

Reflexive and Deliberate Practice in Health Psychology 2026 Advancing Psychological Pain Management

APS College of Health Psychologists -National Event (APS Event: 25935)
Brisbane Westin, 111 Mary Street, Brisbane, QLD 4000
12–14 June 2026 | Hybrid: In-Person and Online
CPD Hours: 20 | Audience: Psychologists at all career stages
Registration: APS Events Portal -Event 25935
Contact: thai.ohtsuka@gmail.com

Conference Program Draft - 15th May 2026.

Overview

This unique conference meets AHPRA professional competencies of advancing self-care and reflexive practice as well as extending your knowledge and understanding of psychological pain management. Attendees will gain both theoretical knowledge and practical tools to apply to their professional practice, as well as enhanced personal well-being and a more reflective, creative approach to their work with clients. Self-care activities may include mindfulness and exercise practices as well as meditation and somatic experiencing. Reflexive practice opportunities will include workshops to spark creativity and self-understanding, alongside encouraging self-care. Attendees will contribute to strategies to promote psychological pain management within the context of effective inter-disciplinary practice.

FRIDAY 12 JUNE 2026

15:00–17:00 Welcome Drinks Reception
Cocktail rounds -4-piece canapé package
Presentation Room, The Westin Brisbane

15.00 - 16.00 ***Advancing psychological pain management and self-care***.

Professor John Toumbourou, Chair APS College of Health Psychologists, Deakin University Chair in Health Psychology.

- Conference opening, overview, welcome and acknowledgement of country.

Abstract: This session will outline the conference objectives and opportunities. Psychological pain management now has an established evidence-base. Despite sound evidence, there is limited promotion of this effective form of pain management. The APS College of Health Psychologists has set a strategic objective to promote psychological pain management. This session will outline what has been accomplished to date and propose a future agenda for further promoting psychological pain management. There are important opportunities for a multi-disciplinary approach to advance both health promotion and clinical health programs related to psychological pain management.

(Hybrid)

16.00 - 17.00 ***Poster session*** (in room) and online.

SATURDAY 13 JUNE 2026

07:00–08:00 Morning Wellness – Restorative Yoga Session

The Pier, The Westin Brisbane
Facilitated by Westin wellness staff
Trauma-informed Yin Yoga

09:00–09:20 Self-Care Opening Practice

Resonance Breathing (Coherent Breathing)
Facilitated by Dr Thai Ohtsuka and Dr Rosemary Higgins

09:20–10:15 Creating a Self-Care Plan: Using Compassion, Breath and Mindfulness to Cultivate Our Self-Protecting Energy

Dr Rosemary Higgins MAPS and Dr Thai Ohtsuka , MAPS
Session content:

- Using compassion-focused self-care to prevent burnout
- Breath and mindfulness practices for practitioner wellbeing
- Developing a personalised self-care plan (workshop)
- Aligned with AHPRA professional competencies for advancing self-care

(Hybrid)

10:15–10:30 Self-Care Break -Stretch and Breath Practice

Cyclic Sighing (Physiological Sigh) / 4-7-8 Breathing
Facilitated by Dr Thai Ohtsuka or Dr Rosemary Higgins
(Hybrid)

10:30–11:00 MORNING TEA

11:00–12:15 Growing into Pain Psychology: Career, Collaboration, and What Comes Next

Dr Laura Prendergast, Northern Health, Pelvic Pain Service. President-Elect of the Australian Pain Society.

Abstract: This presentation reflects on my journey into persistent pain management and the development of my career as a health psychologist working across public health and insurance in Victoria. Using this personal and professional pathway as a framework, the talk will explore the evolving role of psychology in pain care, including what psychologists

contribute well within multidisciplinary teams and where gaps remain. Topics will include pain education, behavioural approaches, systems challenges, and function-focused care. The presentation will also consider future directions for psychologists in persistent pain, including opportunities in advocacy, policy, interdisciplinary practice, and broader systems-level change.
This sessions will include: Q&A and roundtable reflections on strategies to promote psychological pain management within the context of effective inter-disciplinary practice.
(Hybrid)

12:15–12:30 Self-Care Break -Stretch / Body Meditation
Mindful Body Scan (10 minutes)
Facilitated by Dr Thai Ohtsuka or Dr Rosemary Higgins

