

## **SMART Recovery Australia: Establishing an evidence base for mutual support groups**

Self-Management and Recovery Training (SMART) Recovery Australia is a non-government organisation (NGO). The purpose of SMART Recovery Australia is to help support the training and dissemination of SMART Recovery groups throughout NSW and across Australia. SMART Recovery groups are widely available in Australia across a range of regions and health districts. Groups are highly integrated with both NGO and government delivered health services. There are more than 300 groups being delivered throughout Australia each week.

SMART Recovery were fortunate to receive seed funding from the Community Mental Health Drug and Alcohol Research Network (CMHDARN) in 2012. This funding provided an opportunity for SMART Recovery to engage academic research partners for the first time to commence a program of research focused on establishing an evidence base for SMART Recovery, both within Australia and Internationally. This first study involved conducting a cross sectional survey of group members and SMART Recovery facilitators. This study provided an opportunity to examine the range of skills that SMART Recovery participants use to support their recovery, with the results highlighting the importance of group cohesion and the SMART Recovery 7-day plan (Kelly, Deane, & Baker, 2015). It also provided an opportunity to compare and contrast group members and facilitators views on the core aspects of the SMART Recovery program (Kelly et al., 2016).

The success of this initial project led to the development of the SMART Recovery Australia Research Advisory Committee in 2014. Associate Professor Peter Kelly is the current Chair of SMART Recovery's Research Advisory Committee (RAC), leading a team of passionate experts in their fields who generously volunteer their time to help research and evaluate SMART Recovery mutual aid groups in Australia. The team includes Prof Amanda Baker (University of Newcastle); Prof Frank Deane, Dr Alison Beck and Dr Briony Larance (University of Wollongong), Prof Anthony Shakeshaft (UNSW), Prof Leanne Hides (University of Queensland), Dr Victoria Manning (Turning Point), A/Prof John Kelly (Harvard University), and Dr Angela Argent (SMART Recovery Australia).

In just over five years the group has established an internationally recognised program of research, a unique achievement for a small NGO organisation. This has included publishing the first systematic review of SMART Recovery, led by Dr Alison Beck (Beck et al., 2017). With funding from NSW Health, the team have also been working with SMART Recovery group members to develop an App that helps to complement the SMART Recovery program.

In 2018 the SMART Recovery Research Advisory Committee won the NADA Excellence in Research and Evaluation Award and in 2019 received two separate NCCRED (National Centre for Clinical Research in Emerging Drugs) grants. It has also recently had accepted for publication an article exploring the social relationships for people attending SMART Recovery groups (Raftery, Kelly, Deane, Baker, & Dingle, in press). The team is excited by these successes and remains focussed on researching SMART, a significant and under-researched program in the mutual aid space and a significant component of the continuous care jigsaw for people managing their problem behaviours.

### Current projects of this group include:

- SMART Track – development and evaluation of an App to be used by people attending SMART Recovery groups. *Funded by NSW Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Innovation Grants Scheme.*

- Methamphetamine and mutual support: a mixed methods exploration of SMART Recovery participants characteristics and opportunities for enhanced referral opportunities. *Funded by National Centre for Clinical Research on Emerging Drugs (NCCRED) Seed Funding.*
- BeSMART: feasibility and preliminary efficacy of an intervention for family members impacted by methamphetamine. *Funded by National Centre for Clinical Research on Emerging Drugs (NCCRED) Seed Funding.*

You can read more about the members of the RAC and view a bibliography of all that they've published via SMART's website. See <https://smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au/smart-recovery-australia-research-advisory-committee/>

## References

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