

AAG SECG NEWSLETTER



AAG
Australian
Association of
Gerontology

SECG
Student and
Early Career
Group



IMAGE BY MICHAEL TAN

Welcome to the January / February AAG SECG Newsletter

Hi everyone!

As we finish up another fantastic year, I would like to take a moment to reflect on what has been an incredibly rewarding and exciting year for the SECG.

2025 was filled with inspiring events, meaningful engagement, and strong collaboration across our community. It was wonderful to see so many of you at the Alice Springs Conference in 2025, a sincere thank you to the Conference Working Group for their hard work in delivering such a successful and memorable event.

I would also like to acknowledge the Communications Working Group for their fantastic efforts in keeping us connected through regular newsletters, and the Professional Development Working Group for hosting a range of engaging and valuable webinars throughout the year. A special thank you to our State Representatives for their leadership and commitment in organising local activities and fostering connection within their regions.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed their time, energy, and passion this year. Your involvement is what makes this community so strong. I wish you all a safe and wonderful end-of-year holiday, and I look forward to continuing our work together in 2026.

Cheers,
Kate

Kate Wang
SECG President

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AAG & SECG UPDATES

Expressions of Interest for positions on the AAG Student and Early Career Group (SECG) Executive Committee for 2026-2027

The SECG is supported by an Executive Committee. It comprises a President and three Executives: Professional Development and Events Executive; Communications & Awards Executive; and Conference Planning Executive. We are looking to fill two positions in 2026, with Dr Tricia King and Dr Danielle Cave's term coming to an end, this opens the executive position for the:

The Communications and Awards Working Group Lead (2026-2027)

The lead will lead the working group to provide opportunity for collaboration and networking and assists in streamlining communication to SECG members through various social media platforms. The group also delivers the annual Helen Barrie Prize.

The Conference Planning Working Group Lead (2026-2027).

The lead will lead the working group to organise specific SECG events around the Conference, including the annual general meeting at the AAG Conference.

The terms of reference can be [downloaded here](#).

I encourage you to consider submitting an expression of interest to join us.

You can do this by [submitting your EOI at this link](#)

- Your details
- A brief summary about yourself (200 words or less)
- The skills you bring to the position (200 words or less)
- Your current CV

Nominations close on Monday 19th of January, 2026 by COB.

Applicants will be advised of the outcome of your nomination as soon as possible after the due date. If you would like further information or would like to discuss what is involved, please don't hesitate to contact me on the details below.

We look forward to welcoming you onto the AAG SECG Committee.

2026 Helen Barrie Award - Now Open!

AAG's Student and Early Career Group (SECG) is proud to announce that the AAG SECG Helen Barrie National Prize is back.

This prize provides an opportunity for eligible AAG student and early career members to be recognised for their outstanding research contributions to ageing research and practice.

Three prizes will be awarded, with a total value of \$1750.00.

This year, a special prize for excellence for research on innovation in aged care reforms and reach. We gratefully acknowledge the support of [Consultivation](#). Applications are now open and close on 13th February 2026.

Follow this link [for more information about the National Prize and to apply](#).

Hot girls doing hot things and talking about hot stuff

Ella Jackman

Heat Health and Aging

Learn about heat health especially for older members of our community:



Claire's warning: Heat, humidity and health



Martin's story: Why does age increase heat risk?



Heatwave ready: Stay safe during hot weather!



Many moons ago, at the start of Griffith's Ethos ([Extreme Heat and Older Persons](#)) project, I was working alongside my colleague (and beautiful friend!) Mehak Oberai as she designed a statewide survey for older adults. I mostly looked over drafts, helped with recruitment and tried to make her laugh, but it was an exciting time. We wanted to understand older Queenslanders' knowledge, perceptions and behaviours around heat, because at the time... we didn't really know much at all.

While the survey had a lot of findings, a few stuck with me:

- 75% of respondents didn't know heat was a health issue,
- Although many said over-65s were vulnerable, only 20% felt personally at risk,
- Only 43% had ever heard a heatwave warning—and less than half (49%) changed their behaviour in response to the warning.

Fresh out of my MPH and doing an honours in environmental science (a career-change side quest that got me into my current PhD), I remember thinking: "If older adults knew they were more at risk, would they change their behaviour? And why aren't they changing their behaviour when it's a heatwave?" Discussing as a team, we thought about some creative approaches and landed on animated videos: Explaining heat as a health issue, why older adults are more at risk, and how to stay safe. Working with a multidisciplinary team taught me a lot—mainly that experts are brilliant but love their jargon and caveats, and that subtle, story-driven communication matters.

During script writing, a film academic told me, "people like stories," so I drew on what older adults had told us: men who'd collapsed after yard work on hot days, carers finding clients in overheated homes, adult children checking on ageing parents. These stories were weaved together to create the narrative of the Ethos videos: an older widower, his daughter checking in, a hot house, a broken air-con, a "quick mow before the storm hits"... and a heat-stress emergency that becomes the learning moment. I didn't expect it, but the videos took off: Played in hospital waiting rooms, added to Queensland Health and Aged Care websites, shown to older adults in rural Victoria and now, being translated into Chinese and Italian.

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These early questions shaped where I am today and **my current PhD: Improving heatwave communications to facilitate behaviour change among older adults**. Because while the videos were shared widely, behaviour change isn't simple. Air-con is expensive. Cool spaces aren't always accessible. Renters can't upgrade homes. And communications often don't reach the people who need them.

