

Professor Helen Christensen: Driving innovation

Professor Helen Christensen is driving excellence in translational research to build a mentally healthier world as Director and Chief Scientist of the Black Dog Institute and Professor of Mental Health at the University of NSW.

A central priority of the Black Dog Institute is knowledge translation – addressing the gap between what is known from research evidence and the implementation of this knowledge on the ground, in settings such as hospitals, schools, workplaces and the community.

“In addition to our research, we offer evidence-based interventions directly through the internet, through the workplace, through schools and through our clinic doors. We aim to improve health outcomes and recognise that any innovation also requires support and innovation on the ground,” Christensen says.

Since 2002, Professor Christensen and her team have developed and delivered a range of apps and online programs that deliver cognitive behaviour therapy to those at risk of depression, suicide and anxiety. The team are currently undertaking clinical and population-based trials using an automated research platform which has been progressively developed by the in-house IT team.

“Although e-mental health is very effective for certain cohorts, online programs do not serve every person’s needs. Under the leadership of Assoc Prof Sam Harvey, we are redeveloping the Institute’s face-to-face depression clinics to serve those not targeted by other programs. The clinic will take a more holistic approach, providing comprehensive mental and physical health care, including tailored exercise programs and social prescribing. In the future, we will also be offering a range of clinical trials through this clinic.”

‘No other precinct in the world has developed a comprehensive brain, mental health and drug related centre like we have at Randwick.’



Scientia Professor Helen Christensen

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Professor Christensen credits the Black Dog Institute’s success to its partnership approach. “We’re collaborating within the precinct, as well as with Primary Health Networks, NSW Education and headspace centres and over 40 universities both in Australia and across the globe.”

The Black Dog Institute works with precinct partners UNSW, NeuRA and the South East Sydney Local Health District and Christensen sees nothing but opportunity.

“The redevelopment of the precinct represents a perfect window of opportunity. Now is the right time to forge closer links with patients, people with lived experience, researchers, educators and clinicians, and create a world first in improving patient care through better research and training,” she said.