

When I heard about how Robert Brooker had had his life changed after signing up to START, a research program for carers of people living with dementia, I was delighted.

Robert, 63, has been caring for his wife, Sandy, since she was diagnosed with fronto-temporal Dementia (a type of younger onset dementia which is usually diagnosed when the person is in their 50s), four years ago.

Like others in a similar situation, Robert felt overwhelmed at times, isolated and sometimes angry about the situation he found himself in. But after taking part in the program, which includes relaxation training and counselling via video-conference, he has not looked back. His levels of anxiety and depression are lower, and he knows that he can do more than cope as a carer.

Robert's experience is helping us to shape policy directions for how Australia supports carers in the future.

According to the World Health Organisation, globally, almost 15 per cent of adults aged 60 and over suffer from a mental disorder. Mental illness can be overwhelming, crippling and isolating, and it seems that the incidence is increasing.

Little is known about the long-term impact of living with mental illness, and this is something NARI wishes to address through research. We know from the many conversations we have had with you, our supporters, that you share this priority.

*"NARI's mental health research focuses on people at most risk of depression and anxiety in older age, carers, people with chronic disease and residents of aged care homes."*

Over the years, we have helped carers reduce depression and anxiety through internet connection, people with COPD through Befriending and older Chinese people through better identification and screening of mental health issues. The priorities identified through these scoping studies are used by NHMRC and beyondblue to direct their funding in this area.

Our supporters have told us that there is a great need for more predictive tests to enable people to prepare for mental health and ageing, and more preventative strategies that can help us understand and do something about our own mental health as well as strategies to improve wellbeing of aged care residents.

I invite you to join us in our vision of a mentally healthier world for older people. Emotional well-being is as important in older age as at any other time of life. Poor mental health is not a normal part of ageing however, older people can be more vulnerable to loneliness, isolation and depression.

This tax time, if you are able to make a charitable donation, please consider NARI. Donate now either using the donation form inside or on our secure donation site [www.nari.net.au/foundation/donate](http://www.nari.net.au/foundation/donate)

Your gift will help provide the services that we all may need one day.



**Briony Dow**  
Director

## A snapshot of mental health among older Australians



Approximately **10-15% of older people in the community** experience depression (2009)



**Men aged 85+ have the highest rates** of age-specific death by suicide, at 39.3 per 100,000 people (2015)



Older **CALD Australians have a higher incidence of depression** than Anglo-Australian populations (2009)



**More than half of Australia's carers (56%)** have at least moderate depression (2007)

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## Wanted: people who receive or provide home care services for people living with dementia

The provision of home care helps older Australians with complex care needs to live independently in their own homes.

Since September 2017, 32,722 home care packages have been assigned to consumers, taking the total number of packages released since the commencement of the new arrangements to 80,451.

Overall demand for home care is increasing, with the average number of daily approvals growing by 23.9% since March 2017.

While demand is rising, little is known about how people living with dementia and their families are experiencing home care.

This is about to change thanks to a project called PITCH being run by NARI.

NARI is looking for participants to interview who have experience in receiving (as a person living with dementia or as a family carer) or



*NARI researchers working on PITCH: Brendan Hallam, Dr Anita Goh, Dr Sue Malta and Dr Luke Gahan.*

experience in providing home care services for people living with dementia.

Dr Anita Goh said: "The aim of the project is to co-design a training and education program for home care workers to improve their knowledge and quality of care for people living with

dementia. PITCH also is about reducing the burden on families."

The research program is funded through the National Health and Medical Research Council.

*"Overall demand for home care is increasing, with the average number of daily approvals growing by 23.9% since March 2017."*

## Are old guys invincible?

According to recent data, men aged over 85 years have the highest rate of deaths by suicide of any age or gender group in Australia.

NARI is in a collaboration with University of Melbourne to explore suicide among men aged over 80. Researchers recently held focus groups with older men to gain insight into some of the factors that may explain the suicide rates.

Investigator Dr Briony Dow said one hypothesis centred on the notion of masculinity which endorses the concepts of independence, avoidance of negative emotions, and invulnerability.

Research to date suggests that increased risk comes with living alone and mood disorders.

However, it is still unclear why these factors create a higher suicide risk for older men compared to older women.



