the 15-Year Anniversary of the establishment of the Centre in 2007, with the Anniversary Oration on 15 November, presented by Professor Ngaire Kerse, Joyce Cook Chair in Ageing Well, the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

- Dr Sean MacDermott appointed to as JRC Deputy Director
- Professor Irene Blackberry led the successful La Trobe University Care Economy Research Institute (CERI) proposal
- Professor Irene Blackberry is leading a re-bid of Care Economy Cooperative Research Centre ([www.careeconomycrc.com.au](http://www.careeconomycrc.com.au)) focussing on high impact research areas, part of this re-bid involves the establishment of the Care Economy Collaborative Network, involving external partners across the care sectors
- Professor Irene Blackberry has been invited as an advisor on aged care diversity by the Commonwealth Government

### Regional Victoria Trials Alliance: Linkages, Innovation, Special populations, Equity (ReVITALISE) program

This is a partnership between the John Richards Centre and Border Medical Oncology to expand Geriatric Cancer Trials in regional Victoria, with the Regional Victoria Trials Alliance, with Professor Irene Blackberry co-leading the geriatric oncology initiative with Adjunct Professor Christopher Steer. Funded by the Medical Research Future Fund, some \$18.6M has been allocated through the Clinical Trials Enabling Infrastructure Grant, establishing this initiative.

- The purpose of the initiative is to enable older Victorians to access cancer clinical trials. The

initiative will initially start in Albury-Wodonga, with plans to expand to other regional health services in Victoria over the next five years. The program involves multiple universities and health services across Victoria.

*Photo Below, from left to right: Adjunct Professor Christopher Steer, Harry Thomas, Professor Irene Blackberry, and Councillor John Watson*

### PhD student Ms Diana Nabbumba graduates

Dr Nabbumba's project was titled, "Examining responsibility allocation within the social care system for older people in rural Uganda: An ecological systems approach." She was supervised by Dr Rachel Winterton and Associate Professor Suzanne Hodgkin at the Bendigo campus. Her PhD thesis was accepted with no revision required – an achievement – and was subsequently awarded the prestigious Nancy Mills Medal.

*Photo Below: Dr Rachel Winterton, Dr Diana Nabbumba, and Professor Irene Blackberry*

### Commencement of new doctorate students in Mildura and Ballarat

- Oncologist Dr Krishna Rachakonda commenced his professional doctorate at La Trobe University's Mildura campus. Dr Rachakonda's thesis is titled "Prevalence of polypharmacy among older adults with cancer in Mildura Base Public Hospital". He is supervised by Professor Irene Blackberry and Dr Sean MacDermott.
- Rosa Goncalves of Ballarat Regional Cancer Centre commenced her PhD funded by Victorian Cancer Agency on Reducing disparity in cancer outcomes through Health Literacy in culturally diverse and socially disadvantaged cancer patients: Challenges and opportunities in the age of social media. She is supervised by Professors Irene Blackberry, Tonya Stebbins and Dr Wasek Faisal.

### Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry

Professor Blackberry made a submission on behalf of the JRC to the Inquiry into support for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds

### International Keynote Speeches

- Professor Blackberry was invited to speak about intergenerational care by the University of Surabaya in March and by Atmajaya University in Jakarta, Indonesia in September.
- Professor Blackberry hosted a symposium on innovative cancer research methodology at the Gerontological Society of America conference in Indianapolis, November 2-6

### Media

- *Canberra Times*, "The Jobs and Skill Summit can transform the entire care space" written by Professor Irene Blackberry
- Herald Sun, Rural aged-care crisis is just getting worse written by Professor Irene Blackberry
- *ABC Gippsland*, "Regional aged care shortage solution found by Gippsland community", quotes Professor Irene Blackberry



# Research Impact

Over the past 15 years, the JRC's geographic area of impact has expanded from Albury-Wodonga to encompass all other La Trobe University campuses. In collaboration with our research partners we have completed projects all across Victoria, throughout Australia, and internationally. These projects have had a real and positive impact on rural communities in areas such as economy, society, environment, and culture.

The work of the JRC has impact in the broader university sector, as well as in the health services sector, where we focus on building the capacity of academic and health services staff to undertake high quality research, and to transfer the knowledge and findings gained through research into practice, in rural and regional settings. As a world-class research centre, the JRC supports elements essential for research impact through the provision of skills and infrastructure, and mechanisms for upscaling and knowledge transfer.

