

Transforming Healthcare

System change with
impact

Strategic Plan 2026-2029



Impact
Areas
Research
Initiative



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the unceded land on which we work, learn and live. We pay respect to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge the importance of Indigenous knowledge in the Academy.



Bush medicine: a collaborative work by women from Wirrimanu (Balgo)

Our plan on a page

Our vision

All Australians can access healthcare that is connected, efficient and meets their needs.

Our purpose

To advance scalable solutions to systemic healthcare problems, in partnership with, and as identified by, people with lived experience, the healthcare workforce, academics, policy makers, funders, and industry. Through our collaborations we will harness the deep expertise of the University of Melbourne to generate the evidence and advocate for change.

Our strategic priority areas

Across the next three years we will focus our work on three priority areas, whilst establishing an effective, sustainable team.



Introduction

The Transforming Healthcare Impact Area at the University of Melbourne is all about system change that makes a real impact.

As one of the three newly established Impact Areas at the University of Melbourne, we are embracing the challenge of transforming the healthcare system through coordinated action with healthcare workers, industry, government and consumers.

By drawing on diverse partners, people with lived experience and creative thinkers, we're testing bold solutions to ingrained problems within the health system, leveraging the breadth and depth of expertise at the University. We then generate new evidence to support changes that make a measurable difference to patient experiences and outcomes, and to the experiences of healthcare workers.

Positive change in one setting is not enough. Every project begins with maximum impact in mind, as we look to take what works to scale, across varying health conditions and settings. This, our first Strategic Plan, sets our direction for the next three years. It outlines our focus areas and sets ambitious goals for what we hope to achieve as we establish our team, form new relationships and build transformative research programs. It was developed with multiple readers in mind, including the wide range of organisations that share our optimism and drive for health transformation.

We invite you to join us in discovering creative solutions to systemic problems, improving patient care and workforce experiences.

Professor Harriet Hiscock

Academic Lead (Transforming Healthcare Impact Area)



Opportunities for impact

Whilst most Australians enjoy good health outcomes, our health system is not as effective, efficient or as equitable as it could be.

Many who access the health system can face long waitlists, and even receive care that isn't responsive to their personal values or preferences. Care is often fragmented. Those who work in the system are frustrated by operational inefficiencies that slow the pace of change and limit meaningful care. Priority population groups, including those living in rural and regional locations, in low socioeconomic areas, First Nations Australians, and those of refugee and immigrant backgrounds, face access challenges and have poorer health outcomes than the general population.

[The 2024 Commonwealth Fund Mirror Mirror report](#) ranked Australia as the top healthcare system across 10 countries, including the US, UK, Canada and some European countries.

However, Australia ranked 9th for 'Access to Healthcare', which includes affordability and timeliness to access care, and 5th for 'Care Processes', which includes preventive care, safe care, coordinated care, engagement and patient preferences.

If we continue to accept the engrained problems within the health system, it will be akin to the 'boiling the frog' analogy. The system will continue to become more problematic, and effective care will be less attainable. Costs will increase as opportunities for early and efficient care are missed, and our healthcare workforce will continue to burn out, worsening health outcomes for everyone. Australia's ageing population will certainly add to these challenges.

The time for change is now.

Guided by the University of Melbourne's [Advancing Health 2030 Strategy](#), we are setting our sights on ambitious, world-changing solutions to the most pressing health system challenges. With collaboration at our core, we will test inventive solutions to persistent challenges and take effective systems improvements to scale.



Health system challenges and responses

Adding pressure

- **Rising costs**
- **Growing & ageing population**
- **Workforce shortages**
- **Delayed care**
- **Multi-morbidities**
- **Diverse community needs & preferences**



Relieving pressure

- **Whole system thinking**
- **Better data supporting better decisions**
- **Innovation**
- **Person-centred value-based health care**
- **Preventative care**
- **Virtual care**

More about us

Our team of seven includes four internationally renowned practitioners who are leading change within the very systems we are seeking to improve. Their career-long experiences, as clinicians from diverse disciplines, combined with their strong academic credentials, provide a unique balance of the practical and theoretical. Professional team members bring significant project management and communications expertise.



From left to right: Jakeb Fair, Prue Steer, Hayley Loftus, Harriet Hiscock, Stephanie Best, Christobel Saunders, Cate Kelly

Although we are starting with a small FTE, we bring the University’s extensive expertise and methodological capability to the table with us. This includes specialist skills and knowledge in digital health and AI, health economics, implementation science and innovative research design.

Our points of difference

We’re conscious that ‘health transformation’ has become somewhat of a buzzword, and other universities and organisations are working in this space.

This is, of course, a good thing, as there is much work to be done.

Our points of difference lie in:

- Our contemporary and deep understanding of the healthcare system. We do not view the healthcare system from solely an academic perspective. Our team members work in healthcare and treat patients every week.
- The existing relationships we have with hospitals and health services across Australia provide access to testing environments and potential demonstration sites. Our independence and the University’s strong reputation mean we are well-placed to convene leadership discussions and broker new relationships.

