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An Exercise in Integrated Cognitive Care

What is the problem?

Older adults with poor mental and cognitive health are particularly vulnerable during self-isolation. Physical activity (PA) offers physical, cognitive and mental health benefits, and the Australian Government advises all self-isolating Australians to create a home-based exercise routine. PA guidelines for older adults are available, and there is an urgent need for implementation.

About this research translation project

The interim report of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health Services recommended that mental health practitioners should provide integrated care that promotes behaviour change and a healthy lifestyle. This project seeks to empower vulnerable older adults and mental health practitioners with strategies to implement PA guidelines. To overcome self-isolation, we will use information and communication technologies (ICT). Older Australians are highly connected (i.e. >85% internet access).

Direct engagement with vulnerable older adults will provide crucial information regarding PA knowledge, preferences, and needs. Based on this information, we will develop a flexible intervention via personalised PA prescriptions to enable behaviour change. Pilot data from a small study in Germany found that ICT is a feasible and acceptable approach to provide individualised information and support to members in the community, including older adults. We will also contribute to the current global effort to collect data on the impact of COVID-19 enforced self-isolation on mental health.

Using data from the engagement with vulnerable older adults via ICT, we will consult with opinion leaders, clinicians and academics to develop practice guidance material for mental health practitioners when promoting physical activity behaviour change via ICT.

What will be the impact?

This research will address the need for integrated mental and physical healthcare, facilitating more holistic health care for older adults with mental illness.



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