12:30–13:30 LUNCH

13:30–15:15 Psychology is fundamental to understanding pain and delivering effective pain management – we just have to convince the psychologists and society
Professor Michael Nicholas, PhD, Clinical Psychologist, University of Sydney and Royal North Shore Hospital.
Abstract: Persisting or chronic pain affects around 20% of most populations. About half of these people report pain significantly interferes in their lives, affecting their quality of life, ability to function normally, and mental health. Typically, the usual standby, biomedical treatments, for pain only work in the acute stages, like after surgery, and rarely when it becomes chronic. Yet, the most widely accepted understanding of pain is that it is a biopsychosocial phenomenon. This means the experience and impact of pain reflect the influence of biological, psychological and social factors. Limiting treatments to only one of these potential factors seems odd. Unfortunately, training in comprehensive pain management is deficient in all health professions. Correspondingly, healthcare providers, including psychologists, often report low confidence in their ability to help people with troubling chronic pain. So, we have a major health problem in which modifiable psychological factors play a key role, and which can be improved by those with skills in implementing psychological approaches like behaviour change strategies. Health and clinical psychologists have much to contribute here. We need to address the obstacles to their involvement in this work.
This sessions will include: Q&A and roundtable reflections on strategies to promote psychological pain management within the context of effective inter-disciplinary practice.
(Hybrid)

15:15–15:30 Self-Care Break -Ba Duan Jin (Eight Brocades)
Standing group practice - 15 minutes
All eight movements with coordinated breath
Facilitated by Dr Thai Ohtsuka or Dr Rosemary Higgins
(No equipment required; suitable for all fitness levels)

15:30–16:00 AFTERNOON TEA

16:00–17:00 ***Psychological Pain Management Roundtable***
Dr Laura Prendergast MAPS FCHP

19:00 Networking Dinner
At own expense - local venue TBC
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SUNDAY 14 JUNE 2026

07:00–08:00 Morning Wellness -Tai Chi Session
The Pier, The Westin Brisbane
Facilitated by Westin wellness staff

09:00–09:15 Self-Care Opening Practice
Humming / Alternate Nostril Breathing (Nadi Shodhana)
Facilitated by Dr Thai Ohtsuka and Dr Rosemary Higgins

09:15–10:15 Reflexivity and Reflective Practice: Exploring the Self of the Healer
Dr Rosemary Higgins and Dr Thai Ohtsuka, MAPS
Innovate/Design Room, Four Points by Sheraton Brisbane
Session content:

- Professional reflexivity and deliberate practice (AHPRA competencies)
- Exploring personal biases, emotional responses, and professional identity
- Somatic Experiencing -Pendulation technique (workshop)
- Self-awareness as a clinical tool in pain management practice

(Hybrid)

10:15–10:30 Self-Care Break -Stretch and Breath Practice
Box Breathing (4-4-4-4)
Facilitated by Dr Thai Ohtsuka or Dr Rosemary Higgins

10:30–11:00 MORNING TEA
(Buffet served outside function room -included in Full Day Meeting Package)

11:00–12:30 ***Promoting Pychological Pain Management Roundtable***
Session content:

- Psychological frameworks for pain management in clinical practice
- Health promotion strategies to promote pychological pain management
- Collaborative and interdisciplinary care models

(Hybrid)

12:30–13:00 Self-Care Break -Stretch / Body Meditation
Mindful Body Scan / Qigong Mindful Movement
Facilitated by Dr Thai Ohtsuka or Dr Rosemary Higgins

13:00–14:00 LUNCH
(Networking buffet -included in Full Day Meeting Package)

14:00–15:30 ***EQUiPP: A co-designed system intervention to support clinician and community behaviour change in chronic pain care.***
Dr Louise Wiles (presenter), Research Project Manager, Adelaide University.

Abstract: Chronic pain is a growing public health burden and leading contributor to global disability. The EQUipping Primary care and the general Public to prevent and reduce chronic pain (EQUiPP) initiative is a co-designed, scalable system intervention that integrates primary care capacity building with community pain literacy and behaviour change strategies. Implemented across two Australian rural health networks (2024–2028), EQUiPP brings together healthcare professional training, interest-holder engagement, and a community-facing campaign designed to shift knowledge, expectations, and social norms around chronic pain management. This presentation will outline the intervention design, theoretical foundations in behavioural and social influence approaches, and evaluation framework, and discuss implications for upskilling health professionals, strengthening community engagement, and improving uptake of high-value chronic pain care.
This sessions will include: Q&A and roundtable reflections on strategies to promote psychological pain management within the context of effective inter-disciplinary practice.
(Hybrid)

15:30–16:00 Self-Care Break and Closing Reflections
Cyclic Sighing and gratitude journaling
Facilitated by Dr Thai Ohtsuka and Dr Rosemary Higgins
Distribution of Take-Home Self-Care Toolkit

16:00 - 16:30: CONFERENCE CLOSE

Closing remarks - Professor John Toumbourou, Dr Rosemary Higgins & Dr Thai Ohtsuka

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KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this event, participants should be able to:

- Increase knowledge and skills in the promotion of psychological pain management. Participants will increase their understanding of the difference between acute and chronic pain as well as their knowledge of current opportunities to increase skills in psychological pain interventions including pacing, cognitive and behavioural treatments and ACT.

- Enhance Self-Care Practices Participants will learn and apply various self-care techniques such as meditation, mindfulness, and somatic practices to promote personal well-being and avoid burnout, aligned with AHPRA professional competencies for advancing self-care in psychological practice.