Engagement with industry and other external partners is achieved first and foremost by having a regional base with researchers and research affiliates who are embedded in rural and regional communities. This ensures that research is relevant and addresses real-world needs. Impact is enhanced by ongoing engagement and communication via events such as the JRC annual oration, public seminars, and presentations at local events as well as national and international conferences. We also use social media including twitter and traditional media such as newspaper and radio, to reach out to community groups and the general public.

Each project involves engagement and collaboration with a range of stakeholders such as internal and external university partners, national and international collaborators, industry partners, community leaders, consumers, older people, carers, volunteers and other key personnel. Some examples of engagement and impact are described here.

## ARC Linkage project ASPIRE 2012-2016

The ASPIRE (Ageing Services and Supports in Rural Environments) study was a three-year Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage project, supported by the Department of Health and Human Services Victoria, Uniting Care Queensland, and Southwest Hospital and Health Services Queensland. The aim of the project was to identify the systems and services that best support the wellness of older people living in rural communities. This was achieved through a demographic profiling of rural communities across Victoria and Queensland, a quantitative survey (n=266), and qualitative interviews with rural older adults (n=60) across six diverse rural case study sites in Victoria and Queensland.

Findings highlighted five key issues that should be addressed by policy, governments and communities in ensuring that older people's wellness can be supported in rural environments, inclusive of:

1. Moving beyond an 'access' approach to formal service provision to consider how well services meet need
2. Supporting greater intersection between formal and informal methods of service provision
3. Determining ways to build older people's capacity for wellness, through increasing physical health, mental health, community participation, size of social networks and levels of informal support, and reducing loneliness
4. Supporting older people's capacity to remain in their rural community
5. Considering both the diversity of rural communities; and the older people within them, in terms of capacity building for population ageing, particularly in relation to levels of structural disadvantage, existing rates of volunteering and informal support and geographical location/catchment.

This project to date has yielded four conference presentations at leading international gerontology conferences, and seven publications that have cumulatively received over 100 citations in international peer-reviewed articles (*see below for details*). Project findings were also presented to policymakers within state and regional health and aged care departments and featured as part of the expert testimony requested from Associate Professor Hodgkin and Dr Winterton as part of the Royal Commission for Aged Care Quality and Safety.

## Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety 2020

Research and expertise related to JRC activities featured prominently within the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, conducted in 2019-20. **Associate Professor Sue Hodgkin** and **Dr Rachel Winterton** were summoned to appear before the Royal Commission as expert witnesses in 2019. Associate Professor Hodgkin was called as part of an expert panel examining the experiences of carers in aged care, where she reported on findings from her published work on the rural aged care workforce and on findings from the ASPIRE project. Dr Rachel Winterton was summoned to appear as part of the rural enquiry to discuss access and equity in rural aged care and was asked to report on findings from her work on the rural volunteer workforce, including from the ASPIRE project. Based on her role as the national convenor of the Australian Association of Gerontology Rural, Regional and Remote Special Interest Group, she was also asked to speak to publications and activities produced by this group. **Professor Irene Blackberry** and **Dr Marita Chisholm** were also interviewed by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, in relation to findings from the '*Empowering older people in accessing aged care services in a consumer market*' project funded by the Consumer Policy Research Centre.

Testimony provided by **Dr Winterton** was quoted in national media, including *The Australian* ('*Lack of volunteers exposes aged care gaps*') and by ABC Radio National. Articles published by both Associate Professor Hodgkin and Dr Winterton were tabled as evidence to the Royal Commission, with their witness statements included in the Final Report, *Care, dignity and respect*. Their evidence was also cited numerous times in the Final Report in relation to making a case for a new vision for aged care in Australia, with reference to rural aged care needs.

*Photo Below, from left to right: Dr Lyn Phillipson, Dr Meredith Gresham, and JRC Associate Professor Sue Hodgkin at the Royal Commission into Aged Care*



## Well Ageing Vision and Engagement (WAVE)

The WAVE project ran from 2016-2018 and was led by Dr Rachel Winterton and Professor Irene Blackberry. It was initially funded through a partnership with Northeast Health Wangaratta, with matched funding contributed through La Trobe University's Transforming Human Societies Research Focus Area. In-kind and governance support was provided by the Rural City of Wangaratta, Central Hume Primary Care Partnership, Murray PHN and Gateway Health.

