

DACRIN Annual Progress Report 2024



NSW DRUG AND ALCOHOL CLINICAL RESEARCH AND IMPROVEMENT NETWORK

Welcome to the DACRIN Annual Progress Report 2024. This report not only marks the launch of our Strategic Plan 2024-2029 but also highlights the significant strides we've made over the past year.

We are excited to welcome Professor Paul Haber (Sydney Local Health District) as DACRIN's new Chair, effective January 2025. With his wealth of clinical research and leadership experience, he is well-positioned to guide us through this next phase of growth. We also want to express our heartfelt thanks to Professor Adrian Dunlop for his dedicated leadership over the past three years. While stepping down as Chair, he will continue to shape DACRIN's work as a valued Council member.

This report outlines the progress we've made against the strategic priorities of our new plan. We are proud of the advancements across several key areas and look forward to sharing the impact of our collective efforts.

PRIORITY 1: LEAD DRUG AND ALCOHOL CLINICAL RESEARCH

Our agenda for alcohol and other drug (AOD) clinical research is collaborative, diverse, rigorous, and driven by clinical needs and consumer priorities

STRATEGIC GOALS	KEY STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES	2024 Progress
1.1 Collective peer review and endorsement of research proposals <i>Ensure that research and quality improvement (QI) activities investigate important clinical questions, are scientifically rigorous, and have sufficient engagement.</i>	Establish a committee to identify, prioritise and endorse new research and QI activities and subsequent publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DACRIN Research Endorsement Guidelines drafted in Q4 2024 are set for review, endorsement and implementation in Q2 2025. These guidelines introduce a formal submission process for AOD researchers from DACRIN member organisations, and external institutions, to seek endorsement for research and quality improvement (QI) projects. In Q4 2024, the formation of a DACRIN Executive Committee (EC) was approved in principle by the current and previous Chairs, pending Council approval. Terms of Reference for the EC have been drafted and are set for review, endorsement and implementation in Q1 2025. Once established, the EC will endorse research and address urgent matters that do not require full Council attention.
	Facilitate scale-up processes and feasibility assessments to ensure adequate engagement and capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The development of a formal Expression of Interest (EOI) process for new projects is currently underway, as part of the broader Research Endorsement Guidelines. This new process will focus on assessing site feasibility, resource availability, and operational capacity. By streamlining site selection, the EOI process will ensure that participating sites are not only well-equipped and experienced but also aligned with study objectives.
1.2 Set the research agenda for DACRIN <i>Identify potential focus areas in NSW AOD research to better understand the most pressing issues related to substance use and addiction</i>	Set the research agenda for DACRIN through a formal process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Research Endorsement Guidelines, currently in draft, outline research priority areas that align with DACRIN's strategic goals. These areas, set to undergo review and finalisation by the DACRIN Council, will provide clear direction for future research.
	Identify, prioritise, and support a broad range of AOD clinical research and QI activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DACRIN researchers have made significant contributions to the field, with 67 publications in the past year, nearly half of which were led by DACRIN members. Nine publications stemmed directly from DACRIN-led studies, showcasing the impact of our research initiatives.
	Facilitate meaningful consumer engagement to inform and support AOD clinical research and QI activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DACRIN has developed the Involving Consumers in DACRIN Research guidance document (GD-04). Reviewed and approved by the CAOD Consumer-Informed AOD Research and Analysis (CIARA) working group (WG), this document promotes meaningful engagement of consumers throughout all stages of research. The DACRIN SharePoint site has been updated with a dedicated page to assist researchers in connecting with consumers, especially during the grant application phase, when funding may not yet be secured. The DACRIN Participant Reimbursement Guidelines (GD.05), released in July 2024 offer clear and ethical guidance on reimbursement practices specifically tailored to drug and alcohol research. Reviewed and approved by CIARA, they align with consumer standards, reinforcing best practices in participant compensation.
	Consider NSW Health Alcohol and Other Drugs and Future Health priorities when identifying and prioritising AOD clinical research and QI activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The forthcoming Research Endorsement Guidelines, currently in draft, outline priority research areas that align with DACRIN's strategic goals and integrate NSW Health Alcohol and Other Drugs and Future Health priorities, ensuring DACRIN's research supports key NSW healthcare objectives.
1.3 Better use of data <i>Use available AOD clinical data to guide AOD clinical research, QI activities, and pilot studies</i>	Use available AOD clinical outcomes data to guide AOD clinical research and QI activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The forthcoming Research Endorsement Guidelines encourage the use of available AOD clinical outcomes data to inform and guide AOD clinical research and QI. Accessing data from Local Health Districts (LHDs) is complex, presenting both challenges and opportunities. In 2025/2026, DACRIN will develop an AOD Clinical Data Access and Management Guide to standardise how AOD data held by LHDs can be accessed and used for research and QI.
	Invest in gathering data through pilot studies to determine the feasibility and potential of large-scale projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The forthcoming Research Endorsement Guidelines will introduce a new category for DACRIN-led exploratory initiatives, including QI projects and pilot studies. These initiatives will help test feasibility, gather essential data, and inform larger-scale projects, fostering innovation and laying the groundwork for impactful research across the AOD sector.

