



## Annual Report 2014-15

Research and engagement highlights  
from the Disability Research Initiative

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<b>Letter from the Academic Convenor</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>About the Disability Research Initiative</b>	<b>6</b>
Leadership	7
Steering Group	9
<b>Research</b>	
Projects	10
Externally-funded Research	11
Internally-funded Research	12
Public Submissions	12
Disability Human Rights Clinic	13
Public Impact	14

Designed by Gary Dickson

Not titled (plane), Robert Brown, 2013. Arts Project Australia is a Melbourne-based studio and gallery supporting artists with an intellectual disability as they develop their art practice

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## Letter from the Academic Convenor

I have had the pleasure to be the Academic Convenor of the Hallmark Disability Research Initiative (DRI) since its inception in October 2014. In that time, the DRI has grown into a lively interdisciplinary community of researchers focused on creating social change to protect the rights of people with disabilities. From the right to health to the right to access justice, our researchers are engaged in dynamic projects to address these issues both domestically and internationally.

We have had significant success in receiving both internal and external grants. One of our key projects is a large grant from the Commonwealth Disability Research Fund to explore how to provide support to people with cognitive disabilities in the criminal justice system. This aims to ensure the rights of people with cognitive disability and also to begin to provide solutions to the problem of the rapid increase in the prison population in Australia.

I am also excited to announce the development of an international network of disability human rights researchers. The DRI has lead this initiative and we have developed partnerships with United Nations bodies and universities in India, Ireland, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. We are collaborating with these partners to build resources and apply for international grants.

Some of the most important relationships that we have developed have been in the community sector. All of our work aims to listen to the voice of people with disabilities and their organisations and to have outputs that feed directly back in to the community. Our Disability Human Rights Clinic at Melbourne Law School has worked directly with the community and has provided presentations and publications that are accessible the community and are aimed at specifically addressing the needs of the community.

I'm looking forward to continuing to build on the work of the DRI and to explore the future of disability research at the University of Melbourne.



Dr Anna Arstein-Kerslake  
Academic Convenor

► Anna Arstein-Kerslake has been the academic convenor of the Disability Research Initiative since its inception in October 2014. Picture: Richard Timbury







## About the Disability Research Initiative

The Hallmark Disability Research Initiative (DRI) was created because of an emerging desire for interdisciplinary disability research at the University of Melbourne. In mid-2013 four of the University's research institutes held a forum to better understand the research already underway. Participants at the forum expressed the view that future programs and projects should:

- Include people with a disability in the research life cycle (i.e. through consultation, as advisors and/or as co-researchers);
- Take into account different models of disability; and
- Engage with and build strong relationships with disability organisations.

Following the forum, DRI was created. It is one of the first four Research@Melbourne (R@M) Hallmark Initiatives. Our aim is to help to co-ordinate interdisciplinary projects with the involvement of community partners and those with lived experience of disability. We will develop high-quality applied research, policy and education programs. For example, the Disability Human Rights Clinic (DHRC) at Melbourne Law School is one of the first of DRI's projects. Using human rights law and disability studies, law students will analyse and act on threats to the human rights of persons with disabilities. Students will acquire the skillset to become the next generation of disability rights advocates.

The Disability Research Initiative (DRI) was developed by the Melbourne Social Equity Institute and the Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute, together with the Melbourne Neuroscience Institute and the Melbourne Networked Society Institute. It is hosted by the Melbourne Law School, as its focus is rights protection through research and advocacy. In August 2014 DRI signed a five-year partnership with Scope Victoria that will further our common aspiration to improve the lives of those living with disability.

## Leadership

Professor Keith McVilly  
Professorial Fellow in Disability and Social Inclusion

Professor Keith McVilly is the Professorial Fellowship in Disability and Social Inclusion, a joint appointment between the University of Melbourne and Scope Victoria. Professor McVilly's primary area of expertise is in intellectual and developmental disability, acquired brain injury, and forensic disability. He has worked as a direct support worker with people with disability, a clinician and service manager in public health services and in private practice, as well as in the university sector in Australia, the UK and USA. As part of his role, Professor McVilly will lead and direct Scope's research agenda, oversee existing and new research programs, and continue to work with the disability sector more broadly.

