

## AuSCR Research Task Group approved projects

<b>Title</b>	<b>Evaluation of a group-based intervention to enhance adjustment to life with an acquired brain injury: A Phase II randomised controlled trial of VaLiANT (Valued Living After Neurological Trauma)</b>
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<b>AuSCR role</b>	Recruitment
<b>Approved</b>	22 May 2020
<b>Status</b>	In progress

**Summary** Difficulties with cognitive abilities such as memory, attention, and problem-solving affect the majority of survivors of stroke. Similarly, changes in emotion regulation and coping skills are common post-stroke and lead to depression and anxiety. These cognitive and emotional changes significantly impact functional outcomes including return to work, independence in daily activities, and quality of life. While there is good evidence for rehabilitation programs targeting cognition and mood separately, few interventions have formally attempted to integrate cognitive and psychological therapeutic elements with the aim of providing more powerful and holistic enhancement of functional outcomes.

Recent evidence has indicated that valued living, or the extent to which an individual is engaging in behaviours and activities that are consistent with their values (e.g., in the domains of health, relationships, work/study, and leisure), is strongly associated with improved functional and psychosocial outcomes after brain injury (Pais, Ponsford, Gould, & Wong, 2017). This suggests that rehabilitation interventions designed to promote valued living may therefore result in better outcomes. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a behavioural therapy designed specifically to enhance valued living. ACT is well-supported in a variety of psychiatric disorders and health conditions. There is initial evidence supporting its use to improve psychological adjustment in TBI (Whiting, Deane, Simpson, McLeod, & Ciarrochi, 2017); as yet there is no published research in stroke.

The aim of this project is to evaluate the feasibility and potential efficacy of a new group program to enhance valued living after stroke based on ACT principles and processes. This innovative program will integrate cognitive rehabilitation and psychological therapy techniques with the aim of enhancing wellbeing, functional outcomes and quality of life. The 8-session manualised group program will focus on key value domains of health, work/study, leisure, and relationships. Participants will identify behaviours that are consistent with their values (e.g., exercising regularly to stay healthy), then learn cognitive strategies to support those behaviours (e.g., memory aids to remember work tasks; communication strategies to foster healthy relationships), and coping skills to help manage difficult emotions that may arise when acting in accordance with their values.

A pilot Phase II 2-arm randomised controlled trial (RCT) will be conducted, comparing outcomes of the valued living group participants with waitlist control. Outcome measures will be conducted at baseline prior to randomisation, then administered by an assessor masked to condition allocation immediately post intervention (8 weeks) and then at 2-month follow-up (16 weeks). A range of outcome measures will be used to evaluate changes in valued living, cognition, mood, wellbeing, self-efficacy, participation, and quality of life.

The AuSCR registry would be used to identify potential participants for the study, who are at least 3 months post-stroke, between the ages of 18-80, experiencing cognitive difficulties post-stroke, and could attend the group program at the La Trobe Psychology Clinic in Bundoora, Victoria. These potential participants would be sent information about the study and would be invited to contact the researchers if they are interested in participating.