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**Illawarra researcher attracts $5 million to study the health effects of mobile phone use**

Wollongong researchers are now firmly placed to lead the world in understanding the long-term health effects of mobile phone use and radio frequency emissions, with a second major National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Centre for Research Excellence (CRE) grant awarded to Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute (IHMRI) psychologist, Professor Rodney Croft.

In August 2012, Professor Croft became the first University of Wollongong researcher to lead a CRE, with the Federal Minister for Health, Tanya Plibersek, announcing a $2.5 million grant to enable him to establish an Australian Centre for Electromagnetic Bioeffects Research over the next five years.

Yesterday, the NHMRC announced a second $2.5 million grant to establish a new Centre of Research Excellence for Population Health Research on Electromagnetic Energy. This CRE will be administered by Monash University with a substantial Wollongong arm led by Professor Croft. It means that he will be able to attract more talent to the Illawarra from 2014 to 2018 to undertake further research on the effects that radio frequency emissions, or electromagnetic energy (EME), has on our health and our brains and how this information can shape public policy.

“While there is currently no clear evidence that low-level EME is impacting our health, there is not enough information, particularly relating to children, to be sure that it doesn’t,” says Professor Croft.

“The ubiquity of mobile phones coupled with the fact that digital technology will play a huge role in our future means this research is critical, with risk assessment agencies such as the World Health Organisation consistently calling for further research to ensure that we identify any potential risks.”

His affiliation with IHMRI means he will be able to draw upon the skills of multi-disciplinary teams of academic researchers at the university and clinician researchers around the region to solve problems and challenges along the way.

“You can only address these big health issues through a multi-disciplinary approach,” says Professor Croft. “In practice, it means bringing cancer researchers together with psychologists, epidemiologist and technical experts from disparate areas and viewpoints, which ultimately leads to new insights and solutions.”
Within the Australian Centre for Electromagnetic Bioeffects Research, Professor Croft is already trying to determine the mechanisms by which EME interacts with brain function.

Further research will look at the effects of EME on children and whether they are more sensitive to it than adults, as well as addressing cancer risks and the role of EME in those who report specific sensitivity. Professor Croft will also be working with international standards bodies to develop EME guidelines and with policy makers on better communicating potential risks to the public.

IHMRI Executive Director, Professor Mike Calford, says the fact that Professor Croft has won two CREs within the space of one year is a major achievement.

“That IHMRI can play a role in addressing these major public health concerns reflects our role and ambition, which is to bring academic and clinician researchers together to improve the health of local residents through research excellence,” says Professor Calford.

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**About IHMRI**

The Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute (IHMRI) is a joint initiative of the University of Wollongong and Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District.

IHMRI’s goal is to foster, support and grow health and medical research in the Illawarra by connecting and supporting academic and clinician researchers around research problems of relevance to the region and the world. IHMRI provides research leadership, coordination, infrastructure and facilities to more than 500 academic and clinical researchers throughout the region.