

SYDNEY INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

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Update from the Deputy Director

Welcome to the November 2023 newsletter from the Sydney Institute for Women, Children and their Families. We are excited to share what we have been working on and what has been happening in our Affiliate Network over the last few months.

In this edition of our newsletter you will find exciting news regarding the 2023 winners of our flagship grant initiative, the Seed Funding Program. This year's program saw 12 finalists present their research ideas to the Institute Management Group at our Research X-Factor event, with five applicants being awarded \$20,000 each!

The Seed Funding Program is supported by Sydney Local Health District, and accelerates novel research ideas from our District affiliates, providing valuable funding and support, particularly to emerging, early and mid-career researchers. You can catch up on Research X-Factor event on pages 2-3 of this newsletter, and meet first place winner Dr David Zalberg on page 5. Congratulations to all affiliates who participated in this year's program.

Since our last newsletter, we have continued delivering research support services to our Affiliate Network. We have presented a Health Policy webinar focusing on substance use in pregnancy, launched a new webinar to showcase research placements from Masters of Public Health students, hosted a Research Networking Meeting for affiliates, and held a Grant Review and Ideas Development Panel meeting to support the preparation of affiliates' grant applications.

I am also excited to announce that our 2022 Annual Report has been published and is available for you to [read online here](#). It gives the Institute great pleasure to celebrate the work of our Affiliate Network in this report each year.

The Institute is excited to continue supporting our Affiliate Network in 2024, and we look forward to sharing what we have planned in the New Year. I wish you all a smooth and prosperous end to 2023.



Ms Katie Perren
Deputy Director, Sydney Institute for
Women, Children and their Families

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SYDNEY INSTITUTE FOR
**women, children
and their families**

Research X-Factor Event

2023 Seed Funding Program Winners

The Institute presented its flagship grant initiative, the Seed Funding Program, for the second time in 2023. Applications for this year's program were novel, innovative and covered a wide range of research ideas relating to women, children and their families. The Research X-Factor event was held in August this year, where 12 finalists presented their projects, five winners received \$20,000 each, and the audience selected the People's Choice winner. The event was hosted by Associate Professor Lauren Troy, and guests enjoyed a special talk from Professor Iona Novak.



First place

Project title: BABBies study: benefits of analysing brain biomarkers in perinatal care - a prospective cohort study

Principal Investigator: Dr David Zalcborg, Director of Obstetric Anaesthetics RPA Hospital

Second place

Project title: The ABFAB study - Aboriginal breastfeeding practices: Facilitators and barriers

Principal Investigator: Ms Karin Birkner, Research Midwife & Parent Educator RPA Hospital

Third place

Project title: Reducing the effects of smoking and vaping on pregnancy and newborn outcomes: Exploring the knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of clinicians and women

Principal Investigator: Ms Jenni Jones OAM, CNC Child and Family Health Sydney LHD

Fourth place

Project title: Heavy menstrual bleeding in women with congenital heart disease

Principal Investigator: Associate Professor Rachael Cordina, Cardiology RPA Hospital

Fifth place

Project title: Optimising the capacity of health care practitioners to support child behaviour in the First 2000 Days in families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Principal Investigator: Dr Sarah Taki, Population Health Sydney LHD

People's Choice

Project title: Improving oral health policies for children with special health care needs

Principal Investigator: Associate Professor Shilpi Ajwani, Head of Oral Health Promotion and Research Sydney LHD

Research X-Factor Event 2023 Seed Funding Program Winners



Prof Sue Woolfenden & Prof Adrienne Gordon (Institute Co-Chairs), with Dr David Zalcborg and colleagues, RPA Anaesthetics



Prof Sue Woolfenden & Prof Adrienne Gordon (Institute Co-Chairs), with Ms Karin Birkner, Krystie Veldkamp & Renee Bani, RPA Women's & Babies



Ms Jenni Jones OAM, Ms Georgia Frolich and Associate Prof Hala Phipps, Child and Family Health Sydney LHD



Prof Sue Woolfenden & Prof Adrienne Gordon (Institute Co-Chairs), with Associate Prof Rachel Cordina and Dr Verity Chadwick, RPA Cardiology



Prof Sue Woolfenden & Prof Adrienne Gordon (Institute Co-Chairs), with Dr Sarah Taki & Danielle Jawad, Population Health Sydney LHD



Prof Sue Woolfenden & Prof Adrienne Gordon (Institute Co-Chairs), Associate Prof Shilpi Ajwani and Dr Arash Ghanbarzadegan, Oral Health Sydney LHD

Research X-Factor Highlights

[See here a story from Sydney Connect to catch up on the full coverage of the Research X-Factor 2023 including video highlights!](#)

Events

Upcoming



Wednesday 6 December 2023
First 2000 Days Webinar:
Metro and regional perspectives of engaging and delivering child and family health services



Friday 15 December 2023
RPA Women's and Babies Research and Academic Day
Abstract presentations from registrars, trainees, midwives and nurses at the KPEC Auditorium

Recap

Research Networking Meeting November 2023
A group of affiliates from multidisciplinary backgrounds joined an Institute networking meeting. Affiliates met new colleagues to collaborate with, learned what others are working on, and made valuable connections.



