

# VARIO HEALTH INSTITUTE 2008 ANNUAL REPORT



**FACULTY OF COMPUTING, HEALTH AND SCIENCE  
EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY**

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## About the Vario Health Institute

The Vario Health Institute is an initiative that builds collaboration between researchers, educators, industry and government to optimise health and improve quality of life for people of all ages, within differing social, cultural, political and environmental contexts. It will be located in the soon to be completed Health & Wellness building of the Faculty of Computing, Health and Science at Edith Cowan University's Joondalup Campus (ECU). The Vario Health Institute brings together a significant group of research centres, internationally recognised investigators and local industry partners with recognised strengths in areas related to:

- biochemistry
- computer imaging
- communications and information technology
- environmental management
- exercise science
- health promotion
- human biology
- nursing and palliative care
- nutrition
- occupational therapy
- psychology
- public health

to promote a holistic approach to understanding health and lifestyle issues.

With almost three quarters of global deaths among adults today being attributable to non-communicable diseases, it has become increasingly evident that health is not merely the outcome of medical intervention, but is a socio-ecological product arising from a complex interaction of social, political, economic, environmental, genetic and behavioural factors.

Substance abuse, obesity, insufficient physical activity, the prevention and treatment of chronic diseases – particularly those linked to lifestyle, inadequate access to care, environmental hazards, and government policy cannot be solved through the research of individuals or organisations working in one sector alone. Most modern chronic diseases take a lifelong course, and evidence increasingly suggests that lifestyle choices and environments can have a powerful effect on long term health.

Research into interventions aimed at primary prevention and lifestyle management of chronic disease can not only improve quality of life, but it can also greatly reduce the social and economic burden of illness.

Universities can play an influential role in creating health-conducive working, learning and living environments, and can provide a valuable resource to the community through improved teaching and research in health and wellbeing.

The Vario Health Institute represents a top-level commitment to embed health and wellbeing within the University, through efforts to generate and apply a broad base of collaborative research to improve knowledge and understanding of the interrelated factors that facilitate and impede health and wellness.

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A business case has been developed and presented to the Chief Financial Officer to develop a commercial community health clinic called the Vario Lifestyle Clinic. The purpose is to enhance undergraduate and graduate teaching through student placement but also provide a real world laboratory for research into health. The third major benefit is greatly enhanced community engagement with a projected 1000 people per week attending the clinic. Finally, net income from the venture will be channelled back into research in the form of internal research grants, postdoctoral fellowships, and other support for researchers.

The new Health and Wellness Building is critical to consolidating all of the Faculty's health research and teaching groups on Joondalup campus. Careful planning has been made to maximise collaborations and synergies for multidisciplinary health research.

A submission for \$5.12M has been submitted to the "Clever Networks" Federal funding program to develop health programs to be delivered via broadband Internet to metro, rural, regional and remote communities. Industry partners in this project include IBM, Nortel, Broadreach Services, Silverchain and Brightwater. This program will not only deliver health programs to various patient populations but collect physiological and other data for research purposes to inform best practice in on-line delivery and monitoring.

Following several meetings in Canberra with the Federal Government including Minister Tony Abbott, Senator Guy Barnett, Hon. Christopher Pyne, and Perry Sperling in the Prime Minister's office, a request for \$5.36M was submitted to the Prime Minister to support the Vario Health Cluster, an initiative to support research, teaching and community engagement. A matching request for \$5.24M has been submitted to the State Department of Health through a meeting with the Hon. Jim McGinty.

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## OUR VISION

*To optimise collaborative health research, and enhance synergies between different research disciplines, industries and government bodies, with the aim of strengthening knowledge and understanding of how to improve health and well-being across the lifespan, and within differing social, cultural, political and environmental contexts.*

## PURPOSE

By using three key steps to promote interdisciplinary health research, develop practical alternatives for implementation of these research findings, and inform policy and practice on key health issues, the Vario Health Institute's goal is to strengthen our understanding of the increasingly complex interrelations between individual, community, and global factors affecting health, in an effort to improve quality of life.

