PhD Opportunities
Melbourne Centre for Behaviour change

The Melbourne Centre for Behaviour Change (MCBC) is seeking motivated and high performing students interested in undertaking a PhD in behaviour change research. Students must satisfy the eligibility requirements for entry to the University of Melbourne and be competitive for a scholarship. Below is an overview of available opportunities. However, supervisors are also open to other project ideas that align with their research interests. Expressions of interest are due by October 1st.

Supervisor: Professor Ron Borland, PhD

Professor Borland recently joined the Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences after almost 30 years working in applied research on cancer prevention, with a strong focus on reducing smoking. In that time, he has applied a wide range of psychological knowledge to help people change their behaviour to reduce cancer risk; behaviour changes that also reduce risk of other causes of premature mortality and morbidity. He is regularly listed as one of the world’s most influential scientists and has strong collaborative links around the world. He has developed a comprehensive theory of behaviour change (CEOS theory) and has contributed more broadly to thinking around system-based models of behaviour change.

Research links: Find an Expert Google Scholar

Opportunity

Professor Borland is currently semi-retired but is interested in supervising or co-supervising research programs in either of two issues or ideally their combination. First, projects researching aspects of his CEOS theory and its implications for behaviour change in any domain. This may include experimental studies that test specific hypotheses, especially around the primacy of affect in driving behaviour and the limits of rational thinking. The second is projects that might build on the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project, a study that commenced in 2002 and has funding till at least 2026. It is an ongoing series of multi-country longitudinal studies of smokers and recent quitters which contains data on a range of potential psychological and contextual influences on tobacco use. His core interests here are in better understanding why quitting smoking is so hard and the potential of harm reduced alternative products. More recently, he has become engaged in developing and evaluating digital health tools to support person-centered rather than problem-focused approaches, but opportunities here will only emerge if grants to support the work are funded.

Key reading:


Candidate

Project opportunities are available for full-time three-year PhD positions. To be suitably qualified, applicants will need to have education and training in a relevant discipline (e.g., psychology, public health, health promotion, or any cognate discipline).

Contact details
Professor Ron Borland: rborland@unimelb.edu.au, +61 409 979 269
PhD Candidates will work under the direct supervision and mentorship of Dr Michelle Jongenelis, Deputy Director and a Senior Research Fellow at the MCBC. This is a unique opportunity to complete your PhD within a multi-disciplinary team. You will be mentored and supported to develop research skills in psychology and public health and to connect with industry and other stakeholders. Dr Jongenelis has expertise in health promotion, intervention development and evaluation, behavioural psychology, and clinical psychology. She works across multiple and diverse health-related behaviours including alcohol and tobacco control (including use of e-cigarettes), nutrition, and physical activity. She also has an interest in body image disturbances and eating disorders. Michelle works as a researcher and consultant for a broad range of organisations covering the not-for-profit and government-sectors. She is an accredited Clinical Psychologist and maintains a position in private practice.

Research links:  Find an Expert  Google Scholar  LinkedIn

Opportunity 1: Healthy families, happy families: Developing intergenerational health interventions

Undertake a PhD focusing on the development of intergenerational interventions to improve health and well-being in families. By the completion of the PhD, you will have gained and generated new knowledge on how the health and well-being of children, parents, and grandparents can be improved via intergenerational family-based interventions that focus on nutrition, physical activity, alcohol consumption, smoking, and mental health.

Key reading:

Opportunity 2: Minimise the use of emerging nicotine delivery systems among youth

Undertake a PhD focusing on the development of health communications that aim to minimise uptake of e-cigarettes and other emerging nicotine delivery systems among adolescents and young adults. By the completion of the PhD you will have gained and generated new knowledge on the determinants of e-cigarettes use among adolescents and young adults, how stakeholders can be supported to reduce e-cigarette use in their settings, and the development of messages that aim to minimise use and encourage cessation.

Key reading:

Candidate

Project opportunities are available for full-time three-year PhD positions. To be suitably qualified, applicants will need to have education and training in a relevant discipline (e.g., psychology, public health, health promotion).

Contact details
Dr Michelle Jongenelis: michelle.jongenelis@unimelb.edu.au
Deputy Director and Senior Research Fellow, supported by a National Health and Medical Research Council Research Fellowship
**Supervisor: Dr Camille Short, PhD**

Dr Camille Short is a senior behavioural scientist with experience and training in health psychology, and digital, and public health. Her research focuses on the use of technology for improving access to high quality, personalised, and multidisciplinary health services, especially for exercise-related behaviour change and improved mental health among individuals with chronic and complex health issues. Her research is highly cited internationally, including in clinical guidelines, with significant contributions to understanding engagement in digital behaviour change interventions, the role of personalisation in effective behaviour change support, and the development and evaluation of several digital exercise and behaviour change interventions for chronic disease control, including cancer.

