Issue 03 | October 2026

OnTRACK
Centre of Research Excellence

Promoting brain health with older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Welcome to our October 2026 Newsletter

The OnTRACK CRE is dedicated to delivering a comprehensive program of dementia research and translation leading to evidence based, community informed, culturally safe care and improved health and well-being outcomes for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples, their families, carers and communities. We've been very busy this year developing projects across all three of our major themes. We are excited to share our updates with you!

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of all the unceded lands across Australia and are grateful to the Traditional Owners, Elders and Knowledge Holders of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations and clans.

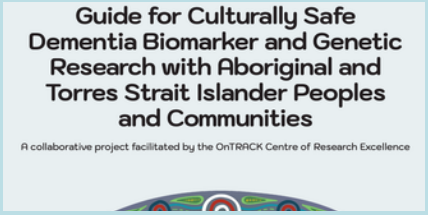
We recognise the unique place held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of the lands and waterways across the Australian continent, with histories of continuous connection dating back more than 60,000 years. We also acknowledge the enduring cultural practices of caring for Country.

We pay respect to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' knowledge in the Academy. As a community of researchers, clinicians, policy makers, and advocates we are privileged to work, research and learn together as we collaborate to address inequity and build better health and wellbeing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples and Communities. We also acknowledge members of the Stolen Generations and their families.

Inside ...



Victorian Aboriginal Elders Summit | Page 2



Guide for Culturally Safe Dementia Biomarker and Genetic Research | Page 8

Project Updates

Introducing the OnTRACK Community Reference Group (CRG)

Researcher Spotlight: Naomi Jones

Resources

Upcoming Events

AIHW Expert Panel Workshop

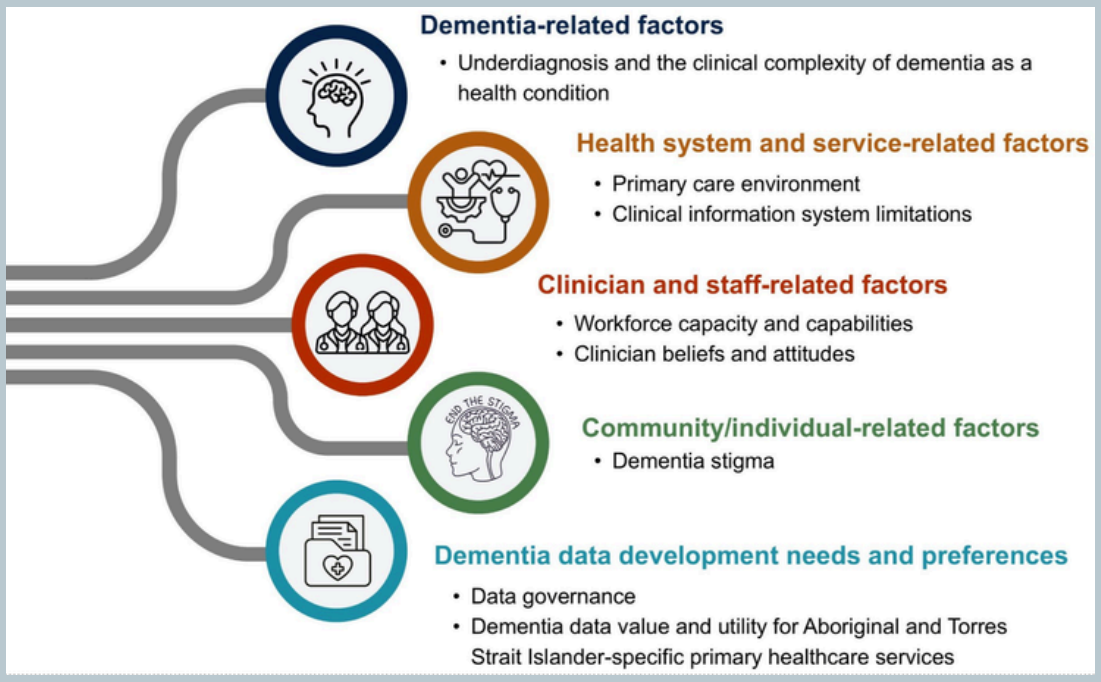


Image: Summary of qualitative findings from the AIHW Dementia Data Development Project