### **Step One: COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH**

This is the core activity of the Institute. By forging new links between disciplines, the Institute is developing innovative studies into the pathology of Alzheimer's disease; diet and exercise; the psychology of bullying and obesity; road safety and drug use control; the impact of lifestyle changes on diabetes and cancer; ageing with dignity, ability and life quality; and rural health and ecology.

### **Step Two: PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS**

Universities are a valuable source of information, however their success depends on their ability to incorporate research and learning into the community setting. The Institute works in partnership with schools, hospitals, community support agencies, NGOs, government and business to develop and evaluate programs to maximise health by preventing or enabling the early detection of health problems, as well treating disease through interventions such as exercise, diet, psychotherapy, physical and occupational therapy.

Key health issues currently addressed by the Institute include cardiovascular disease, dementia, diabetes, cancer and treatment related side effects, obesity, osteoporosis, sarcopenia, road injuries, mental health problems and substance abuse.

### **Step Three: POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT**

The Institute redefines the way research and health needs are reflected in national and international policy and practice. For example, with our ageing population, unpaid carers are becoming the cornerstone of community support for the frail elderly. The Institute encourages teams of dietitians, exercise physiologists, gerontologists and health promotion leaders to inform national policy and practice on meeting carer needs. Increased physical activity has been proven to reduce the risk of virtually all chronic disease conditions simultaneously and the Institute has lobbied through its many connections to have exercise physiologists added to Medicare's Providers List. Minister Abbott approved this change in January 2006.

## RESEARCH FOCUS

The Vario Health Institute resolves to undertake a proactive approach to health research, by:

Prioritising research challenges and existing gaps in research knowledge for the prevention, early diagnosis and management of significant modern chronic diseases to improve, maintain, and/or enhance health and quality of life.

Facilitating the organisation of collaborative work teams around key topics with the aim of building linkages between existing sets of data in an effort to redefine hypotheses and promote a more effective research agenda focusing on the development of supportive environments at the individual, community and population levels.

Enhancing the quantity and quality of priority-driven, evidence-based research that looks at the social, cultural, behavioural, biological and genetic interactions associated with the prevention of complex, interrelated causes of modern chronic diseases, by:

- Investigating the determinants of healthy living unique to Australia
- Testing the generalisability of overseas research findings
- Developing and trialling practical solutions that incorporate research into community settings
- Promoting a stimulating research environment that retains talented Australians and attracts international health researchers
- Informing research and policy agenda to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our health practices and services
- Identifying new health issues and ensuring quick response
- Building leadership among future health researchers.

Strengthening the capacity of new researchers to carry out quality-based, collaborative research founded on innovative research methodologies, by:

- Organising training forums and workshops
- Promoting visiting fellows
- Providing support with proposal writing
- Maintaining a current website with information on upcoming grants, conferences, publications and relevant links
- Carrying out literature reviews on key topics.

Building participative partnerships with schools, hospitals, community support agencies, government organisations, and private businesses, to create environments that provide connection, autonomy, skill-building and healthy behaviours, strengthening the ability of the target audience to participate in and benefit from research programs for the prevention of chronic illness and disease and maintenance of healthy living.

Disseminating research results to different stakeholder groups through the development and promotion of appropriate information and learning packages, the presentation of research findings at regional, national and international conferences, and by acting as a scientific reference group.

Advocating for change within public and private funding authorities, so as to ensure that population health, exercise, nutrition and psychology experts play a far greater role on grant

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review panels that assess the quality, relevance and competitiveness of health research grant applications.

- Strengthening the skills base of researchers and staff to enhance the quality of health research outputs, including publications, and hence enable ECU to retain “performance-based higher education research funding” (Recommendation 3);
- Developing ECU’s research strength in a priority area for national research, through the fostering of greater awareness and collaborative use of human and physical resources to undertake cost-effective research, hence enhancing the University’s capacity to benefit from increased funds provided to ARC and NHMRC (Recommendation 9);
- Furthering links with industry and the corporate sector to reduce dependency on nationally competitive and state government grants, and ensure greater impact of research to back Australia’s future ability through science and innovation (Recommendation 2);
- Forging links between research and teaching, by developing strategic partnerships for the dissemination of new knowledge to improve the health of both individuals and populations into policy and practice (Recommendation 15);
- Ensuring a process of succession planning in health research by attracting and recruiting a pool of senior health researchers to enrich the learning environment and protect against loss of research leaders in the present highly competitive environment.

