

# Fairer Start Initiative

## Working Group Summaries

The ECP Fairer Start Initiative seeks to curate and amplify RMIT transdisciplinary research to influence change for a more inclusive and equitable Australia. There are four key working groups:

### 1. Gender equality

This working group coalesces expertise in the development and implementation of strategies to improve gender equality and evaluation research. It will address the challenges and consequences of the pandemic for women, children and young people in the fields of work, mental health, and prevention of violence. It will do so by working in partnership through participatory and co-design approaches with particular attention to intersectionality to mitigate against the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on other pre-existing social inequalities (e.g. indigenous, CALD, LGBTQIA, disability) and deliver research that will have a positive impact on policy, practice and lives.

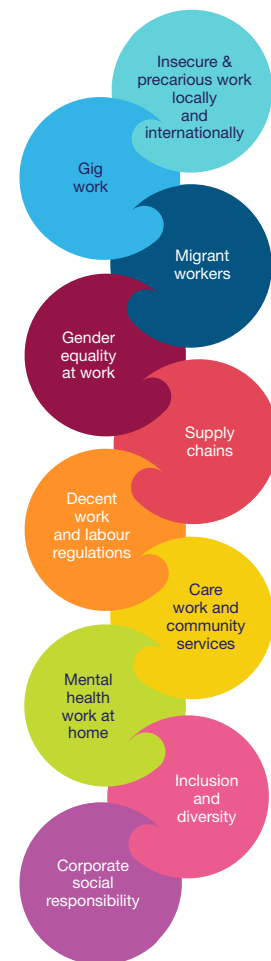
### 2. Sustainable and inclusive work

**What is the critical problem or opportunity you are seeking to respond to?**

- Ensuring that workers have accurate information about their rights and are able to access services for support and advice, and make full use of existing government programs.
- Location-based solutions to fragmented and insecure work to support sustainable jobs and local economies.
- Ensuring that employers, particularly those in SMEs that are hardest hit by lock-downs and the recession, are accessing support and are aware of their obligations.
- Building inclusivity and gender equality into work organisation.

#### Key insights

- Vulnerable work due to casualisation, sham contracting and 'sole-trader' reliance across many industries in Australia is undermining individual work futures and sustainability of growth industries.
- COVID-19 incubation and transmissions, driven by this casualisation, have been particularly stark in meat-processing, aged-care and disability support, security.
- The burden of initial job (and hours) losses have been carried by women, the young and those in casual work. As JobKeeper is rolled back, losses will be more widely experienced, with a larger burden likely felt by older workers.
- Systemic re-organisation of work at industry and local labour market levels involving multiple stakeholders will be required to build sustainability and inclusivity.



**Unique capabilities and responses to industry challenges.** Cross-disciplinary expertise in these topics.

### 3. Reimagining mental health post COVID-19

To tackle some of the mental health related concerns, while utilizing a significant existing RMIT capability in transdisciplinary research in mental health and organisation of health and social care, RMIT academics, under the leadership of Micaela Cronin, Director, FSSI and Renata Kokanović, Professor of Health Sociology (Mental Health), SGSC, have established the *Reimagining Mental Health post COVID-19* working group. The group builds on the mental health research activities of members of the RMIT Humanities, Arts, Social science and Health (HASH) Network (critical mental health group).