PRIORITY 2: BUILD CLINICAL RESEARCH AND TRANSLATION CAPACITY

Our network has the capacity and capability to produce practice-changing outcomes

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	ACTIVITIES	2024 Progress
<p>2.1 Training and professional development</p> <p><i>Invest in ongoing training, professional development, and mentoring opportunities to equip our emerging and existing workforce with the capacity and confidence to produce high-quality, relevant research</i></p>	Offer continuous training and opportunities for professional growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2024, DACRIN continued its collaboration with PRAXIS Australia, enrolling 43 participants in various training programs. We also partnered with SophieMephamGCP™ to offer free Good Clinical Practice (GCP) training, which was completed by 61 AOD staff. To further support professional growth, DACRIN developed two key resources, forming a comprehensive training program to equip AOD researchers with essential skills for delivering high-quality care and support to research participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GD.06: The New Researcher Orientation Handbook, linked to a Learning Hub. GD.07: Working with Trial Participants. A guidelines and training matrix providing best practices for interviewing trial participants. Additionally, DACRIN promoted the HETI Rural, Regional, and Remote Capacity Building Program aimed at strengthening AOD services, with outcomes pending.
	Develop a multidisciplinary (including nursing) clinical research workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Statewide Coordinator presented at the 2024 Drug and Alcohol Nurses of Australia (DANA) Newcastle Forum, discussing the distinction between QI and research, ethics and governance, and strategies for utilising existing data in QI projects. The Statewide Coordinator also delivered a workshop at the NSW OTP Managers Education Day, expanding on the same theme of research vs. QI practices. In December 2024, the Statewide Coordinator led a well-received workshop at the APSAD conference, offering key insights into integrating research and QI, and attracting a broad audience from across the AOD sector. Furthermore, DACRIN introduced a Position Description resource on the SharePoint site, aiming to standardise recruitment and ensure consistency across AOD research teams.
	Actively involve and guide the next generation of AOD clinical researchers through mentoring, support, and professional development opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Research Endorsement Guidelines, still in draft, support emerging AOD clinical researchers through mentorship and collaboration. Implementation planned for Q1 2025.
<p>2.2 Research infrastructure</p> <p><i>Create and preserve a central infrastructure that supports the collaborative development of research and QI activities and ensures quality by design</i></p>	Develop a quality by design infrastructure that can be reused for subsequent trials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The DACRIN SharePoint site was updated to include links to both national and international clinical research regulations. These regulations will form the foundation for the quality by design infrastructure which will commence development in 2025.
	Implement standardised study tools specific to DACRIN AOD research and QI activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2025/2026, DACRIN will focus on developing standardised study tools to ensure consistency and efficiency across all DACRIN-endorsed AOD research and QI activities. These tools will cover start-up, conduct, and close-out phases. In 2025/2026, DACRIN will complete the second phase of the DACRIN Data Project, focusing on the domains Social Outcomes, Health Outcomes, and Consumer Engagement.
	Facilitate internet-based approaches to supplement traditional participant recruitment strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DACRIN's ClinTrial Refer license, paid upfront in 2019, expired. Given the limited trial load, the DACRIN Council opted for the cost-effective Bronze tier. This tier maintains DACRIN's platform presence without the cost of a branded app. To be reassessed in 2025. In 2025/2026, DACRIN will explore and implement AI driven internet-based recruitment strategies to complement traditional methods.
<p>2.3 Better translation activities</p> <p><i>Plan scale-up strategies in advance and leverage technology to enhance the sharing of research or QI activity findings</i></p>	Identify services early on that are capable of effectively and efficiently translating research into practice, particularly if the outcome is favourable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The EOI process, part of the forthcoming Research Endorsement Guidelines, will assess individual sites' readiness to translate research into practice. Sites may be prioritised based on their preparedness, while others will receive targeted support.
	Utilise e-technologies to disseminate study findings to researchers, clinicians, individuals who participated in the study and the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new Communication Strategy (see 3.2) focuses on upgrading the DACRIN website, expanding the SharePoint site, and increasing our social media presence to effectively disseminate study findings. To broaden awareness and reach a wider audience, the Statewide Coordinator launched a LinkedIn account. A dedicated DACRIN LinkedIn account will be introduced in 2025 to further engage researchers, clinicians, study participants, and the public.