Dr Anna Arstein-Kerslake  
Academic Convenor

Dr Anna Arstein-Kerslake is a lawyer, academic and activist in the field of human rights for people with disabilities. As Academic Convenor, she ensures that DRI is engaging in interdisciplinary research and advocacy that is directly related to social change and is responsive to the needs of the community. She aims to build partnerships across faculties and strengthen community partnerships. She also identifies complementary research that is underway or has great potential and will facilitate the Initiative's involvement.

Yvette Maker  
Research Assistant

Esperanza Torres  
Administrative Assistant

Bella Hindle  
Administrative Assistant





## Steering Group

Keith McVilly (Chair, Disability Research Initiative, Professorial Fellow in Disability and Social Inclusion)

Anna Arstein-Kerslake (Academic Convenor, Disability Research Initiative)

Jess Cadwallader (Advocacy Project Manager, People with Disabilities Australia)

John Chesterman (Manager of Policy and Education, Office of the Public Advocate)

Keran Howe (Executive Director, Women with Disabilities Victoria)

Stella Koritsas (Head of Strategic Research, Scope Victoria)

Matthew Wright (CEO, Australian Federation of Disability Organisations)

Lorraine Graham (Professor of Learning Intervention, Melbourne Graduate School of Education)

Anne Kavanagh (Professor of Women's Health, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health)

Katrina Skewes-McFerran (Professor, Melbourne Conservatory of Music)

Michael Palmer (Research Fellow, Nossal Institute for Global Health)

Dinah Reddihough (Professor, Royal Children's Hospital, Developmental Disability & Rehabilitation Research)

◀ Weave Movement Theatre is a dance and theatre performance company comprising people with and without disabilities. Picture provided by Arts Access Victoria.



## Research Projects

The DRI's research impact in 2014-15 included a seed funding round, successful external and internal UoM funding applications, fostering inter-disciplinary and intra-institutional academic collaboration, supporting researchers at all levels, and submissions to major legislative and policy reviews.

Seed funding was conducted in partnership with the Melbourne Social Equity Institute (MSEI), Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute (MSSI), Melbourne Networked Society Institute (MNSI), and Melbourne Neuroscience Institute (MNI). Six projects were funded.

'Choice, control and the National Disability Insurance Scheme'

Led by Associate Professor Helen Dickinson, School of Social and Political Sciences

'Empathy and portrayals of mental illness in Australian visual culture'

Led by Professor Barbara Creed, School of Culture and Communication

'Market forces or forcing markets: Questioning the viability of a consumer-based choice approach to sustain innovation and value in accessible housing'

Led by Dr Andrew Martel, Melbourne School of Design

'Topographical community accessibility modelling for people with mobility impairments'

Led by Dr Marcus White, Melbourne School of Design

'Crowdsourcing of mobility hazards to enhance the safety and independence of the vision-impaired'

Led by Associate Professor Elaine Wong, Electrical and Electronic Engineering

'Promoting social and emotional engagement through music for children with autism spectrum disorder'

Led by Dr Grace Thompson, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music

The DRI also provided seed funding to support an event to involve industry and community in the dissemination of findings from Dr Michael Palmer's research into the economic costs of disability and their impact on poverty in Cambodia. This informed the design of disability-inclusive policies and programs in accordance with the Cambodian Government's obligations under the national law on the Protection and the Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2009). This led to:

- a consultancy with the World Health Organization;
- the preparation of an ARC Discovery Early Career Researcher Award application; and
- a large grant application to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) Poverty Alleviation 2014-15 call.

## External Grants

'Unfitness to plead and indefinite detention of persons with cognitive impairments: Addressing the legal barriers and creating appropriate alternative supports in the community'

A Commonwealth Disability Research Grant worth approx. \$500,000, administered by the New South Wales Research and Data Working Group, Department of Family and Community Services. Project led by Professor Bernadette McSherry (Melbourne Social Equity Institute), with Professor Eileen Baldry (University of NSW), Professor Kerry Arabena (University of Melbourne) and Dr Anna Arstein-Kerslake.