*Networking after a recent focus group to learn more older men and suicide at NARI.*

## News in brief

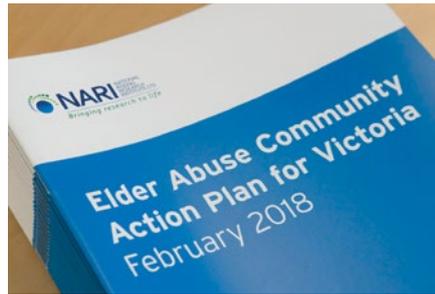


### Scholarship for NARI researcher

NARI researcher Paulene Mackell has been awarded a prestigious scholarship to enable her to pursue a PhD within a current NARI project that is exploring and building on the ways in which art centres, located in remote Aboriginal communities, are providing support to older community members living with dementia.

Paulene Mackell, who will study through RMIT University, will continue to work with the project team which includes Ikuntji Artists, Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency, the Tjanpi Desert Weavers; as well as aged care providers Tjungu Aged and Disability Care and Kimberley Aged Care Services.

The Consumer-Priority PhD Scholarship is supported through the Dementia Australia Research Foundation.



### Victoria's first action plan to tackle elder abuse launched

Developed by NARI with support from Seniors Rights Victoria, the Office of Public Advocate, and community service providers, Elder Abuse Community Action Plan identifies gaps and sets out ten priorities to address elder abuse.

The priorities include the need to clarify the relationship between family violence and elder abuse; raise community awareness of elder abuse and promote a positive of older people to reduce ageism; increase ways to help older people disclose elder abuse without fear, and provide education and training on elder abuse for all health professionals in health and aged care services.

The plan has been funded by Gandel Philanthropy.



### Former NARI director awarded Australia Day honours

NARI congratulates Emeritus Professor David Ames AO for his inclusion in the Australia Day Honours as an Officer of Australia in the General Division.

Prof Ames has been honoured for his distinguished service to psychiatry, particularly in the field of dementia and the mental health of older persons, as an academic, author and practitioner, and as an adviser to professional bodies.

Professor Ames was the Director of National Ageing Research Institute 2007-2015 and has had a distinguished research career committed to the area of new drug treatments for Alzheimer's disease and improving the care of people living with dementia, their families and carers.

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## DELIA - a new app to address CALD equity gap



*Dr Bianca Brijnath, one of the researchers developing DELIA.*

Work has begun on developing a web app to help older Asian-Australians access information about mental illness, care pathways, and where to seek help to improve depression and anxiety.

The app is being developed by NARI in partnership with the Melbourne Networked Society Institute.

Known as DELIA (Improving depression and anxiety literacy among older Asians in Australia), the web-based app will focus on Indian, Chinese and Sri Lankan communities. These are Australia's fastest growing immigrant groups.

Dr Bianca Brijnath, NARI's Director of Social Gerontology, said: "We anticipate DELIA will be a turning point for many vulnerable older Asian-Australians,

many of whom do not understand depression and anxiety, and the importance of seeking help."

NARI will be working alongside community groups including the Confederation of Indian Australian Associations Inc, the Chinese Community Social Services Centre (Melbourne), Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Centre (Perth) and Casey Life Church (Melbourne) when piloting DELIA.

# YOU'RE INVITED SPECIAL FILM FUNDRAISER

We invite you to a special private screening of *Seeing From Within: The Life of Barbara Blackman*

The Australian Ageing Research Foundation is delighted to invite you to a special private screening of an extraordinary film that explores the life of Barbara Blackman, the former wife of celebrated artist Charles Blackman.

Although, legally blind, Barbara Blackman saw her blindness as "different way of seeing." This fascinating film explores her very unconventional life, filled with highs and lows and her strong determination to find meaning and authenticity in life.

*Seeing from within* is an inspirational film about a brilliant and challenging intellectual who on many fronts has contributed to our thinking about art, music and philanthropy in this country. Her libretto to Peter Sculthorpe's *Eliza Surviva*, her book of correspondence with Judith Wright or her recent, beautifully amusing book *Dog's Doggerel* are but three examples of her brilliant and penetrating intellect.

The film screening will be followed by a Q&A hosted by the film's director, John Swindells.

Funds raised will support the mental health research by NARI.



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## EVENT DETAILS:

### When

18th July, 2018  
6pm - 9pm

### Includes

Champagne reception, private screening and Q&A with the film's director.

### Venue

Palace Cinema Como  
The Como Centre:  
Level 1, Corner Toorak  
Road and Chapel Street,  
South Yarra VIC

### Contact

Judith Hooper  
0406 369 877  
j.hooper@nari.edu.au

### Ticket Price

\$55.00

To book visit: [www.trybooking.com/375723](http://www.trybooking.com/375723)



## The benefits of START

When Robert Brooker heard about START, a program of education, relaxation training and counselling for carers of people living with dementia, he knew he had to give it a go.