PRIORITY 3: EXPAND THE NETWORK AND INFLUENCE CHANGE

Our AOD clinical research network is inclusive and has an excellent reputation Our stakeholders recognise the importance of our role and contributions

STRATEGIC GOALS	KEY STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES	2024 Progress
<p>3.1 Network membership Include NSW AOD services and people across disciplines, government and non-government jurisdictions, and into regional and rural areas of NSW to ensure a broad representation of real-world practice</p>	<p>Increase awareness about DACRIN's activities and the benefits of network membership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DACRIN welcomed three new member organisations, including two Local Health Districts (MNCLHD, SNSWLHD), increasing LHD representation to 86% across NSW. The inclusion of NUAA strengthened ties with the non-government sector and amplified consumer voices. Membership discussions continued with FWNSWLHD, MLHD, and SCHN. Monthly newsletters kept members updated on DACRIN's activities, as well as developments within the broader AOD and research sectors. In November 2024, a redesigned version was launched to increase engagement, attract new members, and further expand the AOD research network. DACRIN renewed its membership with the Australian Clinical Trials Alliance (ACTA). The Statewide Coordinator actively engaged in SIGNet and Advisory Council meetings, participated in the ACTA CTN Masterclass series focusing on collaborations and funding strategies, and presented DACRIN's consumer involvement experience at SIGNet. This presentation was later highlighted as a case study on the ACTA website.
	<p>Foster collaboration among diverse disciplines and external organisations with the capacity to contribute to AOD clinical research and QI activities and assist with translation efforts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2024, DACRIN expanded its network by welcoming 114 new affiliate members. This included 26 allied health professionals, 28 medical practitioners, 19 nurses, 9 healthcare workers, and 32 researchers; while engaging with academic institutions, health services, and government bodies in NHMRC, MRFF and TRGS grant applications.
	<p>Grow the number of study sites and participant enrolment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2024, five new studies commenced recruitment—three led by DACRIN and two externally led—bringing the total number of actively recruiting studies to eight.
<p>3.2 Communication and brand awareness Promote our activities and track record to enhance the confidence of stakeholders, journal editors, funding bodies, and guideline developers in the quality of trials conducted through the network</p>	<p>Increase awareness of DACRIN-endorsed research and QI activities through the effective use of the logo</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2025/2026, DACRIN will implement strategies to enhance awareness of DACRIN-endorsed research and QI activities through the effective use of the logo. This will include providing clearer branding guidelines, encouraging researchers to incorporate the logo in study materials, and ensuring consistency across publications and presentations.
	<p>Maintain and enhance information-sharing platforms with a focus on promoting our track record and study outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2025/2026, DACRIN will update and enhance its website to highlight the achievements of its members, featuring concise summaries of study outcomes in plain English, links to relevant publications, citation counts, and other key metrics. These enhancements will help showcase our collective impact, increase visibility, and facilitate the broader dissemination of DACRIN's research within the AOD sector.
<p>3.3 Strategic influence Help break down AOD research barriers and improve translation into practice using our voice and influence</p>	<p>Seek and leverage funding opportunities to support our strategic goals and activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In response to a 2023 NADA/DACRIN study on barriers to AOD research capacity, DACRIN secured Ice Inquiry funding with \$83,000 to PRAXIS Australia training, and \$135,000 for research-related software and equipment. An additional \$25,000 was approved for scholarships in 2025, enhancing AOD staff research capabilities. The OLAM study on methamphetamine withdrawal was awarded \$2.1M in NHMRC funding. The 'Grant Opportunities' section on the SharePoint site was updated to centralise and streamline access to funding opportunities, with email alerts for new, time-sensitive grants.
	<p>Actively seek out opportunities to engage and support clinicians in integrating research into their practice domain, strengthening the connection between evidence-based research and clinical practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DACRIN actively engaged clinicians in integrating research into their practice by presenting at key industry events. In 2024, the Statewide Coordinator presented at the DANA Newcastle Forum and the NSW OTP Managers Education Day, where they demystified research and provided practical strategies for clinicians to incorporate evidence-based practices into their work. This presentation was further repeated at APSAD 2024 as a workshop in December 2024.
	<p>Proactively seek opportunities to address barriers within the AOD clinical research sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DACRIN contributed to the draft Commonwealth Drug and Alcohol Program Research Strategy and NSW Drug Summit: Have Your Say survey. The Statewide Coordinator, based within the CAOD and part of the Strategic Research and Evaluation (SRE) team, continued to provide guidance on conducting research within Local Health Districts (LHDs). Acting as a conduit between CAOD, LHDs, and other stakeholders, the Coordinator helped foster alignment and support for research activities.
	<p>Promote the translation of DACRIN research outcomes into policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Research Endorsement Guidelines, still in draft, emphasise the importance of early engagement with CAOD for studies that have the potential to influence policy or clinical practices, fostering stronger collaboration and supporting the translation of research outcomes into actionable policy recommendations.