From this perspective, the Vario Health Institute will continue to have two key roles:

To ‘grow’ the current research activity of the health-related research centres, through:

- Mentorship in grant writing and research design
- Training workshops
- Biostatistical and infrastructure support
- Research seminars and presentations
- Fellowships and post doctoral support
- Information provision through websites, group emails, etc,
- Research administrative/management support

To provide a ‘face’ for the promotion of health research, through:

- Forging stronger links with teaching
- Encouraging greater understanding of the need to attract senior researchers to Perth in order to promote succession planning
- Promoting research in the media and among corporate partners
- Building links with corporate and political hierarchies to promote health research and researchers at ECU
- Interfacing closely with the University Foundation and Marketing Offices to maximise their success for attracting funding for health research and for increasing awareness and understanding of the research carried out by staff.

In light of this, a new governance structure has been developed and approved for the Institute which includes :

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## VARIO HEALTH INSTITUTE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

<b>MANAGEMENT BOARD</b>
<p><b>Internal board members:</b> Professor Tony Watson (Chair) Professor Barry Gibson Professor Donna Cross Professor Rob Newton Professor Cobie Rudd Professor Ralph Martins Professor Alison Garton</p> <p><b>External board members:</b> Hon. Mal Washer Professor Steve Zubrick Dr. Ron Alexander</p>
<b>COLLABORATIVE DIRECTORSHIP</b>
<p><b>Tier 1: Director</b> Professor Rob Newton</p>
<p><b>Tier 2: Executive Committee</b> Professor Tony Watson Professor Donna Cross Professor Rob Newton</p>
<p><b>Tier 3: Collaborative Team</b> Representatives from the different health related research centres within ECU</p>
<b>TEAM OF SUPPORT STAFF</b>
<p><b>Grant writing support</b></p>
<p><b>Corporate communications support</b></p>
<p><b>Administrative support</b></p>

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## ***Research Working Teams***

In order to channel the research efforts of key researchers and encourage the development of new collaborative research proposals, the Vario Health Institute has set up its research activities around a number of research working teams (scientific advisory teams).

Presently, the Vario Health Institute has two active research working teams, one of which is in the area of "Obesity" and another in the area of "Healthy Aged", both of which are operating with the support of the Osborne Division of General Practitioners.

## ***Obesity Working Team***

The Obesity Research Working Team brings together researchers in health promotion, exercise science, nutrition, psychology, sociology, social marketing, medicine, and genetics to develop comprehensive interventions involving environmental, community, family, and personal strategies that can be developed and sustained over long periods of time, rather than merely short-term, single strategy programs.

## ***Healthy Aged Working Team***

The key focus of the Healthy Aged Research Working Team is to develop and empirically test coordinated programs to extend the period of caring for the elderly outside the institutional environment without detriment to their overall health or wellbeing. Further, physical activity, nutrition education, and psychological support will be investigated for development of strategies and advocacy for policy change to improve older people's abilities and quality of life.

## ***Vario Wellness Clinic***

The proposed clinic will offer consulting and customised programs to groups consisting of the healthy aging, obese children, type 2 diabetes patients, cancer patients and those with cardiac and neurological disorders. This initiative is in keeping with international trends, which has seen a major shift away from acute care and recovery. The World Health Organisation and the Australian Government recognise the critical importance of an holistic approach to preventing illness; a wellness perspective.

We know that over 7 millions Australians, aged between 18-75 years, do not undertake sufficient physical activity to obtain a health benefit. About one third of cancer deaths in Australian can be attributed to poor nutrition (WHO, 2006). Tobacco smoking is the single largest preventable cause of death in Australia and accounts for over 19,000 deaths each year with 13% of deaths from cardiovascular disease attributed to tobacco smoking ([www.heartfoundation.colm.au](http://www.heartfoundation.colm.au))

The Vario Wellness Clinic will provide world class wellness programs built on this an effective strategy to produce improvement is multidisciplinary areas such as exercise physiology, nutrition, fitness and health education, counselling and clinical psychology, occupational therapy and community nursing.