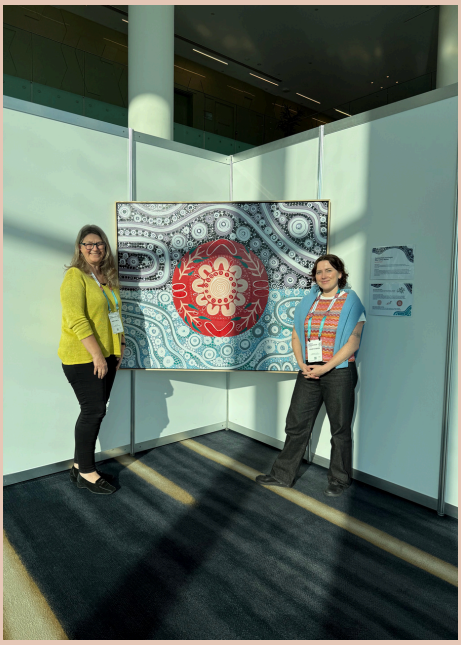
The OnTRACK team was commissioned by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to develop recommendations that will improve the collection, availability and quality of data relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living with dementia who attend Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary healthcare services. We hosted an Expert Panel Workshop in March to gather input and finalise these recommendations.

This collaborative, one-day workshop brought together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous researchers, health professionals and data experts to finalise recommendations to be included in a report commissioned by the AIHW to improve dementia data collection and availability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The day involved facilitated group discussion about draft recommendations, that were informed by previous research phases (a desktop literature review, qualitative yarning study and national survey). Workshop participants reviewed and refined the draft recommendations and gave input on how the collection and reporting of health and welfare data can be improved to better meet the health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

A warm thank you to all who took part. Your knowledge and expertise are invaluable. With your help we hope that these recommendations will allow for improved policy, planning and service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with dementia and their families and communities. **The final report will be released on the 16th of September and available for download on the OnTRACK and AIHW websites.**

Advance Care Planning Conference



Dr. Penny O'Brien and Robyn Smith flew to Yugambeh Country to attend the 9th Advance Care Planning (ACP-i) Conference in September of last year to support OnTRACK AI Dr. Craig Sinclair, who co-chairs the organising committee.

The conference stimulated insightful discussion on advance care planning best-practices and research in a journey towards person and family-centered care.

One presentation outlined the development of culturally safe tool to initiate Advance Care Yarns and conversations on planning ahead for Sad News and Sorry Business.

The 'we need to know before you go' resource includes teabag pouches and questions to initiate yarning. *'Come on, let's have a cuppa and a yarn, cause we need to know before you go'.*

Congratulations to everyone invovled in organising a wonderful conference

Victorian Aboriginal Elders Summit

Elders from across Victoria gathered on Wurundjeri Country in late October last year for the second Victorian Aboriginal Elders Summit.

The Summit's theme 'Dreaming of our past to shape our future' sparked powerful yarns about the role of Elders in Treaty, the impact of aged care reform, the contributions of Aboriginal Health Liaison Officers and the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

The OnTRACK team held a booth as a partner exhibitor at this year's summit. It was an amazing opportunity to yarn about our current projects, and distribute resources we've developped.

It was so wonderful meeting everyone, and we hope to see you all again later this year!



Image: The OnTRACK booth at the 2025 Victorian Aboriginal Elders Summit

Kimberley Indigenous Cognitive Assessment (KICA) Tool

As part of a national research project, the OnTRACK team is supporting the revision of the Kimberley Indigenous Cognitive Assessment (KICA) tool. The KICA was originally developed by members of the team (Prof. Dina LoGiudice and A/Prof. Kate Smith) over 20 years ago. While it has been a valuable and effective tool, we are now working to strengthen it further to better support brain health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia.

The tool has already been revised with input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders from Victoria and across Australia, and we are now moving into the validation phase. We will be double-checking that the changes made to the tool are working as intended and are appropriate, accurate, and meaningful for the communities it is designed to support. The tool will be validated in Boorloo, the Kimberley region, the Torres Strait, and Victoria.

