



PROUDLY SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH
ALL NEUROLOGICAL CONDITIONS



MEDIA RELEASE

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\$1 million research funding into brain plasticity

How the brain works has intrigued Associate Professor Jenny Rodger for almost 30 years, with a lot of her work focusing on brain plasticity – the ability of the brain to change throughout someone’s life by rewiring or modifying neural connections.

Associate Professor Rodger has joined the research team at Western Australia’s Perron Institute, thanks to \$1 million funding from MSWA.

“I’ve always been interested in the way the brain works. For me it’s not about how someone feels but what happens inside their brain to make them feel or act the way they do. That for me is more important and that’s where brain plasticity and brain stimulation come in,” said Associate Professor Rodger.

“Neurotrauma and neurological disease account for more than a quarter of all chronic disabilities in Australia, a healthy brain is fundamentally important to human health. My research develops interventions that promote healthy brain development and function throughout life, as well as repairing damaged brains after injury.”

MSWA has recognised the importance of the cutting-edge research being carried out by Associate Professor Rodger and is investing \$1 million to fund her work over the next four years, in her new role as the Senior Research Fellow in Brain Plasticity at the Perron Institute. Jenny and her team will carry out research to understand the mechanisms of brain plasticity to improve the quality of life in patients with neurological conditions including multiple sclerosis, stroke, Parkinson’s disease, Huntington’s disease, motor neurone disease and acquired brain injury.

“I’m really excited about the opportunity to work at the Perron Institute with clinicians and doctors, to access patients and further develop the evidence base I’ve built-up over the past 10 years,” added Associate Professor Rodger.

“There are certain things that all neurological conditions have in common, including changes to very basic, but very important, structures and functions in the brain. I believe that for many conditions, we can re-organise the brain to help it function normally. In the same way that children can learn how to catch or kick a ball through practice. I believe that we can use training and brain stimulation techniques to make long term sustainable changes in the brains of people with neurological conditions so that they can re-learn actions and regain lost functions.

“When it comes to brain stimulation, we first need to take a step back and understand how this works, and that is what my research is doing. We want to be able to tailor the stimulation to suit different people so that it’s more effective.”

Over the past five years MSWA has invested more than \$8.55 million in research into finding the cause, better treatments and a cure for multiple sclerosis. The organisation is now funding valuable research into other neurological conditions. This year it is spending a record \$2.6 million on MS and other research, more than twice the amount contributed by all the other State organisations combined.

“There is so much we don’t understand about how the human brain works and how it can be rewired to form new neural connections to help people recover or regain function from a neurological condition. Jenny and her team at the Perron Institute are pioneers in this area of medical research, which is why we’re pleased to invest the \$1 million to support WA based research aimed at achieving improved outcomes for people with MS and other neurological conditions around the world,” said MSWA CEO, Marcus Stafford AM.

“With an ageing population, we are faced with an unprecedented rise in the number of people living with neurological disorders. That’s why we’ve committed to this funding for the Perron Institute because demand will surge, and there needs to be an expansion in the depth and scope of the research being carried out.”

Associate Professor Rodger will bring to the Perron Institute ten PhD and Honours students and research officers and is looking to expand her team further.

“We are honoured to support the appointment of Associate Professor Jenny Rodger to the Perron Institute to expand research capability in the area of brain plasticity. Jenny is a passionate advocate for education outreach and science communication. Her appointment comes at an expansive time for the Institute,” said Perron Institute CEO, Steve Arnott.

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