One thing I've learned is that older adults actually do know how to keep cool—many grew up without air-con and adapt better than their younger counter parts. But in a warming world, we need more than individual strategies: better policies, cooler communities, greener streets, and systems that support ageing safely. And above all, we need connection. Effective communication isn't just information—it's relationship. It's people looking out for each other. It's heart to heart, neighbour to neighbour, helping each other stay safe in the heat. The same message that shaped the Ethos videos still guides my work today: **people like stories** and it's through stories that we help older adults feel seen, heard and supported to stay safe in the heat.

Watch the Ethos Videos:

Video 1: <https://youtu.be/qj hvok5VXBA>

Video 2: <https://youtu.be/N7GuYObkhLA>

Video 3: <https://youtu.be/ZCZ73fkbq4o>

Read the findings from the Ethos survey:

https://www.griffith.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/2042658/ober-ai-et-al-2024-towards-improvement-of-heatwave-warnings-for-older-adults-the-case-of-queensland-australia.pdf

Get in touch: e.jackman@griffith.edu.au



SIX QUESTIONS

With Dr Thomas Pace

Tell us about yourself.

I am a Lecturer at the University of the Sunshine Coast's (UniSC) Thompson Institute, in the postgraduate Mental Health and Neuroscience program. I completed my PhD in Psychology at the University of New South Wales, where I used psychophysics and EEG to explore how mental imagery and attention modulate visual representations in the brain. At UniSC, I coordinate a neuroimaging course that takes students under the hood of brain imaging technologies. We explore how different techniques measure brain structure and function, from the physics of MRI to the electrical dynamics of EEG. My goal is to equip students with the critical skills needed to understand and evaluate the latest neuroscience research, particularly studies investigating mental health disorders.

I am also part of the Healthy Brain Ageing research program at UniSC. We investigate how the brain changes with age, the impact of lifestyle-related dementia risk factors on these changes, and how lifestyle interventions might protect against decline. Within this program, I am driving a new research direction focused on metacognition. Specifically, how our ability to monitor our own thinking changes with age. My work generally aims to understand basic brain mechanisms and apply these insights to real-world health challenges, particularly in ageing and mental health.

What inspired you to pursue a career in gerontology?

My path into gerontology began during my time as a research assistant at NeuRA (Neuroscience Research Australia), where I worked on a clinical intervention trial providing exercise programs for older adults with memory concerns. I ran workshops and watched as participants formed a supportive community around their shared goals. We used smartwatches to track daily activity levels and paired new exercises with existing daily habits, essentially hacking the brain's habit-formation systems to make exercise routines stick more easily. This hands-on experience showed me both the challenges and rewards of working with older populations, and I found the work deeply meaningful.

What really solidified my commitment to this field was recognising a critical gap in healthcare. The much older field of medicine has made remarkable progress in extending physical lifespan through advances in cancer treatment, cardiovascular care, and disease management. However, neuroscience as a younger field has not caught up. We are seeing dementia cases rise alongside our ageing global population, showing that while we've gotten better at keeping bodies alive longer, we haven't solved how to keep brains thriving throughout those extended years. This represents one of the most pressing real-world challenges facing neuroscience today. How do we ensure that the extra years we have gained translate into quality cognitive life? This question drives my research, as I believe addressing brain health in ageing is essential for the future of our societies.

What do you find most rewarding about working in the field of aging?

The most rewarding part is closing the loop between lab research and community. I used to do more fundamental science, which can feel far removed from real world impact. Now, that impact is immediate when I run workshops on healthy brain ageing for community groups. People want evidence-based guidance to protect their cognitive health. Our LEISURE trial at UniSC, which targeted exercise, diet, mindfulness, and sleep in older adults, continues to receive fantastic community response. This entire approach is about translating neuroscience into practical tools that give people more agency over their health. It's a principle that became clear during my time at NeuRA, where we used brain-based habit-pairing to help older adults build sustainable exercise routines. My current metacognition research follows that same thread. If we can understand how people monitor their own thinking, we can develop tools to help them recognise and adapt to cognitive changes as they occur. Ultimately, though, what makes the work truly meaningful are the personal moments. When someone approaches me after a workshop to ask about their parent, or tells me how our strategies have helped them stay sharp, I'm reminded that this research touches virtually everyone.

Outside of work, what else are you wildly passionate about/ enjoy spending your time on/ a fun fact about yourself?

I'm a pretty obsessed Arsenal fan who came to football quite late, having played rugby all through school. I play futsal every week now and while my brain knows what it wants to do, my feet have very different ideas. I still love it. Beach volleyball is also a regular fixture. I've learnt that team sports get me to show up for my body more reliably than any solo gym routine ever has. When you're thinking about longevity in terms of years or decades, you need something you genuinely enjoy where you don't count the sessions. I don't track how many coffees I've had or how many matches I've played - football is just what I do on Mondays. It becomes part of your rhythm rather than another thing to tick off. I'm also passionate about science fiction, like Dune or anything Philip K Dick. One day I hope to write my own sci-fi novel, though finding the time is the eternal challenge. My partner has already been volunteered as my first reader, along with whoever else I can convince. Probably the same dedicated souls who read my PhD thesis. At least this time there'll be spaceships!

What is the best piece of advice you've received (professional or otherwise)?

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You can read more about Thomas' research here:



SECG ON SOCIAL MEDIA



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Have something to share?

If you want to contribute to any of the sections or have or have something to share we'd love to hear from you!

The newsletter relies on your content to make it great - so let's make it great!



https://uniofsunshinecoast.syd1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_a3Rqs7viisTqoPc
OR tking2@usc.edu.au