

NDARC at 25: Research Highlights from its First Quarter Century

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**The University of Queensland Centre
for Clinical Research**

and

**The National Drug and Alcohol
Research Centre, UNSW**

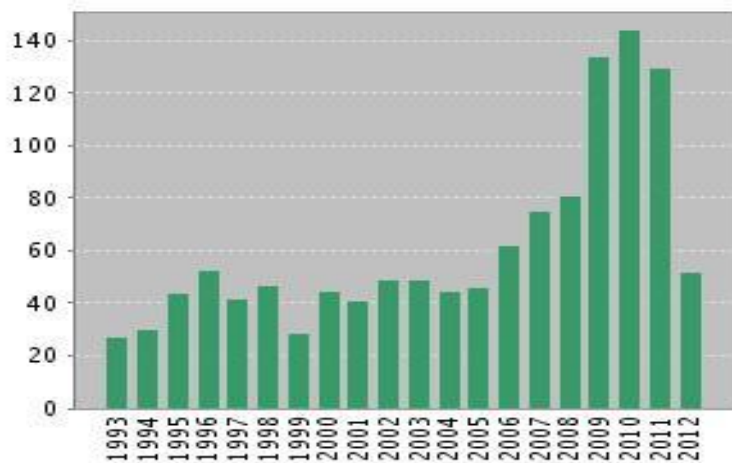
Some History

- Established in 1987 (along with NDRI in Perth)
- An outcome of 1985 Special Premiers' Conference
 - Prompted by rising heroin use and crime
 - Recommended by 1977 Senate Inquiry: An Intoxicated Society
- Largely began from scratch
 - Very little research on alcohol and drugs in Australia
 - Clinician researchers but no institutional research base
 - Foundation Director, Nick Heather, recruited from UK
 - Janet Greeley trained at ARF in Toronto
 - NDRI Director David Hawks had worked in UK and WHO
 - Local staff recruited from psychology
- What has 25 years of sustained funding achieved?

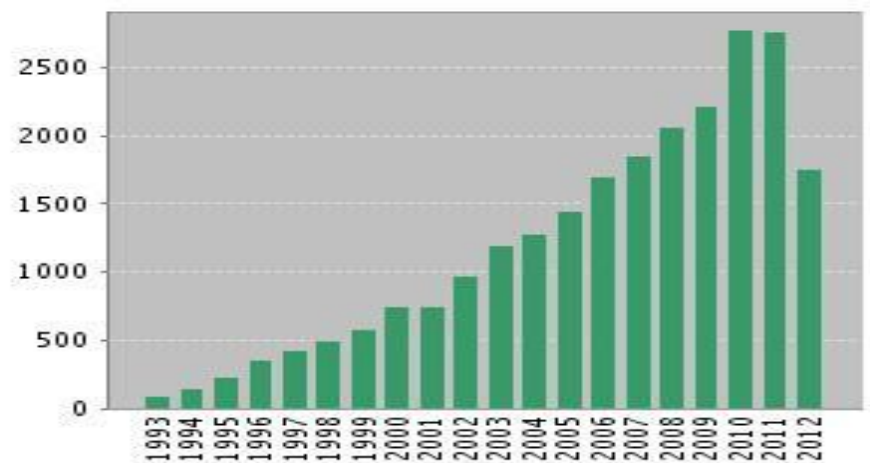
NDARC Research Outputs from Web of Science

1300 papers; 23985 citations; 18.45 citations/paper

Publications



Citations



The Centre's Growth

- Staff numbers
 - initial academic staff of 6 (1 Professor and 2 academic staff)
 - now 125 staff (including 8 Professors)
- Income:
 - Increased from under ~\$1M to \$14M
- Research outputs per annum
 - Peer reviewed: from < 20 to 120
 - 64 other: technical reports, monographs, books etc
- Students and researchers trained
 - 20 doctoral students
 - 105 staff trained in research

Emerging Research Programs

- Much original work was opportunistic:
 - funding, political interest, availability of data,
 - interest from field, access to patients etc
- More systematic research programs emerged
 - In response to earlier work
 - In discussions with funders and field
 - As funding became available
 - Initially from Commonwealth
 - Increasingly from competitive research funding
- Describe major work by substance

Alcohol

- Major interests of Nick Heather
 - Screening and brief interventions in primary care
 - Cue exposure for heavier problem drinkers
 - Quality Assurance Project guidelines
 - Early attempt to trial naltrexone
- Overshadowed by concern about illicit drugs
 - Heroin use a dominant political issue
 - Alcohol use disorders in NSMHWB
- Alcohol use now very much on research agenda
 - Pharmacotherapies and brief interventions
 - Community-based interventions in rural NSW towns

