



Melbourne Centre for Behaviour Change PhD Opportunities

About us

The Melbourne Centre for Behaviour Change (MCBC) is a major initiative led by researchers and clinicians who are dedicated to understanding and improving the individual, social, organisational, and environmental factors that affect behavioural patterns. Supported by the Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences and the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, MCBC's mission is to generate research outcomes that contribute to population-level improvements in health and wellbeing and promote socially responsible behaviours.

MCBC studies a wide range of behaviours including physical activity, nutrition, smoking, vaping, alcohol consumption, sun protection, sleep, sexual activity, and health screening. We also have an interest in behaviours that contribute to protecting the health of our planet.

Our research addresses many significant issues including:

- How can we deliver information in a way that promotes positive behaviour change?
- How can we motivate people to change their behaviour?
- How can we help people break and establish habits?
- How can we assist individuals in successfully managing long-term illnesses and disabilities?
- How can we deliver high-value interventions that are efficient and widely acceptable?
- How can we adapt interventions to meet the needs of vulnerable populations?
- What are the relative strengths and limitations of new technologies that aim to facilitate behaviour change?
- How can we change organisations and environments to support behaviour change?

For more information about MCBC, visit:

<https://psychologicalsciences.unimelb.edu.au/melbourne-centre-for-behaviour-change/about>

Study with MCBC

Work environment

MCBC has capacity to provide an integrated approach to all aspects of behaviour change and health promotion. MCBC specializes in the development, implementation, and evaluation of evidence-based interventions. We adopt a person-centered approach to assist individuals in self-managing their health, and work with professionals and organisations to co-design health-enhancing policies and practices.

Eligibility

Please note that entry to research programs at The University of Melbourne is very competitive and you are advised to check the webpage at <http://mdhs-study.unimelb.edu.au/degrees/doctor-of-philosophy/entry-requirements> for information about the academic entry standard and application process prior to contacting a potential supervisor.

Scholarships

To be eligible for a University of Melbourne PhD scholarship, applications must be completed by the 31st of October 2020. In addition to any scholarships received, applicants are able to undertake one day of paid work during the PhD Candidature external to the PhD.

Next steps

Please send an Expression of Interest to the relevant contact for the project you are interested in (see pages that follow). All expressions of interest should include:

- A cover letter
- CV
- Academic Transcript (with WAM or GPA)

Please note that the 2020 deadline for scholarship applications is the 31st October. We welcome EOIs at any time but if you miss the deadline you must be able to self-fund your PhD studies if you intend to study in 2021. Alternatively, you may wish to consider delaying your PhD studies to 2022.

Available PhD Topics and Supervisors

Supervisor: Dr Camille Short



Dr Short
PhD

Dr Camille Short is a senior behavioural scientist with experience and training in health psychology, 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 behaviour change and improved mental health among individuals with chronic and complex health issues. She has an affiliate position in the cancer experiences research group at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, the School of Medicine at the University of Adelaide, and the NHMRC Centre for Research Excellence in Prostate Cancer Survivorship. She is the past chair of the International Society of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity's e-&mHealth special interest group, an ambassador for Open Digital Health, and serves on the scientific advisory committee for PoCoG, the psycho-oncology clinical trials group funded by Cancer Australia. 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 behaviour change interventions for chronic disease control, including cancer.

Opportunity: Digital Health, Cancer Survivorship, and Behaviour Change

Undertake a PhD focusing on the use of digital health tools for improving access to rehabilitation and supportive care services for cancer patients. The candidate will work under the direct supervision and mentorship of Dr Camille Short, who holds a joint position with the Melbourne Centre for Behaviour Change within the School of Psychological Sciences and the School of Health Sciences at The University of Melbourne. 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 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 your PhD within a multi-disciplinary team and as part of established projects. You will be mentored and supported to develop research skills in psychology and health sciences, and to connect with industry and other stakeholders. By the completion of the PhD you will have gained and generated new knowledge on how health behaviours impact on health, how to prescribe health behaviours, and how to support uptake and habit formation using digital technologies.

Key reading:

Short, C.E., Rebar A. L., Plotnikoff R.C., Vandelanotte, C. (2015). Designing engaging online behaviour change interventions: a proposed model of user engagement. *The European Health Psychologist*, 17, 32-38
Short, C.E., Finlay, A., Sanders, I. *et al.* (2018). Development and pilot evaluation of a clinic-based mHealth app referral service to support adult cancer survivors increase their participation in physical activity using publicly available mobile apps. *BMC Health Services Research*, 18, doi: 10.1186/s12913-017-2818-7

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, physiotherapy, exercise physiology, dietetics, and nursing.

Contact details

Dr Camille Short; Camille.short@unimelb.edu.au

Senior Research Fellow, supported by a Victoria Cancer Agency Research Fellowship



Dr Jongenelis
MPsych (Clinical), PhD

Supervisor: Dr Michelle Jongenelis

PhD Candidates will work under the direct supervision and mentorship of Dr Michelle Jongenelis, a Senior Research Fellow in the Melbourne Centre for Behaviour Change within the School of Psychological Sciences at The University of Melbourne. 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.