WAVE sought to determine what is needed for older people to maintain their wellbeing within the Rural City of Wangaratta, with the aim of developing a new, responsive model of care. Through a comprehensive, multi-staged consultation and co-design process with approximately 500 rural older people, carers, health services, government and community stakeholders, our research established that locally specific information in relation to available services and supports was a key barrier to healthy ageing. It also identified how and where this information could be provided.

Based on these findings, a new model for a volunteer-led community Well Ageing Information Hub was developed in collaboration with health and community stakeholders, and launched in April 2018. Funding to implement and evaluate the Hub was provided by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services and the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal. Our evaluation of this hub after one year identified a number of conditions for sustainability. The evidence and recommendations provided through our research have directly contributed to the ability of the Hub to remain operational, through enabling our health service partner to justify ongoing support of the program and gain ongoing funding support. As well as generating a final report, findings from this project have also been used in two academic journal articles <sup>(1), (2)</sup> a Conversation article on age-friendly neighbourhoods, and data has been used to develop an age-friendly rural communities checklist in collaboration with local health organisations.

*"What's really valuable about the WAVE project is combining research and local knowledge together to produce something tangible for older people."*

Cathy McGowan MP

Photo Right, from left to right: David Kidd, Cathy McGowan MP, Margaret Bennett, Professor Irene Blackberry



## Evaluation of the Flying Doctor Specialist Telehealth Service 2021

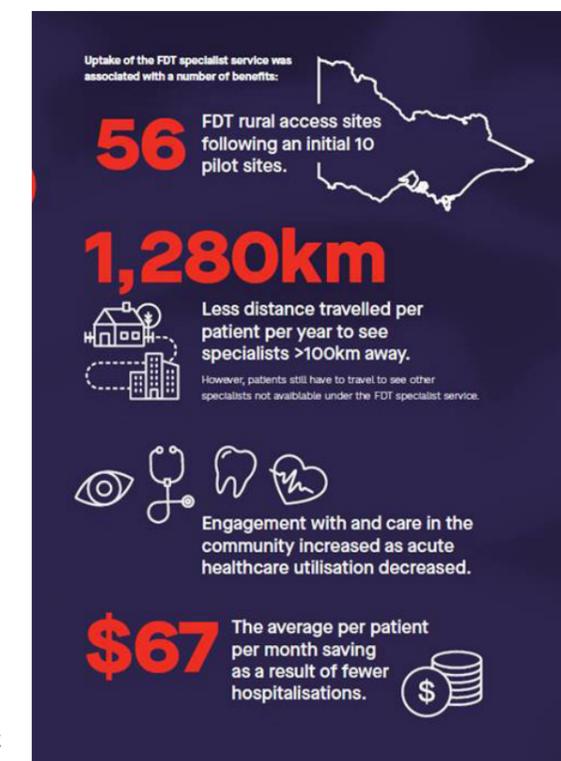
Falling under the "Technology" key research area, the JRC partnered with Royal Flying Doctor Service Victoria to undertake evaluation and research on the *Flying Doctor Telehealth Specialist Service (FDT-SS)*. The evaluation aimed to establish whether FDT-SS increased access to specialist services for patients in small rural Victorian communities and to explore the impact on health service and economic impact of the service. FDT-SS originally started as a 12-month pilot program funded by the Department of Health Victoria as a partnership between the RFDS Victoria and Small Rural and Regional Health Service Research Team (SMARt) (a collaborative of 10 Victorian rural health services and La Trobe University and Swinburne University of Technology). SMARt was formed in 2016 with the aim for a collective impact (rather than individual) approach to healthcare issues beleaguering the partner health services.

Following the success of the FDT-SS pilot which focused on endocrinology specialist care for people served by SMARt partner health services, RFDS Victoria began embedding FDT-SS into their primary care service unit and expanded FDT-SS to offer cardiology, respiratory and psychiatry specialties. The JRC, La Trobe University, was engaged to undertake evaluation and research of the expanded service, with an index cohort of service users (734 patients) from 1 March 2018 to 31 March 2019.