Our commitments to:

- Person-Centred, Values-Based Health Care – an inclusive approach which puts people (rather than diseases) at the core of our work.
- A wider view of health care – we’re interested in the whole patient journey, pathways of care and in creating a more ‘connected’ system. We seek to view problems holistically, listening to everyone who’s impacted and forming multi-disciplinary, cross-service and cross-sector collaborations.
- Scale – We have no interest in research for research’s sake, or in yet another pilot that goes nowhere. The knowledge we build will translate to change, and with the right partners, wide-scale change will result over time

“We see the person behind the patient. What matters to them, matters to us.”

Working with us

We are always on the lookout for values-aligned partners committed to improving the health system. Our goal (and skill!) is to bring the right people together. We envisage working closely with hospitals, health services, Primary Health Networks, government departments, and communities and people with lived experience. We want to generate the evidence to de-risk novel strategies so health partners can rapidly adopt them.

Our systems scope is necessarily broad as we seek to improve pathways of care and to create less siloed approaches. This sees us working from early intervention through to acute care and post-acute care.

Taking a flexible approach, we foresee many opportunities for meaningful change. Some of our work will be project-based, but other endeavours will be setting-based as we develop ideas like ‘demonstration hospitals’ or ‘demonstration wards’ as sites for rethinking work practices and testing solutions in real-time.

As research translation experts, we will generate the evidence for feasible change using creative, and often sophisticated tools and methodology, including AI, before working with partners to implement change at scale.

Our current projects are diverse in scope, but united by innovative thinking. They include:

- the use of computer simulation to remodel and improve hospital ward operations and free up staff for more patient facing care.
- development of a new model of care that sees Community Health and Wellbeing Workers providing outreach to multi-generational families, with the aims of increasing cancer screening and vaccination rates, improving attendance at general practice, and reducing emergency department presentations
- evaluating the expanded use of a unique digital tool designed to understand what really matters most to patients, ensuring treatment decisions align with patient goals, values and preferences.

“Drawing on data and new technology, we’re aiming to develop new workforce approaches, reduce wait times, and ensure patients receive the care they value, in the right place, at the right time.”

Decision making criteria

We use these criteria to determine where we focus our efforts and resources:



System level

Is this a multi-disciplinary, multi-site or multi-sector project?



Disease agnostic

Will the outcomes change the system rather than a disease area?



Consumer voice

Will consumer voices be embedded throughout?



Sustainable

Is the project environmentally, resource and financially wise?



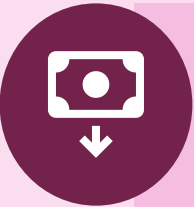
Willing team

Are appropriate multi-disciplinary teams willing to lead and participate in the research?



Equitable

Will the intended outcomes promote access and equity across the system?



Reduce low-value expenditure

Is the project focussed on areas that have poor return/benefit in care, systems, or processes?



Unearthing solutions through international collaborations

Healthcare systems globally face shared challenges, with emerging technologies offering transformative potential when thoughtfully considered.

Transforming Healthcare has established Australia’s first International Community of Practice for healthcare transformation. Our aim is to foster cross-country collaboration, knowledge exchange, and the co-development of solutions that advance healthcare transformation through research, shared learning and strategic partnerships.

With our international colleagues we are collaboratively exploring innovative models of care, addressing common pain points, and unlocking opportunities for joint action.

Eight countries are currently involved in the Community of Practice, with more expected to join.

Our guiding principles

These principles reflect our values and guide our approaches.

 Impact	We have all grappled with challenges within the health system for too long. Our work will be focussed on agile responses and the rapid translation of research at scale. We will focus on change that matters to people, practice, policy and outcomes — not just knowledge generation.
 Person-Centred Values-Based Health Care	The needs and preferences of the diverse people who use the health system will drive our decisions. We will pursue ideas that aim to deliver better health outcomes and improved patient experiences relative to costs, and strive for equitable, compassionate, sustainable care.
 Equity	We will design and deliver solutions that reduce, rather than reinforce, health inequities.
 Collaboration and teamwork	Health transformation is a complex, multi-faceted endeavour, requiring collaborative efforts. We will partner with stakeholders from the health system, within government, philanthropy and across the University. The diverse people who use and/or benefit from health services will be critical partners in all our work as we co-design creative solutions to complex problems together.
 Integrity	We will act with transparency, rigour and respect for communities and those working in the health system. Our relationships will be built on trust and care.
 Courage	We will not shy away from complex challenges. By thinking creatively and drawing on evidence, expert opinion and contemporary resources, we will turn bold ideas into pragmatic solutions.

Our strategic priority areas

We will focus our work on these three overlapping priority areas, whilst remaining responsive to opportunities for addressing related issues.

