The Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR) is committed to addressing health inequalities and improving the health and wellbeing of all. We study the context of health and wellbeing across the life course, focusing on how the conditions in which people are born and live shape their health, and how the people, environment, settings and institutions they interact with affect their wellbeing. Our research focuses on enabling the strengths, protective factors and resources of individuals, communities and the health systems that support them.

ISSR researchers apply cutting-edge design and methodological and statistical expertise to investigate how early life experiences, social supports and policy decisions influence health. We work with stakeholders to develop health improvement interventions and test and implement these at scale, engaging with communities to understand lived experience and co-develop solutions. Key research areas are: maternal, perinatal and child health, obesity, sleep, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, and syndemics – understanding the complex interplay of multiple social and health problems.

**WHAT WE DO**

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**OBJECTIVES**

- Understanding the social determinants of health
- Addressing health inequalities
- Co-developing health and wellbeing solutions

**IMPACT THEMES**

- Health in context
- Ethical and social implications of health
- Strengths and resiliencies in communities
- Health systems and services

**LEAD RESEARCHERS**

- Professor Lisa McDaid
- Professor Karen Thorpe
- Professor Rhema Vaithianathan
- Professor Simon Smith
- Associate Professor Abdullah Mamun
- Associate Professor Fran Boyle
- Dr Caroline Salom
- Dr Sally Staton
Evaluation of the National Support for Child and Youth Mental Health Program and Longitudinal Research Plan

Australian Department of Health, 2018-2021

An ISSR team of mixed-method researchers is undertaking the overarching evaluation of the National Support for Child and Youth Mental Health Program. The program is an initiative designed to build the capability of, and coordination between, national providers (including Beyond Blue and Emerging Minds) to support positive mental health in young Australians.

In collaboration with the Telethon Kids Institute, ISSR is assessing the role of educators, health workers, and others working with children in supporting child and youth mental health; how they can be best assisted; and how these benefits might be tracked over time.

A life course approach informs the evaluation, which will benchmark the impact of mental health support on the wellbeing and mental health risk of children and young people. The evaluation will also inform the development of a future longitudinal research plan to develop a viable framework for conducting national research that will provide an evidence base to inform ongoing government investment in promotion, prevention, early intervention and post intervention mental health measures for children and young people.

Monitoring trends in illicit drug use in Queensland

Australian Department of Health, contracted through National Drug and Alcohol Centre, UNSW, 2017-2022

In 2017, ISSR commenced work as the Queensland arm of the Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) and Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) studies - monitoring systems for illicit drugs that are conducted annually in all Australian states and territories. EDRS and IDRS are components of Drug Trends, an Australian Government funded program that monitors emerging trends in substance use in Australian capital cities. The program is key to identifying emerging problems in substance use in Australia and providing impetus for policy responses and intervention.

To collect these data, ISSR researchers undertake 100 annual interviews with people who regularly inject drugs and 100 interviews with people who regularly use ecstasy and other stimulant drugs. They also examine and analyse local indicator data related to illicit drugs. These data are collected from Brisbane and the Gold Coast.

Care after stillbirth research program

Australian Centre for Research Excellence in Stillbirth (Stillbirth CRE), 2016-2021

The Stillbirth CRE, funded by the NHMRC, was established in 2017 to reduce the rate of stillbirth and improve care for parents and families whose babies are stillborn. Led by the Mater Research Institute within UQ’s Faculty of Medicine, the Stillbirth CRE has brought together researchers, clinicians, policy makers and consumers to drive research and policy that translates into improved maternity care and better health outcomes for women and their babies.

ISSR is contributing to the Stillbirth CRE through the Care after Stillbirth program of research, where the main focus is on the development, implementation and evaluation of evidence-based perinatal bereavement care. ISSR researchers recently co-developed the parent guideline “When your baby dies - guiding conversations with your health care team”.

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