Findings from the evaluation and research demonstrated successful scale up of services to several locations, from the initial 10 pilot sites to more than 56 centres, where patients could be connected to specialists outside their own communities. The services reached more than 700 patients in the 12-month index evaluation period; saving the patient on average 1,280kms per year in travel time and \$67 per patient per month in decreased hospitalisations and demonstrated better engagement with primary care services. Although the social impacts of the service were not directly evaluated, inference that can be drawn from receiving care close to home, and reduced travel and hospitalisations could mean potential positive impact on the social wellbeing and quality of life for the people in the served rural communities.

*"Most important for us is the convenience for our clients, for less travel and things like that...getting access to some services that they think that they wouldn't [have]... Because we're an ageing population and so they're finding it more difficult to travel and... as you get older you get more health problems."*

The report and ensuing evidence played a crucial role in community engagement and support, health promotion, and displaying the important work of RFDS Victoria, which contributes to health services accessibility to underserved communities. Recent changes to the FDT-SS funding model creating uncertainty for the service means the evidence generated by this project will have an important impact and leverage for further funding for the service.





### Virtual Dementia Friendly Rural Communities (Verily Connect)

The number of informal caregivers (unpaid family and/or friends) of people with dementia is estimated to be high, and in addition, the burden placed upon these caregivers is substantial. In rural and regional areas, the burden upon caregivers of people with dementia is complicated by challenges that are unique to living in rural areas, such as isolation, distance and limited access to support services. The development of information and communication technologies such as apps, video-conferencing, and social media have created new opportunities for fresh solutions to the pressing problems faced by rural communities.

The Virtual Dementia Friendly Rural Communities (Verily Connect) project built upon previous work going back to 2015 commencing with a consultative process to establish the support needs of people living with dementia and their carers. This was followed by the SENDER - Service Navigation and Networking for Dementia in Rural Communities and associated prototype application in 2016-2017, eventually leading to the Verily Connect concept. The Verily Connect research project was a stepped-wedge cluster randomized controlled trial of web-based technologies to support carers of people living with dementia in 12 rural communities across Victoria (8), New South Wales (2), and South Australia (2). In each community Verily Connect involved implementation of three key initiatives:

1. volunteer-led support and mentoring hubs to assist older people to use online technologies;
2. an integrated website and mobile app that assist carers of people with dementia to identify and engage local services and to connect to other carers and
3. online video-conferenced carer peer support groups.

Findings showed that carers had a strong need for social support and that they experienced a high level of burden in caring for a person living with dementia. Verily Connect was instrumental in significantly improving carer social support. Furthermore, the Verily Connect app and peer support videoconference meetings provided carers with much needed social and emotional support. The approach offered carers an option for more flexible access to this support.

In partnership with Heathcote Dementia Alliance (HDA), Verily Connect has now been translated into practice. In early 2022 HDA took over the responsibility for providing Verily Connect as a service in Australia, while the JRC focuses on its key strength of research in relation to Verily Connect and the broader dementia space.

### Volunteer Competency Framework project



This project, funded by the Department of Health and Human Services and supported by the Leaders of Health Volunteer Engagement Network, aimed to develop a competency framework for volunteer managers within the health sector in Victoria. To do so, the project sought to identify the specific competencies required to manage volunteers within health and aged care settings. Through conducting a survey and interviews with health volunteer managers, and a comprehensive co-design process conducted with health volunteer managers and volunteer sector policy experts, a competency framework specific to health volunteer management was produced. This framework outlines competencies at five different levels of expertise, across seven key areas of volunteer management competency.

As part of this project, a survey of health volunteers was conducted in collaboration with Bendigo Health, Northeast Health Wangaratta and Austin Health. 270 health volunteers were surveyed to explore factors that influence intention to remain among volunteers in Victorian public health sector organizations. This report found that levels of volunteer satisfaction, commitment and engagement are positively correlated with intention to remain among Victorian public sector health service volunteers.

The two reports were launched by the Hon. Luke Donnellan, Victorian Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, in May 2021. The competency framework is currently being used to inform development of position descriptions and role development within volunteer programs across a series of Victorian health services.

