

PhD Scholarship – The role of maternal microbiome on neurodevelopmental disorders in the offspring

The Opportunity

Around 40% of children in the Barwon North postcodes (3212-3215) commence school with a developmental problem. This is a sobering indicator of entrenched disadvantage and a focus of the Child and Family Services at Barwon Health North (BHN).

Launched in 2020, the underpinning philosophy and strength of BHN is accountability to a clearly defined community in place serviced by the 'BHN Hub', a stable service and facility that families can come to know and trust. BHN provides pre-pregnancy and antenatal care to the community with a focus on prevention strategies targeting the first 2000 days among vulnerable groups. Despite a higher risk of adverse maternal and infant outcomes, vulnerable families are less likely to engage with antenatal services.

The Role

Embedded within the BHN Child and Family service, this PhD project has been designed to both leverage and enhance BHN clinical services, and will be a place based, community-owned initiative that tackles two important clinical problems for the Australian perinatal healthcare system: first, how can the proportion of neurodevelopmental difficulties in children from vulnerable families be reduced, and second, how can the engagement of families with perinatal services at Barwon Health be enhanced.

The PhD candidate will be supported by a well-integrated, multidisciplinary supervisory team with a mix of academic and clinical backgrounds and roles, and extensive experience in all aspects of the project including working with vulnerable communities, perinatal care, the successful conduct of large-scale birth cohort studies, immunology, epidemiology and biostatistics, and paediatric care and neurodevelopmental phenotyping. Specifically, our supervisory team includes health professionals intimately involved in perinatal and paediatric care to the BHN community, which will further support the PhD student and our team to build research capacity in this clinical unit.

Healthcare professionals, including from psychiatry, nursing, psychology, neonatology, midwifery and/or maternal and child health fields, are strongly encouraged to apply.

The PhD stipend is provided jointly by Deakin University and Barwon Health, and the successful applicant will be enrolled via Deakin University.

How to Apply

Applicants should submit a covering letter and their CV **prior to 5pm 1st October 2021** addressing the following selection criteria:

- must have an Hons degree (H1A) or equivalence in a related discipline
 - please contact us for details regarding 'equivalence'
- demonstrated genuine interest in infant mental health, paediatric care, neurodevelopmental phenotyping and/or the microbiome
- be enthusiastic to work within the antenatal healthcare setting on a multidisciplinary project

- demonstrated experience in at least one of the following fields: infant mental health, molecular biology, midwifery, neonatology, neurodevelopment, social work, or similar
- self-management and high personal motivation
- high level of organisational skills
- excellent communication and interpersonal skills
- be located within Australia

Please forward your covering letter (EOI) and CV to Prof Sharon Brennan-Olsen at sharon.brennanolsen@deakin.edu.au or on +61 3 5227 8362.