(Re)humanising healthcare
Goal: Embed Person-Centred, Value-Based Care to shift healthcare towards outcomes that matter to patients, delivered equitably and efficiently Issues Healthcare can fail to align with individual patient values and preferences, leading to unnecessary or unwanted care. Our approach We seek to understand what really matters most to patients and embed tools and approaches to ensure treatment decisions align with patient goals, values and preferences. This will shift care away from standardised treatment toward a personalised, value-based model that improves outcomes and resource use. Examples of our work In partnership with a large tertiary hospital, we are conducting three projects to: determine the impact of a PCVBHC approach on patient care and costs; explore the barriers and enablers to using such an approach in the intensive care unit, and; examine what a nurse-led approach could look like in ensuring treatment decisions align with patient goals, values and preferences.
Busting bottlenecks
Goal Relieve access constraints such as long waitlists, low-value care, and operational inefficiencies that delay or prevent effective care. Issues Australia’s hospitals are stretched. Patients can wait up to three years to access specialist hospital-based care with little systematic effort to support their health whilst waiting. Our approach Through patient journey mapping and co-design, we develop data- and AI-informed approaches to more efficiently triage patients and actively support their health whilst on waiting lists, potentially reducing their need for specialist care. Examples of our work In partnership with two hospitals, consumers and primary care staff, we are developing new approaches to support women’s pelvic pain and patients with upper gastrointestinal issues, whilst on hospital waiting lists.
Re-imagining workforce
Goal Reimage roles, scope of practice, and models of care to support multidisciplinary teams, retention, and sustainable careers Issues The health workforce is facing multiple challenges relating to demand, skills shortages, burnout and inequitable distribution of staff – all reducing access to care and increasing staff turnover. Our approach Drawing on international successes, we are exploring new models of care to decrease service demand. Examples of our work We are developing a new model of care that sees Community Health and Wellbeing Workers providing outreach to multi-generational families, with the aims of increasing cancer screening and vaccination rates, improving attendance at general practice, and reducing emergency department presentations. Through the WECARE project, we are co-designing, simulating and costing new ways of working in general medical wards in two hospitals, exploring the roles of AI, alternate workforces and task disinvestment to free up staff for more patient-facing care.

Future objectives

Across our three strategic priority areas we will:
- Establish at least four programs of collaborative research in our priority areas that have the potential to scale - Build and sustain partnerships to foster innovative thinking and grow skills and capacity for health transformation, across healthcare sectors - Form ‘successful’ collaborations i.e. collaborations that meet partners’ needs and lead to demonstrable research impact - Meaningfully engage community members and people with lived experience in all projects - Add to the evidence for scaling Person-Centred, Value-Based Care practices in the Australian context - Grow our international Community of Practice to foster cross-country collaboration, knowledge exchange, and co-development of solutions that advance healthcare transformation

Our internal focus

Foundations for success
Goal: Build a strong, effective and sustainable team Objectives: - Work with internal partners to amplify impact - Build the profile and reputation of the Impact Area - Attract skilled early to mid-career researchers to grow their expertise in health services research - Establish sustainable and diverse revenue sources, and year-on-year growth in funding - Establish an effective, sustainable operating model for the Impact Areas

Monitoring our progress

This Strategy is a high-level plan that will guide Transforming Healthcare’s work over the next three years. It will inform the development of detailed annual workplans and benchmarks upon which we will measure our progress. Each project we undertake will have a comprehensive project plan that aligns with this strategy.

Transforming Healthcare, and the University more broadly, is committed to accountability and continuous improvement. Across the three years, we will regularly reflect, learn and adapt, remaining flexible and responsive to changes in evidence and opportunities that align with our goals. This will include strategy reviews at mid-point and conclusion.



Developing this strategy

We acknowledge and thank the many people who generously shared their insights and experiences in helping to identify priorities for Transforming Healthcare and to shape this strategy. This included:

- Over 160 participants attended our Radical Ideas Fora, including those with lived experience/community representatives, doctors and nurses working in general practice, people working in community health, hospitals, the Victorian Department of Health, Safer Care Victoria and health insurers
- The 12 community members and people with lived experience who participated in our consumer consultation workshop, facilitated by Health Voices Victoria
- The 23 senior academic staff and guests with specific sector insights who helped refine our thinking during our strategy workshop
- Members of our direct and extended teams at the University of Melbourne.

Contacting us

For more information about the Transforming Healthcare Impact Area, or to discuss potential collaborations, please contact us via MDHS-ImpactAreas@unimelb.edu.au



Impact Areas Research Initiative

Guided by our Advancing Health 2030, strategy this program will drive progress in health and medical sciences through collaborative innovation and transformative research. As we tackle the health challenges of a changing world, we're committed to making a real difference in the lives of communities locally and globally. Together with our partners, we aim to position Melbourne as a global leader in health impact and innovation.

Get in touch

Email us at MDHS-ImpactAreas@unimelb.edu.au



Ambition made real
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