While the central research team is based in Boorloo, here in Naarm, we are working with VAHS Fitzroy, South Morang and St Albans, and with Wathaurong Health Service in Geelong.

Our team is aiming to conduct 100 KICA assessments and 100 comprehensive health checks with older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people attending these services.

In the next few weeks we'll begin validation at VAHS in Fitzroy. We look forward to updating you as the project progresses!

River of Life Project

We want to hear about what needs to change so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples get higher-quality dementia care and support for carers.

The River of Life (or Healthcare Journey Mapping) project sits within Theme 2b of the OnTRACK CRE. This project will gather the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living with dementia or cognitive impairment and their carers navigating their care journeys.

Research yarning for this project has now begun at many of our partner ACCHO sites in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. A massive thank you to everyone who has been involved in making this project happen so far!

Introducing the OnTRACK Community Reference Group (CRG)

The OnTRACK Community Reference Group (CRG) is made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and experienced researchers and ensures the values and practices of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their families and communities are upheld in the CRE. The CRG provides essential cultural guidance to all phases of our research. Following our last issue, we would like to introduce a few more of our CRG members!



Uncle Danny Kelly

Uncle Danny is a Mutthi Mutthi and Wemba Wamba man with over 40 years' experience working with the Victorian Aboriginal community. Uncle Danny has a background in social work, beginning with The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and has also worked in Koorie Services /Human Services Swan Hill in establishing the Mutthi Miah Aboriginal Family Preservation Program with Rumbalara and Morewell. He served on the Wilandra World Heritage Joint management committee for Mungo National Park in NSW for 15 years and was known as the 3TG's as Mutthi Mutthi representative.

In 2001 Uncle Danny worked to establish the Balranald Aboriginal Medical Service in NSW. He is a long-standing committee member and has served the Special Ethics Committee for NSW Aboriginal Health Medical and Research Council as Elder's representation since December 2004.

As of 2024 Uncle Danny has joined the Victorian Treaty process as one of the Elders of the Elders Voice for Treaty Group. He is currently working on The University of Tasmania "Privileging the spirit, voices, and culture of Aboriginal people in dementia care and is a voice on the OnTRACK Community Reference Group at the University of Melbourne.



Aunty Miriam Cleary

Miriam Cleary is an Eastern Arrernte and Gurindji woman and the Family and Community Coordinator with the Advocacy and Research team at Dementia Australia, in the Northern Territory, prioritising the importance of genuine connection and assistance to everyone who's impacted by dementia.

Her work focuses on raising awareness of dementia, providing education, and ensuring information delivered in a community-led, culturally centred, and respectful ways. Miriam also has a strong interest in emerging dementia research, including biomarkers, and how these advances can translate into meaningful outcomes for communities.

She continues to strengthen partnerships with local communities, health providers, researchers, and other external stakeholders with a vision of improving dementia knowledge, reducing stigma, and supporting better outcomes for families across the NT.

Miriam values the opportunity to work together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, communities, community health services, and local community Councils in rural, regional, and remote areas. Each visit to individual communities helps her to listen, learn, and provide information that is culturally safe and meaningful for the community.

Her work is grounded by lived experience as a former carer of a family member with dementia and Miriam genuinely believes taking the time to include families, carers, and community into the conversation about dementia, dementia care, and aged care is a safer way for everyone.

Researcher Spotlight: Naomi Jones

A warm welcome to Naomi Jones, who joined OnTRACK this year, working with Uncle Harry Douglas, and other OnTRACK team members on the KICA project.



Naomi is a Dharug woman who recently joined the OnTRACK team as a Project Officer.

After five years working in lab-oriented research, she has transitioned to clinical research, with the aim of working more closely with communities, taking a 'hands-on' approach to improving health outcomes.

In her role at OnTRACK, Naomi is currently working on the Kimberley Indigenous Cognitive Assessment (KICA) Project. Naomi will be conducting assessments with older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 45 and over at VAHS clinics in Naarm and Wathaurong Health Service in Geelong, under the guidance of Uncle Harry Douglas, Kate Bradley and the broader OnTRACK team.