Dr Marjan Haghighi presenting to affiliates at the Research Networking Meeting, held in the Charles Perkins Centre at The University of Sydney



Missed any of our webinars or event invitations?

If you're interested in seeing webinar recordings or have questions about our events, please get in touch with us: SLHD-SydneyInstituteforWCF@health.nsw.gov.au

News

Invitation to present at international conference

Associate Professor Brad de Vries (Head of Obstetrics at RPA, Research Director for Women's Health, Neonatology and Paediatrics SLHD, and Institute Management Group Member) has been invited to present an important study at the annual Society for Maternal and Fetal Medicine Pregnancy Meeting in Washington DC in February 2024.

The study Brad will be presenting, titled *Inter-pregnancy interval and uterine rupture among more than 500,000 Trials of Labor after Cesarean (TOLAC)*, is a retrospective cohort study utilising data from the United States through an international collaboration with Professor Vincenzo Berghella from Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia.

The study is co-authored by Institute Database Manager Pejman Adily who has been working closely with Brad, as well as colleagues from RPA Women and Babies including Associate Prof Hala Phipps, Dr Travis Bettison, Dr Adam Mackie and Dr Raji Narayan. Dr George Johnson (Institute Director) and Dr Marjan Haghighi (Institute Senior Research Officer) are also contributing to the paper.

We'd like to congratulate Brad and his colleagues on the lifetime achievement of presenting at this eminent meeting next year.



Do you have news and achievements to share?

Please get in touch with us: SLHD-SydneyInstituteforWCF@health.nsw.gov.au

Affiliate spotlight

Meet our affiliate

Dr David Zalberg

**Staff Specialist Anaesthetist
and Director of Obstetric
Anaesthetics RPA Hospital**

Winner - Research X-Factor 2023



What's your research focus?

The predictive impact of brain biomarkers in newborn babies and the ability to predict a lack of oxygen in the brain during childbirth. Over time, we hope to expand this research to use these biomarkers to identify babies suffering from oxygen stress during delivery, adding confidence to the decision making paradigm during childbirth. Currently, we rely on indirect measurements of oxygen stress. This new research aims to give us a clearer picture of the degree of neurological stress immediately after birth to determine those babies who will benefit from early intervention to minimise the long term impact on their development.

What are you looking forward to this year?

After successfully completing BABBIES-1 we are writing up our findings for publication and planning the next phase of our research - this will be a multi-centred trial focusing on a large number of deliveries, measuring brain biomarker levels in high risk deliveries, and comparing these to the currently available prognostic tests. We also want to start follow up for these patients, evaluating how the delivery effects growth and development in early life.

What has your career path looked like?

I started medicine in 1999 in Melbourne - however chasing a sporting dream took me overseas and I deferred study for 4 years. I ultimately returned to Australia and juggled my sporting commitments (sometimes flying to Europe for the weekend to compete!) and university. I struggled to decide which area of medicine I was most passionate about, and initially thought I would head down the physician training pathway. After an elective in trauma medicine in Copenhagen, Denmark I formed some clarity around the idea of doing anaesthetics. During my internship at The Alfred in Melbourne, I would come into theatres on my days off to try and see if it was the right path for me. After doing critical care at The Alfred in 2010, I moved to Sydney to start my anaesthetics career so my partner could be closer to her family.

I loved training at St. Vincent's Hospital in Darlinghurst, and felt very supported. I worked with great people and learnt from colleagues who I consider career defining people.

I decided to undertake a second fellowship at RPA in 2017, and was overwhelmed with the environment. Coming from a small hospital to working with so many legends in the field and a hospital which was at the cutting edge of almost every speciality was unimaginable. I was lucky enough to be offered a staff specialist position at the end of that fellowship, and have been in this role at RPA ever since. In 2021, I took on the role of Director of Obstetric Anaesthetics at RPA which became incredibly challenging with the emergence of COVID-19! Outside of obstetrics I am also interested in airway anaesthesia, peritonectomy and paediatrics.

What would you like to achieve in the next 5-10 years?