Heroin use

- Reviews of treatment literature
 - Quality Assurance Project treatment guidelines
 - Methadone treatment review for NSW Health
- Epidemiology of fatal and nonfatal opioid overdoses:
 - Risk factors and interventions to prevent opioid overdoses
- Epidemiology of heroin use and harms
 - Ethnographic research in SW Sydney
 - Estimating the number of dependent heroin users
 - WHO Global Burden of Disease studies
- Treatment Evaluations
 - Buprenorphine clinical trial and NEPOD project
 - Australian Treatment Outcome Study
- Evaluation of policy responses: Drug Policy Modelling Project

Cannabis Use

- Cognitive effects of chronic use
- Reviews of adverse health effects of cannabis
 - 1994, 1998 (Lancet), WHO (1999), 2001, ANCD
 - Contributions to GBD (2012)
- Studies of long-term cannabis users
 - NSW North Coast and Sydney
- The nature and treatment of cannabis dependence
 - Treatment trials of CBT and brief interventions
- National Cannabis Prevention and Intervention Centre
 - Public outreach and education
 - Provider training
- Policy evaluations: Drug Policy Modelling Project

Stimulants and Party Drugs

- Reviews of literature on amphetamines and cocaine
- Earliest survey of MDMA use and effects (1991)
- Studies of injecting amphetamine users
 - Early 1990s: psychotic symptoms; HIV risk; treatment seeking
 - Origins of Illicit Drug Reporting System
 - Cognitive effects of psychostimulants: doctoral research
- Methamphetamine use 2000s
 - Interventions for problem amphetamine users: dexamphetamine
 - Psychosis risks
 - Prospective studies of users
- Stimulant related deaths
 - Cocaine, MDMA and methamphetamine

Tobacco Research

- Quality Assurance Project:
 - Treatment Guidelines
 - Meta-analysis of unassisted cessation
- GP based interventions
 - Robyn Richmond's group at St Vincents' Hospital
- Tobacco and mental health
 - Analyses of 1997 NSMHWB
- NHMRC funded project 2012
 - RCT of financial counselling for low SES smokers

Psychiatric Comorbidity

- Comorbidity literature review (1996)
- National Survey of Mental Health and Well-Being (1997)
 - Prevalence of alcohol & drug dependence
 - Patterns of comorbidity with mental disorders
 - Service utilisation and disability
- Commonwealth National Comorbidity Initiative 2001
- Comorbidity a major theme in ATO Study
 - Program of doctoral research
- NDARC's key role in design and conduct of NSMHWB 2007
- Epidemiology of mental disorders a major NDARC strength
- Award of NHMRC CRE in comorbidity

Special populations

- Needs of women with AOD problems
 - Evaluation of Jarrah House
- Youth with AOD problems
 - Ted Noffs outcome studies
 - Cannabis check up for youth
- Prisoners
 - Epidemiology of IDU in prisons
 - RCT of MMT in prison setting
- Indigenous Australians
 - Early work with Ernest Hunter and Maggie Brady
 - New work undertaken within the Centre

Public and Policy Engagement

- Good media coverage of research
 - Thanks to recommendations of early review
- Frequent source of information & comment
 - Accessible briefings for policy makers and public
- Helped put drug issues on the public agenda:
 - Opioid OD deaths late 1990s
 - Mental health effects of stimulants
 - Prevalence of cannabis dependence
 - Comorbidity with mental disorders
- Responding to public concerns
 - Cannabis use

International Recognition

- World Health Organisation (since early 1990s):
 - Health effects of cannabis; MMT; Swiss heroin trials
 - Global Burden of Disease and illicit drugs
- World Bank (2006)
 - Disease Control Priorities Project
- UN Office of Drugs and Crime
 - Demand reduction report late 1990s
 - World Drug Report revamping
- Cochrane Collaboration on opioid treatment
- National Governments: UK; House of Lords

In Summary

Sustained funding and support from the field has produced an:

- Internationally recognized research powerhouse that
 - attracts and retains high quality staff
 - has a depth and breadth of expertise & knowledge
 - Epidemiology, interventions, treatment, policy analysis
 - has the capacity to respond to new challenges
 - publishes high impact, internationally recognised work
- With plenty more still to do

Drug Futures

- Alcohol abuse & dependence:
 - Social neglect of alcohol abuse and intoxication
 - Promoting treatment within a public health approach
- Emerging drug trends:
 - Need for continuous monitoring of new drugs & pharmaceuticals
 - Assessing prevalence of use and harms
 - Characteristics of users
- Implications of neuroscience & genetics
 - For governing ideas of drug use and addiction
 - For treatment, prevention and public health