Naomi recently completed a Masters of Biomedical Science, where she researched the relationship between iron and albumin.

Her research interests are in the social and clinical determinants of health for minority groups, with a specific focus on how barriers and enablers to healthcare provision lead to gaps in healthcare outcomes.

Guide for Culturally Safe Dementia Biomarker and Genetic Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Communities

Following our Biomarker Workshop in March, It is our great pleasure to share the final report of the **Guide for Culturally Safe Dementia Biomarker and Genetic Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Communities**.

This guide addresses a key gap: until now there was no existing guidance specifically addressing dementia biomarker and genetic research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The OnTRACK (Teaching, Research and Community Knowledges) Centre of Research Excellence identified this gap as a Community priority and supported the development of dementia-specific guidance.



Image: Guide for Culturally Safe Dementia Biomarker and Genetic Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and Communities

This guide is grounded in the principle that dementia biomarker and genetic research should involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at every stage of the research process. It promotes active consideration and alignment with Community priorities and culturally informed ways of knowing, being and doing.

Key areas addressed include: **community engagement**, **culturally safe consent and communication**, **governance of biological samples and data**, **ethical storage and repatriation**, and **the responsible return and use of research findings**.

This guide is intended to support both researchers and institutions to undertake dementia biomarker and genetic research that is ethically sound and accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The guide is now available for download on the OnTRACK website.

Upcoming Events

Our OnTRACK team members and researchers are excited to be attending and presenting at a number of conferences over the coming months. Check out upcoming conferences below!

International Indigenous Dementia Research (IIDRN) Conference	*Bringing together leading scientists, policy makers, Elders, Indigenous communities and organisations, and people living with dementia and trainees, the IIDRN aims to advance research in the area of Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD) in Indigenous populations worldwide.* **We are pleased to announce that Uncle Harold Douglas, the co-chair of our Community Reference Group, has been invited to sit on this year's Elders panel.** We wish him all the best in Hawai'i! **https://iidrn.org/conference**	**19th-22nd of October 2025, Honolulu, Hawai'i**
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Conference	*The inaugural National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Conference will bring together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care providers, Elders and Older People, community leaders, policymakers, researchers, and sector partners from across the country to yarn, share knowledge, and shape the future of Ageing and Aged Care in Australia.* **https://natsiaacc.org.au/2026conference/**	**3rd -4th of November 2026, Canberra, Australia**
Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG) Conference	*The AGG Conference provides attendees with the opportunity to network and learn from the expertise and experience of other professionals working in gerontology.* **Dr. Penny O'Brien & Prof Sean Taylor will present on service delivery, workforce and reform; Dr. Jesse Zanker & Dr. Ebony Lewis will present on strengths-based approaches to social and emotional wellbeing; and Ms Robyn Smith will present on Communities of Practice (CoPs).** We are excited to have so many OnTRACK team members and friends in attendance! **https://aagconference.asn.au**	**11th -13th of November 2026, Alice Springs, Australia**
NACCHO Members' Conference	*The NACCHO Members' Conference is an annual gathering of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders from across the country.* **Members of team will be attending light of an upcoming collaboration with NACCHO.** We look forward to sharing updates on this project soon! **https://www.naccho.org.au/naccho-members-conference/**	**2nd -3rd of December 2026, Canberra, Australia**

Check out our Website!



The OnTRACK website is live and running! Check out our new uploads, including our report commissioned by AIHW and our Biomarker Guide.

https://medicine.unimelb.edu.au/ontrack

Scan the QR code for more information about our research, projects, team, and resources.

Instructions for scanning the QR Code

1. Open your phone camera
2. To scan, steadily point your camera at the QR code
3. Wait until a link or notification appears on your screen
4. Tap the link to open, this will then bring you to our OnTRACK homepage website

Contact Us

Penny O'Brien (OnTRACK Coordinator)
Mobile: 0413371403 | Email: penny.obrien@unimelb.edu.au

https://medicine.unimelb.edu.au/ontrack