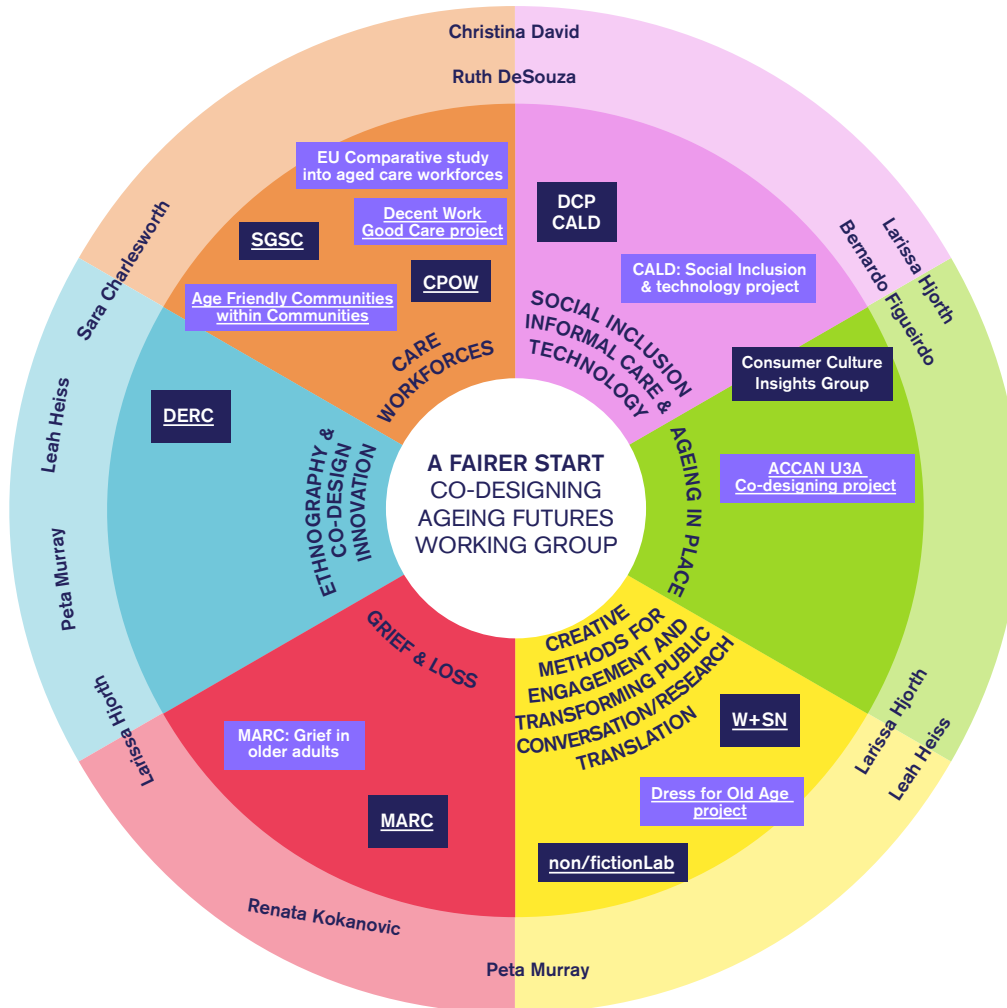
To commence discussions and further facilitate development of RMIT Post COVID19 mental health response to enhance community positive futures, our initial activities will focus on the following areas:

- What does the community want to hold onto and embed in future mental health and social care service delivery approaches informed by the adaptations made during the COVID crisis response?
- How do we understand mental health, mental distress and emotional wellbeing in our changed world?
- How can lived experience guide new ways of responding to mental distress?
- What does effective mental health and social care look like post COVID pandemic crisis phase?
- How can we contribute to the growing knowledge base regarding the utility of digital mental health service delivery?
- How current acknowledgement in the community about impact of broader social structures on mental health of individuals and community could be utilised in shifting how we talk about mental health and mental distress and further de-pathologize and de-stigmatize experiences of mental health?

### 4. Co-designing ageing futures

The *Co-designing ageing futures* working group coalesces expertise in socially-engaged research in across fields of psychology, design, business, economics and art alongside innovations in health technology to address key challenges of the pandemic, including decent work and high quality care, social and mental health, and crises of value and meaning.

The working group addresses these challenges using innovative interventions that place lived experience at the centre of shared revisioning of existing narratives about ageing. These interventions aim to restore inclusion and connection within a fairer, healthier society, to enable older adults to fully participate and create meaning in later life.



Artwork by Louisa Bloomer Kamilaroi