## **RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

The Vario Health Institute's research activities have been aimed at supporting the development of a robust and far-sighted, collaborative research agenda targeted towards improving health and the performance of the health system.

### ***Impact of Physical Activity on Reducing Alzheimer Risk Factors.***

The project is testing the efficacy of a clinic versus home-based program of physical and cognitive exercise. This research involves development, implementation and evaluation of a quality physical and cognitive exercise intervention for independently living older people (>65 years). The project aims are:

- To evaluate the theoretical efficacy of exercise programs combining physical exercise (anabolic, aerobic and mobility training) with cognitive exercise (cognition and memory training) versus physical or cognitive exercise alone to reduce the risk factors of Alzheimer's disease;
- To provide a quality exercise program that incorporates both physical and cognitive activities designed specifically to maintain mental capacity, physical function, psychological wellbeing, reduce chronic disease risk, signs and symptoms, and eliminate or at least delay the move into dependent care by elderly people;
- Compare the effectiveness, compliance, attrition and cost: benefit ratio of home-based versus group exercise settings for elderly people.

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## Proposals

### *Grants Awarded in 2006*

Newton, R.U., Martins, R. & Turner, D. 2006 Alzheimer's Disease Research and Care – Postdoctoral Fellowship. Lifestyle, cognitive function and Alzheimer's disease risk factors. \$253,423

Pettigrew, S.F., Donovan, R.J., Boldy, D.P. & Newton, R. 2006 ARC Linkage Grant #LP0775021 Investigating older Australians' beliefs about and understanding of mental health and their practice of relevant protective behaviours. \$56,000

Thorogood, C., Sim, M. & Lobb, E., Community and Child Health Directorate of the Women's and Children's Health Service, WA Department of Health, Review and provision of recommendations for the updating of four government publications by the Health Department of Western Australia on abortion and abortion counselling, \$16,699.10

Toye, C., Edith Cowan University – Industry Collaboration Scheme, Reducing the Early Re-Presentation of Older Adults to Hospital after Discharge from Acute Assessment Unit: Phase One, Determining Predictors, \$27,814

## PUBLICATIONS

### *Books*

### *Chapters*

Hatfield, D. L., **Kraemer, W. J.**, Volek, J. S., Rubin, M. R., Grebien, B., Gomez, A. L., French, D. N., Scheett, T. P., Ratamess, N. A., Sharman, M. J., **McGuigan, M.R.**, **Newton, R. U.**, & Hakkinen, K., *The effects of carbohydrate loading on repetitive jump squat power performance*, Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research, 20:167-171.

**Kraemer, W. J.**, Ratamess, N. A., Volek, J. S., Hakkinen, K., Rubin, M. R., French, D. N., Gomez, A. L., **McGuigan, M. R.**, Scheett, T. P., **Newton, R. U.**, Spiering, B. A., Izquierdo, M. & Dioguardi, F. S., *The effects of amino acid supplementation on hormonal responses to resistance training overreaching*, Metabolism, 55(3):282-291.

## **CAPACITY BUILDING**

With the goal of “growing” the research activities of the university in the area of health, the Vario Health Institute has had as one of its key objectives that of building the capacity of young investigators both at the University and those within the related service industries.

By improving teaching and learning and creating capacity-building mechanisms, the Institute aims to develop the career pathways, training and mentoring for decision-makers to promote effective strategic, development and evaluation research, through the use of partnerships between universities and industry. Such development and training cannot be conducted solely within universities but requires the integration of various sectors. The strategies developed here aim to foster and develop such partnerships. To this end, the Institute has played an active role in:

- Attracting international visiting fellows to work with staff from the various research centres to strengthen their networks, to shed light on new methodologies being used in other countries, and encourage staff to develop innovative research;
- Providing leadership/mentorship to early career researchers and encouraging those working on research projects to enter a masters or doctoral level program to gain formal accreditation for their contribution;
- Organising lunchbox presentations and training workshops to strengthen the skills base of researchers and staff to enhance the quality of health research outputs;
- Developing an informative website to disseminate information to researchers through on-line seminars, as well as databases on upcoming grants, conferences and research publications;
- Providing advice and guidance in proposal writing, project design and coordination, data analysis and presentation of findings.