- Integrate Reflexive Practice Attendees will engage in workshops designed to foster selfawareness and reflection, enabling psychologists to evaluate their own professional experiences, biases, and emotional responses, thereby enhancing their effectiveness and selfunderstanding in practice, aligned with AHPRA professional competencies for exercising professional reflexivity and deliberate practice.

- Strengthen Professional Networks Psychologists will have opportunities to connect with peers, fostering a community of practice that supports ongoing learning, collaboration, and shared experiences in the areas of self-care, reflexive practice, and psychological pain management.

- Cultivate Creativity and Innovation in Practice Through interactive workshops, participants will be encouraged to think creatively about their therapeutic approaches, integrating new tools, techniques, and insights into their clinical work to better support clients dealing with pain and distress.

- Promote a Holistic Approach to Psychological Practice Psychologists will deepen their understanding of the intersection between physical and psychological pain, and learn how to incorporate multi-disciplinary methods, including mindfulness, body awareness, and reflective practice, to support client recovery and well-being.

Venue Accessibility: Wheelchair accessible

ACCOMMODATION -THE WESTIN BRISBANE

Room Type: Westin King (inclusive of one daily breakfast)
Rate: $320.00/night

Speaker biographies

Professor John Toumbourou, Chair APS College of Health Psychologists, Deakin University Chair in Health Psychology.
Professor John Toumbourou, PhD, is the Chair in Health Psychology at Deakin University, Australia. He is the Co-Leader of Intervention Science in the Deakin University SEED Lifespan Institute. He is the current Chair of the APS College of Health Psychologists. He has published over 310 peer-refereed papers, which have over 23,000 citations (h-index = 79) (https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=en&user=aNMRlOUAAAAJ). He is a co-investigator on the MRFF funded project led by Professor Lorimer Mosley "EQUipping Primary care and the general Public to prevent and reduce chronic pain (EQUiPP)". He is a prominent health promotion researcher and social advocate in areas related to community-based prevention of alcohol and drug problems, and family violence. His research and advocacy led to national reductions in youth alcohol and drug use across Australia and the establishment of the tobacco prevention movement in Timor Leste. In 2023 he received the Presidential Award for lifetime contribution to prevention science research from the Society for Prevention Research.

Dr Laura Prendergast, Northern Health, Pelvic Pain Service. President-Elect of the Australian Pain Society.
Laura Prendergast is a Health Psychologist with nearly fifteen years' experience in persistent pain management across public health and insurance settings in Victoria. She works within multidisciplinary pain services at Northern Health, where she has recently taken on a role in the Pelvic Pain Service. Laura also evaluates the clinical effectiveness of psychological treatments for individuals injured in motor vehicle accidents through her work with the TAC.
She has a strong interest in psychologically informed pain care, functional restoration, and improving system responses to persistent pain. Laura is the President-Elect of the Australian Pain Society and is committed to advancing pain care at a systems and policy level through collaboration with key stakeholders across Australia.

Professor Michael Nicholas, PhD, Clinical Psychologist, University of Sydney and Royal North Shore Hospital.
Michael is a Clinical Psychologist and the Professor and Director of the Pain Education Unit within the Faculty of Medicine and Health (Northern), University of Sydney. Nationally, and internationally, he has been actively involved in teaching interdisciplinary pain management since completing his PhD at Westmead Hospital and the University of Sydney on psychological treatments of low back pain in 1988. He has played leadership roles in the lead organization for pain, the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) since 2010, with a particular emphasis on teaching pain self-management methods to health professionals in Asia, Africa, North America, Europe, and Australasia. Clinically, he has worked in the pain field since 1980 and was the inaugural Director of the interdisciplinary INPUT program at St

Thomas' Hospital, London (1988-90). Since 1994 he has directed interdisciplinary pain management programs at the Royal North Shore Hospital. Most recently, he has been the academic lead for the OPEN project funded by the Federal Government for upskilling health professionals in interdisciplinary pain management skills. His long-standing research interests include the self-management of chronic pain and early psychosocial interventions to prevent long-term disability in injured workers.

Dr Louise Wiles, PhD, is a research project manager at Adelaide University, leading the EQUiPP Project, a co-designed implementation trial to improve high-value chronic pain care in rural and regional Australia. With a background in physiotherapy and health services research, her work focuses on translating evidence into practice through meaningful partnerships with communities and health services. At this conference, she will present an overview of EQUiPP and its implications for workforce development and community-informed approaches to chronic pain care.

Dr Thai Ohtsuka and Dr Rosemary Higgins are highly experienced health psychologists who are members of the Victorian Branch of the APS College of Health Psychologists. Their professional development encourages creatively in therapeutic approaches, integrating new tools, techniques, and insights into clinical work to better support clients dealing with pain and distress. Their professional development sessions regularly receive high positive participant endorsement.