This might sound very unambitious but I don't think I have a specific goal. Of course it would be fantastic to have a proven biomarker which changes the way we approach intrapartum care - but if I'm completely honest my goal is just to enjoy the journey - to stay in the present and get the most out of all of my experiences.

What benefits you as an Institute affiliate?

It's wonderful to work in an environment with a focus on women's health. There are so many international experts who are affiliated with the Institute and it's great to collaborate with them to improve clinical care.

Tell us about your experience applying for seeding funding through the Institute, and what presenting at the Research X-Factor was like.

I first applied to the program in 2022 and was unsuccessful, but Professor Rob Sanders was extremely positive and pushed me to keep going and so we decided to apply again in 2023. I usually don't mind public speaking but getting up in front of a group of neonatal, obstetric and research experts - about a topic I am not an expert in was VERY nerve-wracking!

What is your top research tip or secret?

Find a good mentor. For me that is Professor Rob Sanders. As an emerging researcher he has given me so much confidence - I probably wouldn't have dived into research so far down the track in my career without his encouragement.

Affiliate publications

A snapshot of some recent affiliate publications:

Black, K. I., Dorney, E., Hall, J. A., Pelosi, M., Khan, S. A., & Cheney, K. (2023). **Using a validated instrument to assess pregnancy planning and preconception care at antenatal booking visits: a retrospective cohort study.** Medical Journal of Australia.

Goldfeld, S., Moreno-Betancur, M., Gray, S., Guo, S., Downes, M., O'Connor, E., Azpitarte, F., Badland, H., Redmond, G., Williams, K., **Woolfenden, S.,** Mensah, F., O'Connor, M. (2023). **Addressing Child Mental Health Inequities through Parental Mental Health and Preschool Attendance** Pediatrics, 151 (5),

Wen L. M. (2023). **A novel modelling approach to assess obesity prevention at the population level: limitations and opportunities.** The Lancet. Public health, 8(11), e832–e833.

[https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(23\)00250-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(23)00250-5)

Hu, N., Gelaw, Y. A., **Katz, I.,** Fernandez, E., Falster, K., Hanly, M., ... & **Lingam, R.** (2023).

Developmental trajectories of socio-emotional outcomes of children and young people in out-of-home care—Insights from data of Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS). Child Abuse & Neglect, 106196.

McGlynn, A., Ní Shé, É., Bennett, P., Liaw, S.-T., Jackson, T., & **Harris-Roxas, B.** (2023). **Exploring the spread and scale of a web-based clinical decision support portal in Sydney, Australia, during COVID-19: A case study.** Journal of Integrated Care, online first.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/JICA-01-2023-0006>.

Jardine, I. R., Christie, H. E., Oetsch, K., **Sabag, A.,** Kennedy, M., Meyer, B. J., & Francois, M. E. (2023). **Physical Activity, but Not Glycaemic Load, Is Associated with Lower Real-Time Glycaemic Control in Free-Living Women with Gestational Diabetes Mellitus.** Nutrients, 15(8), 1974.

Affiliate achievements

NHMRC - 2023 Centres of Research Excellence announced!

We congratulate our affiliates who are involved in recently awarded CREs:

- **ARPAN** - Accelerating Research and Progress in maternal And Newborn health: A Centre for Research Excellence to improve maternal and newborn health in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, led by Professor Caroline Homer with **Institute Co-Chair Professor Adrienne Gordon and affiliate Professor Kirsten Black as Chief Investigators**
- **(STAR-CRE)** - Centre of Research Excellence in supporting child and family health for priority populations: Addressing inequity and supporting positive life trajectories through strengths-based tiered access and resources is led by Professor Valsamma Eapen with **Institute Co-Chair Professor Sue Woolfenden**
- **SPHERE II** - The Centre of Research Excellence in Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health in Primary Care led by Professor Danielle Mazza with **Institute affiliate Professor Kirsten Black as a Chief Investigator**

New Child and Family Health Toolkit

Institute affiliate **Dr Debbie Stockton** recently presented her paper titled: *Collaborative Community Co-design: Harnessing realist evaluation to adapt child health service models for rural communities* at the AES International Evaluation Conference (27-29th September). The paper is an example of realist evaluation with rural communities to evaluate the fit of a child and family health service model for local context, resulting in a framework and toolkit to facilitate collaborative community co-design of service model adaptations (**CASCADEs**).

Become an Institute affiliate

We invite researchers, clinicians, educators, and partners to formalise their affiliation with the Institute. Benefits of an affiliation with the Institute include networking, collaboration, and training and education opportunities. If you would like to know more about becoming an affiliate, email:

SLHD-SydneyInstituteforWCF@health.nsw.gov.au



Sydney
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