## **Research Centres**

### ***Systems and Interventions Research Centre in Health (SIRCH)***

A new collaborative venture with a prime focus on prevention and early intervention, particularly for children and adolescents with mental health problems was formed as a Faculty Designated Group Level 1 research centre.

## Conference Presentations

**Galvão DA, Spry N, Taaffe DR, Shannon T, Rowling C, Newton RU.** Changes in muscle, fat, and bone mass after 36 weeks of maximal androgen blockade for prostate cancer. *Australian Association for Exercise and Sports Science Conference*. Sept 28th to 1st October, NSW, Sydney, Australia 2006.

**Galvão DA, Nosaka K, Taaffe DR, Spry N, Kristjanson L, McGuigan MR, Singh A, Newton RU.** Benefits of Resistance Training in Men Undertaking Androgen Deprivation Therapy for Prostate Cancer. *18th Nordic Congress of Gerontology*. Jyväskylä Paviljonki, Jyväskylä, Finland, 28 to 31st May 2006.

**Galvão D.A., McGuigan M.R., Nosaka K., Taaffe D.R., Galvão R., Wahid M.A. Singh A., Spry N., Kristjanson L.J., Newton, R.U.** A pilot study of hydraulic resistance exercise in men receiving androgen deprivation therapy for prostate cancer. *Commonwealth Sports Science Conference*, March 9-12th, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia 2006.

**Hope, P.A.J., R.U. Newton, P. Sacco, L. Kristjanson, and N. Spry.** Fatigue and associated changes in activity and fitness during adjuvant breast radiotherapy. *Second Annual Chicago supportive Oncology Conference*, Chicago, Illinois, September 28-30, 2006. Page 429.

**Hope, P.A.J., R.U. Newton, P. Sacco, L. Kristjanson, and N. Spry.** Reducing the stress of repeated assessments: A comparison of multidimensional fatigue inventory and visual analogue scales in adjuvant breast radiotherapy. *Second Annual Chicago supportive Oncology Conference*, Chicago, Illinois, September 28-30, 2006. Page 430.

**Lobb E. A., Kristjanson, L. J., Aoun, S., Monterosso, L., (2006).** *Complicated Grief: A systematic review of the literature*, Palliative Care WA Conference, Parmelia Hilton Hotel, Perth

**Lobb E. A., Kristjanson, L. J., Aoun, S., Monterosso, L., (2006).** *Complicated Grief: A systematic review of the literature*, Research and Advances, Princess Margaret Hospital, Perth

**Monterosso, L., Kristjanson, L. J., White, K., Phillips, M., Lucas, R., Valentine, J., Rowell, S., (2006).** *The Palliative Care Needs of Western Australian Children and Their Families*, Clinical Oncology Society of Australia, Sofitel Hotel, Melbourne

**Monterosso, L., Kristjanson L. J., Phillips, M., (2006).** *The Western Australian Analysis of Supportive and Palliative Care Needs of Families of Children with a Life Threatening or Chronic Illness*, University of the Aegean, Rhodes

Iverson, D. and **Newton, R.U.** Exercise and Cancer. *AAESS 2006 Exercise and Sports Science Conference*. Sydney, 29th September 2006.

**Newton, R.U.** Exercise is medicine - preventing and managing chronic disease. *WA Division of the AAG*, Bunbury, Western Australia, 18th August 2006.

**Newton, R.U.** Exercise is a medicine. *Launching Hope Day, MS Society of Victoria*, Ballarat, Victoria, 4th June 2006.

**Newton, R.U.** Exercise – the best medicine. *Strengthen Your Body of Knowledge: A Conference on Strength Training for Older People – COTA Victoria*, Melbourne, 1st May, 2006.

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**Newton, R.U.** Lifestyle and Chronic Disease. *Education Leadership Conference – WA* Department of Education, Fremantle, 10th March, 2006.

