

THE SOUTHERN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE RESEARCH NETWORK NEWSLETTER

Issue 5/ December 2025

News

2025 has been another busy year for the Southern Primary Care Research Network (PCRN). Southern PCRN researchers have been working hard to complete their projects, which you can read more about below. We have made substantial efforts to apply for further funding to support the ongoing administration and infrastructure of the network for 2026 and beyond. Unfortunately, this was unsuccessful. Consequently, the Operations Group has made the difficult decision to put the network into abeyance, hopefully just for the short term. We will continue to seek funding opportunities to support the network. We remain keen to support research using primary care data; if you have a project in mind, we would be happy to support the work alongside WellSouth.

We want to thank everyone that has been part of the journey to develop the network, especially Dr Carol Atmore, Dr Abby Pigden, Dr Sharon Leitch and Prof. Tim Stokes. We also thank Prof. Robin Turner, Assoc. Prof Alesha Smith and Alex Ryde for their contributions to the Operations Group. We thank the Governance Group for their support and interest over the last few years; Claire Turner, Mani Molloy-Sharplin, Brendon McIntosh, Amanda Clifford, Prof. Leigh Hale and Assoc. Dean Letava Tafuna'i.

We still have some projects currently underway, and these will continue as planned. We celebrate those projects that have been completed as well.

Research Projects – current and planned

Research Prioritisation exercises

Completed research

An experiential workshop was held at the Australasian Association for Academic Primary Care (AAPC) Conference, 11-12 August 2025, in Geelong, Melbourne. The workshop was conducted by Dr Sharon Leitch and Anna Williams who presented different methods of how to engage with different stakeholders and conduct research prioritisation, based on their research. The advantages, disadvantages, and lessons learnt were discussed. Workshop participants then conducted a matrix ranking exercise to prioritise research topics. The workshop was well received, and participants appreciated the hands-on experience of conducting research prioritisation.

Planned Research

One of the outcomes of the prioritisation community consultation was a realisation that there is a need for further research into improving primary care access for neurodiverse

patients. Anna Williams and Sharon Leitch have been awarded the James Hume Bequest Fund to support neuroinclusive healthcare environments. Neurodiverse patients will be interviewed to understand their experiences of attending a GP consultation. The intent of the project is to provide healthcare providers with guidance on how to create neuroinclusive centres of care.

Ethical Framework for PHC data

Completed Research

Tania Moerenhout (Senior Lecturer, Department of Bioethics) and Wenna Yeo (Research Fellow) have completed their study establishing an ethical framework for the secondary use of PHC data in Aotearoa New Zealand, supported by the Healthcare Otago Charitable Trust. As a reminder, the framework was constructed based on a scoping literature review, centred around four overarching principles: reciprocity, justice, respect, and trust. Alongside these principles, a set of 29 questions was developed to help the governance group, and researchers think about the ethical aspects of secondary data use. The framework was validated by ethics committee members, primary care researchers, and primary care practitioners in a two-round Delphi study. This resulted in several adjustments to the phrasing of the questions, the deletion of two questions, and a change in one of the subthemes. The preliminary results of the study were presented at a Bioethics seminar at the Department, at the GP25 conference of the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners in Christchurch, and at the WONCA (World Organisation of Family Doctors) World conference in Lisbon, Portugal. We are now preparing an article for publication in the Journal of Primary Health Care, which will report on the literature review and the development of the ethical framework. Our aim is for the ethical framework to support wider integration of ethical principles into research and technology development. In the past few years, we have seen an increased interest in the development of AI applications for healthcare, where datasets play a major role and clear processes for ethical considerations are often lacking. We hope that this framework can provide guidance for (data) researchers, ethics committee members, and governance groups to ensure safe, equitable, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi-aligned research.

Paediatric Primary Care Service Utilisation

Current Research

Drs Amanda Clifford and Abby Pigden (Psychology) are seeking to identify what paediatric data is available for researchers in a multi-dataset linkage project. The data request to the National Collections is complete. They have received data from WellSouth which they are currently analysing alongside 300-level Psychology student Emma Lailey.

Coding Quality of Primary Care Data

Current Research

This project aims to audit the coding quality of primary care data available to the Southern PCRN. The data analysis is well underway, and a report is being prepared.

Research Dissemination

Leitch S, Williams A C, Stokes T. (2025) 54. Avoiding the perils and pitfalls of stakeholder engagement and research priority setting [Conference abstract]. Australian Journal of Primary Health 31. doi:[10.1071/PYv31n4abs](https://doi.org/10.1071/PYv31n4abs)

Are you interested in undertaking research using primary care datasets?

We now have a clear process to help you plan how to undertake your research using primary care data, as shown in the flow chart below. We are keen to hear from you. Please contact Dr Sharon Leitch sharon.leitch@otago.ac.nz if you have a proposal you would like to discuss with us!