The program is directed at carers of a person with dementia, and is a research program currently being run by the Melbourne Ageing Research Collaboration (MARC), hosted by NARI.

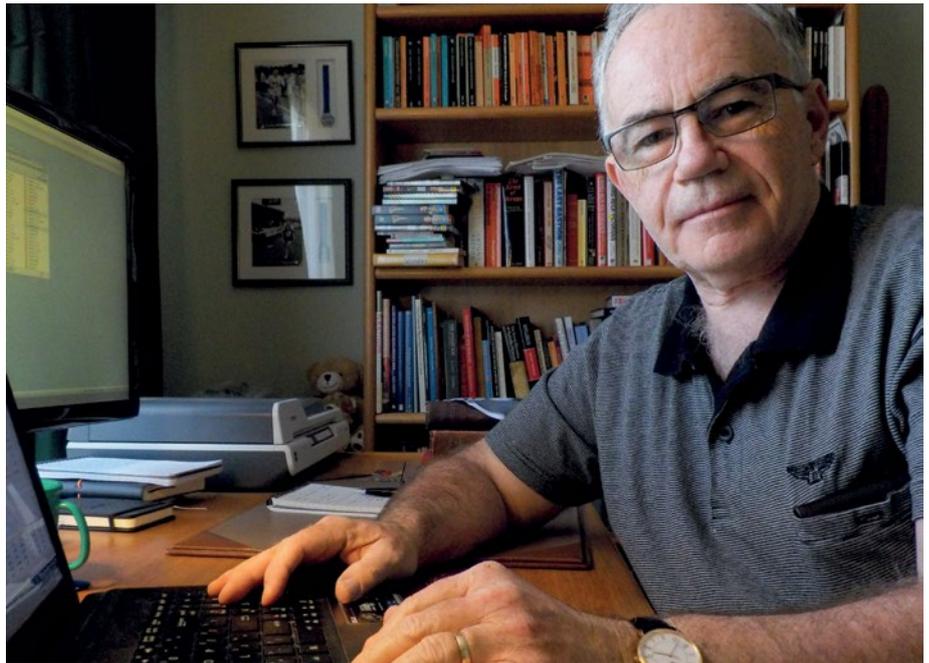
Robert, 63, has been caring for his wife, Sandy, since she was diagnosed with fronto-temporal Dementia (a type of younger onset dementia which is usually diagnosed when the person is in their 50s), three years ago.

"It is difficult to be a carer so the chance also to be a part of something that may be useful for others was important to me," Robert said.

"I put up my hand for selfish reasons because I wanted to judge for myself whether the emotions I was having were common to other carers. The answer was an emphatic yes. It was a relief to have my worries alleviated, and feelings validated," he said.

Developed in the UK, the program was shown to be effective in reducing the rates of depression and anxiety in carers. START has adapted the UK program, and is testing the approach via video-conferencing technology, enabling access to carers living in remote areas.

START was useful on many counts for Robert: he enjoyed learning how to relax and the exercises were not only practical but easy. The tips about learning to plan have proved a boon as he juggles caring with his part-time job working in economic research for NAB. He also appreciated the information about moods that he may experience and has since learned to curb his impatience, or at least most of the time.



*Robert Brooker, research participant in START.*

"What I realised is that when things got too bad for me, I did not know how to redirect my anger and frustration. I now do, and that has been very helpful for both of us."

For Robert, being able to see the researcher thanks to video-conferencing was a definite plus. It allowed me to connect on a personal level.

Robert still works part-time as a researcher in NAB's economic department. It gives him an 'out' and something else to concentrate on.

"What I have learned through START is helping me balance my work, care and life," he said.

"I would encourage anyone who is in a similar position to me to consider taking part in the program. You have nothing to lose but a great deal to gain," Robert said.

MARC continues to recruit carers for this project. To participate in the study, you need to: be 18 years of age or over,

be caring for and living with someone with dementia and live within 100k radius of Melbourne.

The program involves eight weekly face-to-face (via videoconferencing) sessions of education, relaxation and counselling.

### Find out more about this project

Contact Ellen Gaffy on (03) 8387 2296 or at [e.gaffy@nari.edu.au](mailto:e.gaffy@nari.edu.au)



Melbourne  
Ageing Research  
Collaboration