## Internal Grants

‘Modelling supported decision making in consumer transactions for people with mental and cognitive impairments’

\$50,000 of funding was secured from the Melbourne Law School Major Collaborative Fund for this project, which aims to lead to an ARC Linkage application in 2016. The project is led by Professor Bernadette McSherry, with Profesora Jeannie Marie Paterson (Melbourne Law School), Dr Anna Arstein-Kerslake and Dr Lisa Brophy (Melbourne School of Population and Global Health).

## Public Submissions

The DRI produced four public submissions to major national and international inquiries:

- UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Day of General Discussion on the Right to Education (March 2015);
- Senate Committee for Community Affairs on the Social Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 (May 2015);
- Committee on Bioethics of the Council of Europe consultation on the Additional Protocol to the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (November 2015);
- National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability (December 2015).

Submissions can all be read on the DRI website.

## Disability Human Rights Clinic

In 2015, the DRI began offering a new juris doctorate subject, the Disability Human Rights Clinic. Students enrolled in the clinic identify, analyse and report on rights violations experienced by persons with disabilities, and propose and advocate for solutions. They collaborate closely with a range of external stakeholders, including disabled people’s organisations, government bodies, civil society organisations, international non-governmental organisations, and international human rights bodies. The semester-long clinic has a multidisciplinary focus bringing together the fields of disability studies and international human rights law.

The clinic aims to enhance students’ academic and professional skills in the areas of legal analysis, research, collaborative work and advocacy. It seeks to instil an understanding of the capacity and role of law and lawyers to create social, economic and political change, and the justness of being able to access the law. The clinic also aims to give students an appreciation of the relevance and value of applying disability human rights frameworks to Australian and international legal problems.

The clinic’s first cohort produced an inclusion policy for the University of Divinity and research into violence against women with psycho-social disabilities, legal capacity for people with intellectual disabilities in Australian electoral law and disability discrimination as a public health issue. The students presented their work and advocated for change at public events, roundtables and briefings to the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Australian Centre for Disability Law, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, Victoria Legal Aid, the Office of the Public Advocate, and others.

Clinic students have gone on to further research at the University of Melbourne and to graduate positions at law firms.



## Public Impact

The DRI hosted a range of well-attended events in 2014-15, commencing with the DRI launch in October 2014. We held a series of public lectures and symposia on issues including supported decision-making, accessibility, disability discrimination, and international development. The events targeted a wide audience and increased public awareness of the contribution of the DRI and UoM to research and to the community, while also fostering national and international networks.

Key events:

'Place matters for people with disability: improving access to housing, transport, education and employment opportunities' workshop

'Future directions in supported decision-making research' symposium  
Keynote: Dr Peter Blanck (Director, Burton Blatt Institute, University of Syracuse)

'Web accessibility for people with cognitive disabilities'  
Speaker: Dr Peter Blanck (Director, Burton Blatt Institute, University of Syracuse)

'Disability discrimination: Australian and European perspectives'  
Speakers: Beth Gaze (University of Melbourne) and Lisa Waddington (Maastricht University)

'Media representation of persons with disabilities'  
Speaker: Professor Beth Haller (Towson University, Maryland, USA)

'Models of disability: implications for disability policy and programs'  
Speaker: Dr Tom Shakespeare (University of East Anglia)

'Social equity in a post-broadband society'  
Speaker: Professor Gerard Goggin (University of Sydney)

'Beyond access: The creative case for inclusive arts practice'  
Speakers: Caroline Bowditch (Keynote) and Prof Gerard Goggin (University of Sydney).

► Launching the University - Scope Victoria partnership. L-R Dr Jennifer Fitzgerald, Prof Bernadette McSherry, Prof Liz Sonenberg, Prof Mark Considine, Prof Carolyn Evans, Mr Louis Lachal. Picture: Richard Timbury











# DISABILITY RESEARCH

*A Hallmark Research Initiative*