

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Young and Healthy

Dr Ann Dadich, Dr Daniela Spanjaard, Dr Francine Garlin and Dr Nicole Stegemann of the School of Business along with Ms Vanessa Rock, Ms Sofia Potente and Ms Emma Fitzgerald of Cancer Council NSW (CCNSW) are implementing a feasibility study of research methods to examine healthy lifestyle choices among young people. This project is funded by the UWS Research Partnerships Program and CCNSW.

'Sun exposure is a key contributor to melanoma, the most common form of cancer among Australians aged 15-29,' says Dr Dadich. 'Despite three decades of traditional educational campaigns to raise awareness about skin cancer, young Australians continue to have a higher frequency of sunburn and lower levels of sun protection compared to adults – this is particularly the case among young people aged 15 to 17 years. Youth health represents such an important area; yet, there is still a limited understanding of the factors that help or hinder healthy lifestyle choices among young people. Strategies to encourage sun protection in young people have been used, but it is difficult to engage young people in campaign evaluations and collect timely data on *current* behaviours and choices. Our study will determine the feasibility of two novel research methods to collect data on lifestyle choices among young people that encourage active participation in the research and that are carried out in naturalistic settings.'

Trained peer researchers (aged 18 to 24 years) will use two mobile methods – namely, SMS surveys and Facebook focus groups - to consult with young people about their sun protection behaviours while at swimming sites. This will help to determine whether young people engage with mobile methods, particularly when facilitated by peers. For comparative value, the research will be conducted at sites where public CCNSW "Sun Sound"



broadcasts occur to encourage sensible sun-protection behaviours, as well as sites where this message is not broadcast.

There is government recognition that investments in youth health should be a priority and yield both immediate and long-term benefits. However, traditional methods to promote youth health and evaluate youth health initiatives are problematic. Given that smartphones are an intrinsic part of the lifestyles of young people, exploring new methods to collect public health data and encourage youth participation in public health initiatives promises a richer understanding of the lifestyle choices of young Australians, particularly with regards to sun-protection behaviour.

Project Title: Feasibility study of research methods to capture lifestyle choices among young people.

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