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 vision - *Excellence and innovation in health and medical research, better health services, healthier Illawarra community* - encapsulates the belief that, by linking academic and clinical researchers around health and medical issues common in the region, research findings can be rapidly translated into improved clinical practice and health service delivery in the region.

IHMRI provides research leadership, coordination, infrastructure, facilities and other support to more than 500 academic and clinical researchers throughout the Illawarra. Laboratory-based scientists are investigating the causes of major diseases such as Alzheimer’s disease and Motor Neurone Disease, while researchers with skills in health and behavioural science, psychology, physiotherapy, nutrition, education, drug design, mental health, aged care and clinical practice are collaborating on projects to prevent disease, prolong life and promote good health in the Illawarra and beyond.

Our Illawarra context

IHMRI’s point of difference as a health and medical research institute is its regional context, community-centred focus and commitment to addressing regional health issues.

The health of Illawarra residents is, on average, poorer than for other NSW residents and there is a high proportion of people aged 75 and over; many of whom are affected by age-related diseases such as cancer and dementia. Regional and social isolation also affects resident’s ability to access health services.

IHMRI has strong links to the University of Wollongong’s Graduate School of Medicine, which trains doctors to work in regional, rural and remote areas. IHMRI’s founding partner, the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD), is also committed to improving the range of health services and quality of clinical care to regional residents.

While the Illawarra faces several health challenges, its stable population, mix of metropolitan and rural influences and low level of in/out migration makes it ideal for clinical studies and population health-based initiatives that will not only benefit the local community, but the Australian community as a whole.

Our research program

IHMRI’s overarching population health agenda is driven by a commitment to improving the health status of Illawarra residents. The program addresses three broad areas of research:

**Community Interventions**
- Health Promotion and Education
- Observational Studies

This agenda is underpinned by four broad-based research themes:

**Ageing and Chronic Conditions**
- Diagnostics and Therapeutics
- Health Care Delivery

**Neuroscience and Mental Health**
- Health Care Delivery

This theme structure leverages existing relationships between academic and clinical researchers, creates a framework for collaboration, draws upon and develops research capacity in the region and is shaped by the particular health challenges it faces, such as chronic disease, potentially avoidable hospitalisations, mental illness and the increased burden of disease in elderly and disadvantaged populations.

Each theme is facilitated by two theme leaders; a scientific leader from within the university and a clinical leader from within the health service. This dual leadership model is implemented at every level and means research findings can be rapidly translated into improved clinical practice and health services delivery.
Our researchers

Around 100 full-time laboratory, clinical and population health researchers are based at IHMRI's headquarters, with a further 100 using the facilities on a regular basis. Another 300 academic and clinician researchers from various research centres, groups and networks within the university, the local health district, primary care and community settings are connected to IHMRI through the IHMRI Research Network. The interests and specialisations of these researchers are diverse, covering many disease areas and spanning fundamental, clinical, translational and population health disciplines.

Our research network

Launched in 2009, the IHMRI Research Network is a community of academic researchers, clinicians and other health professionals with a common interest in advancing health and medical research in the region.

The network provides a structure to connect our researchers across institutional boundaries and facilitates the coordination of health and medical research.

It also provides opportunities for information sharing, networking and collaboration through regular events and seminars offered in areas of research interest specified by members.

Our story

In 2006 the University of Wollongong (UOW) and South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra Area Health Service (SESIAHS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to foster and grow health and medical research in the Illawarra and advance joint research initiatives to benefit the local community.

A major goal of the MOU was to build IHMRI’s headquarters on the university campus to provide a focal point for health and medical research in the region. It would also complement existing centres of research excellence such as the Graduate School of Medicine and bring academic and clinician researchers together to address health issues of relevance to the region and the world.

In 2008, IHMRI was formally constituted as a company limited by guarantee with the university and SESIAHS (now Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District) as its founding members. In 2008, the NSW Government matched a contribution of $15m from the university to allow construction of IHMRI’s $30m headquarters, completed in May 2010.

Our building and facilities

Built over four levels, IHMRI’s state-of-the-art headquarters feature international standard PC2 and PC3 biomedical research laboratories designed around the principle of shared amenities and services.

The building also features a dedicated Clinical Research and Trials Unit (CRTU) with nine examination rooms, a blood collection room, pre-analytical blood laboratory, three large physical activity rooms and a commercial kitchen for dietary and health studies.

Sponsored trials on new and existing medications for conditions like gout and high blood pressure have been undertaken and investigator-initiated studies on dietary approaches to weight management, age-related conditions such as dementia and exercise interventions are ongoing.

In May 2012, the CRTU opened a Hypertension Clinic to improve the management of high blood pressure and to evaluate guidelines for best practice management.

Our structure

As a company limited by guarantee under the Corporations Act 2001, IHMRI is governed by a board comprising three directors each from the UOW and the ISLHD and an independent community chair. Directors include UOW Vice-Chancellor, Professor Paul Wellings, and ISLHD Chair Denis King.

IHMRI’s Executive Director is Professor Don Iverson.

The executive is supported by a Scientific Advisory Committee chaired by Dame Bridget Ogilvie and comprising international and Australian experts in research areas relevant to IHMRI’s themes and population health agenda.

Interested in research?

Academic researchers or clinicians interested in pursuing research in the Illawarra are invited to join the IHMRI Research Network. Register online at http://ihmri.uow.edu.au/join