### Indigo 4Ms projects (2018 – present)

In 2018, funding was sought from Safer Care Victoria to develop an age-friendly health system model in the Indigo region of northeast Victoria, drawing on the Institute for Health Improvement's 4Ms Framework and the World Health Organization's (WHO) Integrated Care for Older People (ICOPE) guidelines as guiding principles. This funding application was led by Beechworth Health Service, with a consortium of health services and local government agencies engaged as partners (Albury Wodonga Health, Gateway Health, Indigo North Health, Indigo Shire, Northeast Health Wangaratta, Upper Hume PCP, Yackandandah Health). The JRC was engaged as the academic partner and played a key role in synthesising the academic evidence to support development of the model, which has been published as a peer-reviewed journal article. The key outcome of this project was the development of the Indigo 4Ms framework, which is a framework to deliver better care for older people living in regional and rural Victoria that has been endorsed by clinicians and consumers and can be used in any care setting.

This framework has received significant attention in the international age-friendly health system networks, and is currently being used to tailor care within the local Indigo region. It also provided the initial impetus for Safer Care Victoria's Age Friendly Health System initiative, which is currently being rolled out across Victoria. Importantly, its relevance to future policy development has been recognised through a successful competitive funding application to the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care Health Workforce grants program (Primary Care Rural Innovative Multidisciplinary Models), which aimed to extend the project. This new project, which will run from 2021-23, will use the Indigo 4Ms model to guide a co-design project aimed at developing a new interdisciplinary, integrated model of primary care for the Victorian Upper Hume region. The project is led by Beechworth Health Service on behalf of a consortium of local health and aged care services (Albury Wodonga Health, Corryong Health, Tallangatta Health Service, Yackandandah Health, Gateway Health, Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service), with the JRC as the monitoring and evaluation partner.

# Partnerships and funding sources

## The John Richards Centre would like to acknowledge support from the following organisations:

Albury Wodonga Health	Indigo Shire	National Healthcare Group	Swinburne University
Albury Wodonga Regional Cancer Centre Trust Fund	Ipswich City Council	Polyclinics Singapore	Tallangatta Health Service
Alexandra District Health	JSS Academy of Higher Education and Research and JSS Hospital, Mysore, India	National University of Ireland	Trent University Canada
Alpine Health Services	Kilmore and District Hospital	Newcastle University United Kingdom	Uniting Care Queensland
Annecto - The People Network	Kilmore-Hume Health	NHMRC Rapid Synergy	University of Alberta Canada
Australian Government Department of Health, Aged Care Centre for Growth and Translational Research	Kooweerup Regional Health Service	Nijmegen University	University of Barcelona
Australian Government Department of Health, Dementia and Aged Care Services Fund	Kyushu University Japan	Northeast Health Wangaratta	Department of Developmental and Educational Psychology
Australian Research Council (ARC)	La Trobe Asia Research Program	Northern Health	University of Melbourne
Beechworth Health Service	La Trobe University ABC Internal Investment Scheme	Nyngan Multipurpose Service	University of Newcastle Australia
Beijing Normal University China	La Trobe University Business School Digital Disruption Stream	Olivia Newton-John Cancer Centre, Austin Health	University of Queensland
Bendigo Health	La Trobe University Centre for Sustainable Regional Development	Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH)	University of Queensland Geography Department
Benetas	La Trobe University China Studies Research Centre	Pilot Grant Support Program, La Trobe Rural Health School	University of Queensland Institute of Social Sciences
Better Care Victoria Innovation Fund	La Trobe University Research Focus Area – Transforming Human Societies	Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia	University of Saskatchewan Canada
Border Medical Oncology	La Trobe University Research Focus Areas - Sports & Exercise & Parkinson's Victoria	Queensland Department of Communities	University of Western Australia
Cancer Council of Victoria	Leicester University United Kingdom	Queensland Health	Upper Hume Primary Care Partnership
Central Hume Primary Care Partnership	Macedon Ranges Shire Council	Queensland University of Technology School of Psychology and Counselling	Valley General Health Queensland Australia
Charles Sturt University	Mallee Track Health and Community Services	Radboud University Medical Centre Netherlands	Victorian Department of Health and Human Services
Chronic Illness Alliance	Mansfield District Hospital	Research and Evaluation Services (RES) Panel, Australian Government	Violet Marshman Centre for Rural Health Research La Trobe University
Cobaw Community Health Service (Macedon Ranges)	Melbourne Health	Robinvale District Health Services	West Wimmera Health Service (WWHS)
Consumer Policy Research Centre	Mercy Connect Thurgoona Australia	Royal Flying Doctor Service	Western University Canada
Corryong Health Service	Mildura Private Hospital	Royal Melbourne Hospital	Western Victoria Primary Health Network
Country Health South Australia	Molong Health One General Practice	Rural Ageing Research Strategic Start-up Support Initiative	Westmont Aged Care Services
Curtin University	Monash University	Rural City of Wangaratta	Wimmera Health Care group
Deakin University	MRFF Regional, Rural and Remote Infrastructure Grant	Rural Northwest Health	Yackandandah Health
Edenhope and District Memorial Hospital	Murray Primary Health Network	Sandhurst Trustees	York University Canada
Flinders University	My Health Services Pty Ltd	Second Affiliated Hospital of Kunming Medical University (SHKMU)	
Gateway Health	Nanyang Polytechnic	Singapore Ministry of Health	
Heathcote Health	Singapore and Imperial College London	South West Hospital and Health Service Queensland	
Helen McPherson Smith Trust Fund	National Ageing Research Institute	SportAus	
Hume Regional Integrated Cancer Service Grant		Sunraysia Community Health Services	
Illawarra Retirement Trust (IRT)			
Indigo North Health			