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:

Jongenelis, M. I., Morley, B., Pratt, I. S., & Talati, Z. (2020). Diet quality in children: A function of grandparents' feeding practices?. *Food Quality and Preference*, 83, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2020.103899>

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:

Jongenelis, M. I., Jardine, E., Kameron, C., Rudaizky, D., & Pettigrew, S. (2019). E-cigarette use is associated with susceptibility to tobacco use among Australian young adults. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 74, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2019.06.017>

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

Senior Research Fellow, supported by a National Health and Medical Research Council Research Fellowship



Professor Borland
PhD

Supervisor: Professor Ron Borland

Professor Borland has recently joined the Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences after over 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 and has contributed to thinking around system-based models of behaviour change.

Opportunity

Are you interested in doing research that can make a difference? Do you have a passion for acting to improve human health and well-being or to research better ways of getting people to behave in ways that protect our planet? If so, this opportunity might be right for you.

Professor Borland is interested in supervising research programs that look systematically at barriers to effective behaviour change, to address pressing social problems, or on the development and the testing of interventions to produce such changes. He has access to some large multi-county multi-wave data sets as a Chief Investigator of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Study. He is also a chief investigator of a Centre for Research Excellence in Digital Health Interventions for Prevention and Management of Chronic Diseases, so would be interested in students with an interest in the use of digital tools to enhance behaviour change. More recently, Professor Borland has become engaged in major projects to enhance well-being using digital tools to support person-centered rather than problem-focused approaches.

If you are interested in working with Professor Borland, you might wish to familiarize yourself with some of his theoretical thinking (references below) and be prepared to challenge your own thinking if the evidence forces you to.

Key readings:

Borland, R. (2016). CEOS Theory: A comprehensive approach to understanding hard to maintain behaviour change. *Applied Psychology: Health and Wellbeing*, 9(1). doi:10.1111/aphw.12083.

Borland, R., Young, D., Coghill, K., and Zhang, J. Y. (2010) The Tobacco Use Management System: Analyzing Tobacco Control from a Systems Perspective. *American Journal of Public Health*, 100(7). doi: 10.2105/ajph.2009.165910

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



*Professor Abraham
PhD*

Supervisor: Professor Charles Abraham

Professor Abraham is the Director of the Melbourne Centre for Behaviour Change at the University of Melbourne. He is an applied social and health psychologist specialising in behaviour change and translational health research. He is expert in a range of quantitative, qualitative, and review methods used to research many behaviour-change challenges. He is world-leading researcher and in 2014, was one of 7 psychologists included in a list of the leading 100 practising scientists in the UK. In 2018 and in 2019, he was listed as one of the Web of Science Highly Cited Researchers, defined as "world-class researchers selected for their exceptional research performance, demonstrated by production of multiple highly cited papers that rank in the top 1% by citations for field and year in Web of Science". Professor Abraham has successfully supervised 19 PhD students as primary supervisor and many others as co-supervisor. He works with research students collaboratively to advance the fields of behaviour change intervention design, enhancement of health promotion, and evaluation of behaviour change intervention and health promotion.

Opportunity

Professor Abraham's research focuses on the design, implementation, and evaluation of behaviour-change interventions, including those using digital and group-based components. Areas of application include preventive behaviour patterns (e.g., weight loss), health service usage (e.g., increasing engagement with relevant health services) and management of long-term illnesses (e.g., diabetes, heart failure and persistent pain), and other behavioural patterns with potential to improve public health and health care services. If you want to advance research into helping people live healthy, satisfying and globally-sustaining lives – get in touch!

Key readings (all authored by PhD students under the supervision of Professor Abraham):

- Borek, A. J., Abraham, C., Greaves, C. J., Gillison, F., Tarrant, M., Morgan-Trimmer, S., ... Smith, J. R. (2019). Identifying change processes in group-based health behaviour-change interventions: development of the mechanisms of action in group-based interventions (MAGI) framework. *Health Psychology Review*, *13*(3), 227–247. doi: 10.1080/17437199.2019.1625282
- Chng, S., White, M. P., Abraham, C., & Skippon, S. (2019). Consideration of environmental factors in reflections on car purchases: Attitudinal, behavioural and sociodemographic predictors among a large UK sample. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *230*, 927–936. doi:10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.05.179
- van Beurden, S. B., Smith, J. R., Lawrence, N. S., Abraham, C., & Greaves, C. J. (2019). Feasibility randomized controlled trial of impulsepal: Smartphone app-based weight management intervention to reduce impulsive eating in overweight adults. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, *21*. doi: /10.2196/11586
- Elliott, L. R., White, M. P., Taylor, A. H., & Abraham, C. (2018). How do brochures encourage walking in natural environments in the UK? A content analysis. *Health Promotion International*, *33*(2), 299–310. doi: 10.1093/heapro/daw083
- Sani, A. S., Abraham, C., Denford, S., & Ball, S. (2016). School-based sexual health education interventions to prevent STI/HIV in sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Public Health*, *16*(1), 1–26. doi: 10.1186/s12889-016-3715-4

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 Charles Abraham; charles.abraham@unimelb.edu.au