Australian Lifestyle Psychiatry Research Priorities

Introduction

Lifestyle psychiatry focuses on the role of modifiable health behaviours, such as diet, physical activity, sleep, and substance use, in the prevention and treatment of mental disorders, with increasing evidence supporting its clinical relevance and scalability. However, translation into routine care remains inconsistent, and progress is limited by fragmented research efforts and a lack of coordinated strategic direction.

In Australia, there has been minimal national alignment to guide research investment, particularly with respect to implementation and equity. The Australian Lifestyle Psychiatry Symposium (ALPS) was convened to address this gap by bringing together researchers to foster collaboration and define a shared research agenda.

This communique presents a consensus-driven set of research priorities to guide the advancement of lifestyle psychiatry in Australia over the next decade.

Methods

A multi-stage research priority-setting workshop was held on March 19, 2026 at the Melbourne Deakin Downtown Corporate Centre with researchers from across Australia (Deakin HREC project 2025/HE001221). Priorities were developed through a modified nominal group technique that included individual idea generation (122 priorities submitted), small-group discussion/priority generation (40 submitted), and two rounds of voting (one in person and one online after question refinement). Voting was anonymous, and the 11 resulting consensus-driven research priorities were thematically synthesised and are presented here. To aid participants in priority generation and prioritisation, they were prompted to focus on issues of feasibility, scalability, equity and potential impact and translation, along with presented lived-experience priorities (fully reported in a separate publication; project ID 2025/HE001120), and insights on implementation, barriers, and equity described by a panel of experts in the field.

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Key Takeaways

The priorities established emphasise the need for large-scale, real-world research to determine effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, and targeting of lifestyle psychiatry interventions. Establishing data standards and technology for scalable, personalised care is likewise necessary. Highlighted is the importance of implementation-focused work, addressing barriers and inequities, and strengthening workforce capacity and cross-sector partnerships. Taken together, this will support a sustainable, coordinated, and holistic integration of lifestyle psychiatry into routine care.

Suggested citation: Marx W on behalf of the ALPS Organising Committee. Australian Lifestyle Psychiatry Research Priorities. Australian Lifestyle Psychiatry Symposium, 2026. Available at: https://isnpr.org/etn/australian-lifestyle-psychiatry-symposium/ Contact: alps@deakin.edu.au

Next Steps

The priorities emerging from this inaugural national symposium are an important first step in building consensus and coordination across the lifestyle psychiatry research community. The outputs of this workshop can inform future national working groups in lifestyle psychiatry, and facilitate funding discussions. In parallel, the findings will inform a larger Delphi study establishing international priorities in the field. This will ensure sustained impact beyond the symposium and help shape future research and funding initiatives.

Demographics

ALPS brought together **58 researchers and clinicians** from universities, health services, research institutes and non-profit organisations



43 female
14 Male
1 Non-binary

53.4% had a lived experience of mental health challenges



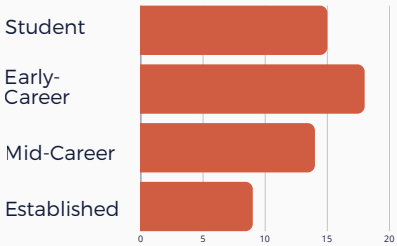


13 resided in regional areas

Representing 4 States

Victoria
Queensland
New South Wales
South Australia

Career stages



Lived-experience Priorities

Priority areas and research questions that we co-developed with 7 lived-experience participants were presented at the start of the symposium. The endorsed priorities highlighted issues of equity in access, support, and education. More specific themes of interest included understanding the evidence base for popular concepts in lifestyle psychiatry, including meal timing and specific nutrients. These priorities informed discussion during the symposium and highlighted issues that researchers were encouraged to consider in generating and ranking research priorities.

Priorities

- Financial stability
- Access to medical support
- Access to neurodiversity support and services
- Understanding why lifestyle change is needed

Themes of Interest

- Supplementation
- Intermittent Fasting
- Six Pillars in Lifestyle Psych
- Neurodiversity
- Physical Activity
- Fermented Foods
- Variation in Diet
- Gut Microbiota
- Education / Implementation

Researcher Priorities

Identifying High-Quality Standardised Evidence

- Determine real-world effectiveness and inform lifestyle psychiatry intervention tailoring through models such as large-scale hybrid trials with diverse populations that allow for subgroup analysis.
- Identify the unintended harms of lifestyle focused interventions (eating disorders, exercise addictions, body dysmorphia, self-harm).

Evaluating and Actioning Implementation

- Evaluate and develop effective training in lifestyle psychiatry for multidisciplinary staff, including mental and allied health professionals.
- Understand the steps towards closing the gap between research and real-world implementation of lifestyle psychiatry by implementing and evaluating lifestyle interventions within routine care.
- Determine who benefits from lifestyle psychiatry interventions, and why, using implementation evaluations that capture barriers, enablers, and harms.
- Determine how best to leverage technology to deliver scalable, personalised digital lifestyle psychiatry interventions.

Understanding Scalability

- Evaluate the cost-effectiveness of lifestyle psychiatry interventions across diverse populations and contexts to inform policy and funding decisions.
- Identify meaningful partnerships (e.g. between doctors, policy makers, lived experience/peer-support, allied health) that will enable holistic mental healthcare.

Identifying Equitable Implementation Strategies

- Identify how to adapt lifestyle psychiatry implementation strategies to ensure effectiveness and access equity for marginalised and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.
- Understand how inclusive (neuro-affirming, culturally sensitive, accessible) lifestyle psychiatry interventions can be implemented across health settings and life stages.
- Determine how lifestyle psychiatry implementation can be adapted across key reproductive stages of women and girls.