**Research links:**  Find an Expert  Twitter  Google Scholar  LinkedIn

**Bridging gaps in supportive care for cancer using new digital health tools**

Undertake a PhD on the use of digital health tools for improving access to rehabilitation and supportive care services for cancer patients. Successful candidates will work under the direct supervision and mentorship of Dr Camille Short who holds a joint position with the School of Psychological Sciences and the School of Health Sciences. Dr Short’s team is currently focused on improving quality of life for cancer patients by developing, trialling and implementing multi-disciplinary digital health interventions to support cancer patients rehabilitate and adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles. The research has a focus on equity and access, with the aim to ensure high quality support is available to patients regardless of geographical location and other barriers. This is a unique opportunity to complete a PhD within a multi-disciplinary team and as part of established projects. By the completion of the PhD, candidates can expect to have gained and generated new knowledge on how to design health interventions that are person-centred, and how to support uptake and maintenance of new health routines using digital technologies.

**Key reading:**

**Candidate**

Project opportunities are available for full-time three-year PhD positions. To be suitably qualified, applicants will need to have education and training in a relevant health-related discipline, including (but not limited to) psychology, public health, physiotherapy, exercise physiology, or nursing.

**Contact details**

Dr Camille Short: camille.short@unimelb.edu.au
Senior Research Fellow, supported by a Victoria Cancer Agency Research Fellowship
Professor Walker is a social psychologist with broad interests in social and environmental sustainability and in social justice. His research focuses on understanding processes of social and environmental change, with a broader aim of developing a better understanding of the interplay between theory and practice. Professor Walker’s goal is to join analyses of ecosystems, social systems, and egosystems to enhance social and environmental sustainability within and across those systems. Consistent with this, his research has increasingly been done in interdisciplinary contexts and appears in interdisciplinary outlets. Iain believes this helps spread the scientific impact of social psychology, provides novel and important forums in which to do social psychology, and ultimately helps inform and advance the science of social psychology.

**Research links:**  
Find an Expert  
Google Scholar  
LinkedIn

**Opportunity 1: Public understandings of climate change and promoting pro-environmental behaviours**

The ways that people, individually and socially, understand climate change and the environment more generally, are important in shaping the sorts of environmentally relevant behaviours they engage in. This program of research has spanned more than a decade, and included tracking segmentation analyses of the Australian population, articulating how false consensus and pluralistic ignorance biases influence readiness to engage in behaviours, and how beliefs and opinions relate to environmental behaviours including policy support. Iain is especially keen to develop the program of work by focusing more directly in stimulating and maintaining changes in behaviour.

**Key reading:**  

**Opportunity 2: Science communication and environmental risk perception**

Human health and welfare are inextricably and reciprocally tied to environmental quality. Professor Walker is a co-lead of the Science Communication theme in the recently-established *Healthy Environments and Lives* research network. This theme will be examining: how (or if) people perceive environmental risks and how that relates to behaviour; the effects of environmental degradation and restoration on human wellbeing; and how the ways people think about the future influence their decisions and behaviours today. There is ample scope for a student to develop a PhD project within these broad parameters, and to be connected to a nation-wide network of colleagues. A related topic area would be to look at science communication, engagement, and translation.

**Key reading:**  

**Opportunity 3: Bushfire preparedness and response**

Professor Walker has been working for two years with a team of colleagues from psychology, population health, and medicine to examine the effects of the 2019-2020 bushfires on mental health and wellbeing, and community resilience. Most results are yet to be published, but suggest huge rates of PTSD, especially among people directly affected by the bushfires but also among those not directly affected. Simultaneously, there appears to be a similar effect on indicators of growth and resilience. Perhaps most usefully in terms of disaster preparedness, social belonging and connectedness seems to have both prophylactic and restorative effects on psychological distress. There are plenty of opportunities for students to engage with the main project, which is funded for one more year, or to develop a spin-off project.

**Key reading**  
Opportunity 4: Relative deprivation and prejudice

Relative deprivation describes the experience (usually anger) of being denied something one thinks one is entitled to. Personal RD usually leads to individual-level behaviours; group-based RD usually leads to intergroup outcomes such as social protest or outgroup derogation. Iain and colleagues have been trying to extend the theoretical framework of RD to accommodate environmental outcomes. One promising angle is to consider RD on behalf of others, particularly on future generations but also others in parts of the globe that are likely to be severely affected by climate change or other forms of environmental change (land-clearing, biodiversity loss, etc). Iain would be happy to talk with prospective students about possible projects in this area, or in the more typical area for RD research of prejudice and intergroup conflict.

Key reading:
https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429274558

Candidate

Project opportunities are available for full-time three-year PhD positions. To be suitably qualified, applicants will need to have education and training in a relevant discipline (e.g., psychology, sociology, public health, environmental sciences).

Contact details
Professor Iain Walker: iain.walker@unimelb.edu.au
Director

Please send an Expression of Interest by 1st October 2022 to the relevant contact person. All expressions of interest should include:

- CV
- Academic Transcript (with WAM or GPA)