*“Albury Wodonga Health (AWH) and La Trobe have established a research partnership which has supported AWH to increase research competency and activity across our service. We have created a conjoint research position, located at AWH, to lead research in areas of interest to both organisations and, in the process, to build the research skills of participating staff from AWH and from our rural health service partners. The current research focus – the transfer of older people from AWH to small rural health services – will help AWH to redesign its transfer processes to better meet the needs of consumer and health staff. This is a great example of how research can influence practice.”*

### Adjunct Associate Professor Janet Chapman

Former Deputy CEO, Albury Wodonga Health

*It is a pleasure to work collaboratively with Professor Irene Blackberry and her team. They are genuinely interested in the welfare of the community and their research efforts reflect a desire to make a difference by providing research data that supports positive interventions for people living with dementia and their carers.*

### Sandra Slatter

President, Heathcote Dementia Alliance Inc. Secretary, Advnce Heathcote Inc, Member, Dementia Village Working Group

*“As a health care provider of services to the aged, John Richards Centre’s research role is a leading light, identifying areas that make a positive difference in the safety and quality of care delivered.”*

### Dennis Parry

Former CEO, Tallangatta Health Services

*“... Mercy Connect has worked closely with La Trobe University, through the John Richards Centre for Rural Ageing Research. Within this new partnership, we have explored and designed a range of important research studies, aimed at improving the overall health outcomes of people living with disability. Mercy Connect is very pleased to have partnered with La Trobe University, with its professional, and highly regarded, academic staff.”*

### Trent Dean

CEO, Mercy Connect

# List of Publications

## (2007 - 2022)

### 2008

**Warburton, J.,** Everingham, J. A., Cuthill, M., & Bartlett, H. (2008). Achieving effective collaborations to help communities age well. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*.

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**Warburton, J.,** & Petersen, M. (2009). The Eden in Oz model of care: Staff perceptions of change - Report to Tallangatta Health Service. John Richards Initiative, La Trobe University.

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**Warburton, J.,** & Winterton, R. (2010). The role of volunteering in an era of cultural transition: Can it provide a role identity for older people from Asian cultures? *Diversity*.

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**Hodgkin, S.** (2011). Participating in social, civic, and community life: are we all equal? *Australian Social Work*.

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**Warburton, J.,** Bathgate, T., & Cowan, S. (2011). Online and Real Time: Building Social Inclusion for older rural people using information and communication technologies: What are the challenges? - Report for LTU Institute for Social Participation. John Richards Initiative, La Trobe University.

**Warburton, J.,** Everingham, J. A., Cuthill, M., Bartlett, H., & Underwood, M. (2011). More than just a talkfest: The process of developing collaborations in ageing across two different community types. *Urban Policy and Research*.

**Warburton, J.,** & Jeppsson Grassman, E. (2011). Variations in older people's social and productive ageing activities across different social welfare regimes. *International Journal of Social Welfare*.

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