**Newton, R.U.** Physical activity and chronic disease, *Population Health & Ambulatory Care Showcase - Building A Healthier Future - "Outside the Square"*, Perth, 2 February, 2006.

Newton, R.U. Exercise as Medicine for Cancer. *Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia – Men's Health Symposium*, Melbourne, Victoria, 12th August 2006. (Keynote)

**Rudd, C.**, (2006). *Forging Partnerships in Health Care: Process and Measuring Benefits*, EDU-COM 2006 International Conference, Engagement and Empowerment: New Opportunities for Growth in Higher Education, Nong Khai, Thailand.

**Rudd, C.**, (2006). *Keynote – Closing Address, International and industry partnerships: Building nursing capacity in Thailand*, EDU-COM 2006 International Conference, Engagement and Empowerment: New Opportunities for Growth in Higher Education, Nong Khai, Thailand.

**Sealey, M., Rudd, C. & Churchouse, C.**, (2006). *International and industry partnerships: Building nursing capacity in Thailand*, EDU-COM 2006 International Conference, Engagement and Empowerment: New Opportunities for Growth in Higher Education, Nong Khai, Thailand.

## ***Postgraduate Mentorship***

Key professors at the Vario Health Institute have an outstanding record for increasing research capacity. Their extensive experience in working with students, teachers and parents and in conducting intervention research has enabled them to provide strong leadership/ mentorship of new and early career researchers. For example, between them Professors Ralph Martins, Linda Kristjanson, Donna Cross and Rob Newton presently supervise 11 post-doctoral fellows, 11 PhD students and 31 Masters students.

## ***Seminars***

- Endnote Demonstration, Lyn Leslie and Lynette Hirsch, ECU University Libraries
- ECU-VDX and MetaQuest, Lyn Leslie FCHS Librarian
- Men's Health Matters, Find out how sex, drugs and rock'n'roll motivate men to improve their health, A/Professor Samar Aoun, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Postgraduate Medicine.
- Find out why older men with prostate cancer should lift weights, Dr Daniel Galvao, School of Exercise, Biomedical and Health Sciences.

## ***Dissemination And Translation Into Policy***

A further key goal of the Institute has been to provide a 'face' for the promotion of health research, through :

- Forging stronger links with teaching;
- Encouraging greater understanding of the need to attract senior researchers to Perth in order to promote succession planning;
- Promoting research in the media and among corporate partners;
- Building links with policy;
- Interfacing closely with the University Foundation and Marketing Office to maximise their success for attracting funding for health research and for promoting the research carried out by staff.

To achieve this, staff at the Vario Health Institute have played an active role presenting at local, national and international conferences, organising educational evenings/seminars for service providers, building partnerships, developing systematic reviews and meta-analyses to guide policy papers, developing promotional and educational materials to encourage the uptake of evidence-based interventions, disseminating knowledge through media and meeting with key stakeholders and leaders to encourage the integration of research findings into practice.

## ***Media Presentations***

**Professor Robert Newton** was interviewed live on ABC Radio, 28th October 2006 to discuss the importance of exercise for older people.

**Professor Robert Newton** was interviewed live on ABC Morning Radio, 8th June 2006 to discuss exercise and cancer.

## ***Partnerships and Networks with Service Providers***

Through its partnerships and memoranda of understanding with key stakeholders, the Vario Health Institute has developed a number of collaborative training sessions for service providers.

For example, as part of its on-going Memoranda of Understanding with Osborne Division of General Practice (ODGP), the Vario Health Institute has organised three educational evening for GPs on Palliative Care, Alzheimer's disease, and Exercise and Ageing. These evenings have each been attended by between 50 and 85 GPs and senior level service providers and have been sponsored by private corporations.

In addition, the Institute has become a key partner in a major state-wide exercise program for older people in Western Australia, called "Living Longer, Living Stronger", promoted through the Council on the Ageing.

Moreover it has developed a number of policy-directed literature reviews on issues such as obesity, physical education and nutrition, for organisations such as the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute, the Cancer Council and the Department of Health and Ageing.