$38.5 million of research to find mental health solutions

Research to prevent, treat and manage mental illnesses has received a $38.5 million boost following the announcement of new National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) grants today.

The grants cover a range of conditions including depression, bipolar disorder, anorexia and schizophrenia. While some of the grants are focused on developing new treatments, others focus on preventing the onset of mental illness or better understanding the role of genetics and/or the social environment.

A 2007 AIHW report estimated that almost half of Australians aged 16–85 will experience a mental illness at some point in their lives. The effects of poor mental health are significant and can affect a person’s employment opportunities, their family life, and their physical health.

NHMRC CEO Professor Warwick Anderson acknowledged the importance of this investment in helping Australians live healthy and fulfilling lives.

“Mental health is a particularly complex issue for researchers because it encompasses so many areas of medicine, including neuroscience, genetics, psychology, pharmacology and many more,” Professor Anderson said.

“It is a challenging field but I am certain our researchers are up to task. I am confident that the grants announced today will go a long way to improving our understanding of mental illness and lead to better outcomes for the many Australians suffering from poor mental health,” he said.

Following on from National Mental Health Week, this funding is a timely reminder of the need for research to help improve the mental health of all Australians.

Mental health is one of the Australian Government’s nine National Health Priority Areas (NHPAs), which together account for almost three quarters of the total burden of disease of Australians.

‘The government’s NHPAs are also all strongly supported research areas for NHMRC,’ Professor Anderson affirmed. ‘In this current round of funding, around $308 million is going towards research focused on the NHPAs.’
The grants were part of a $539.8 million announcement made today by Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Minister for Health Peter Dutton, for 773 grants across a broad range of diseases and health conditions.

**Research Highlights**

**Professor Nicholas Martin, Queensland Institute of Medical Research, Project Grant ($2,445,015)**

Professor Martin and his team will join an international effort to identify the first 50 genes that underlie depression. They aim to recruit 20,000 participants for this study and hope that the outcomes of their research will contribute not only to the development of better treatments for depression, but more targeted therapies for individuals affected.

**Professor Janice Russell, University of Sydney, Project Grant ($402,864)**

Anorexia nervosa has the highest mortality of any psychiatric disorder. Professor Russell will test a nasal spray containing oxytocin to improve the eating by patients with anorexia nervosa.

**Dr Alison Clear, Australian National University, Project Grant ($793,112)**

Dr Clear’s research is aimed at reducing suicidal behaviours amongst high school students. The team will train peer leaders in Years 7-10 in sixteen Australian high schools to help encourage students to seek help, strengthen youth-adult connections and promote positive coping in schools.

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**Further information**

More information about the grants announced today can be found on the NHMRC website under [Outcomes of funding rounds](#).