

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
HEALING ARTS AND DIGITAL WELLBEING MONITORING IN RESIDENTIAL DEMENTIA
CARE
FORMAL RESEARCH AND FUNDING STATEMENT
MASONIC BOARD – FUNDING DECISION MEETING 2026

Lead Organisation: University of New England (UNE)

Key Partners: World Class Scholars; Masonicare

1. BACKGROUND AND NEED

Residents with moderate-to-advanced dementia in residential aged care experience very high rates of depression, anxiety and social withdrawal, often managed with psychotropic medications that carry well-documented risks and were criticised in the Aged Care Royal Commission. This extended pilot responds to that gap at UPA Woodlands Lodge by embedding, from June 2026, a structured healing-arts and digital wellbeing monitoring program as a humane, non-pharmacological alternative over a two-year research period (June 2026 – June 2028).

The project aligns with person-centred and trauma-informed care principles and is intended to generate scalable, evidence-informed practices that can be adapted across RFBI and Masonic villages and other residential aged care settings.

2. OBJECTIVES

The project pursues the following objectives.

- (a) Improve mental health, engagement and quality of life for approximately 30–40 residents with dementia through weekly, trauma-aware arts-based sessions.
- (b) Safely reduce reliance on psychotropic medications where clinically appropriate, tracked via regular medication audits across the June 2026 – June 2028 period.
- (c) Build capability among 20–30 staff in person-centred, healing-arts practice and digital outcome monitoring.
- (d) Develop, test and refine a lightweight, RFBI/Masonic-branded web/mobile app for real-time recording of mood, participation and implementation indicators.
- (e) Generate a concise evaluation and practice pack that can be scaled to other RFBI and Masonic villages.

3. METHODS, DESIGN AND INNOVATION

Over a two-year research program (June 2026 – June 2028), UNE, World Class Scholars and partners will co-design the program with residents, families and staff; implement weekly small-group arts sessions (visual, music and storytelling-based) facilitated by trained staff and

artists; and embed routine digital mood and participation tracking at point-of-care.

Standardised measures (DASS-21, QoL-AD), medication audits and qualitative interviews with residents, families and staff will be combined with app-generated datasets over this two-year period to evaluate feasibility, safety, acceptability and indicative impact. The project will deliver a purpose-built, low-friction web/mobile application that enables front-line staff to quickly capture residents' mood, engagement, behavioural observations and session participation using structured, icon- and colour-based ratings aligned with trauma-aware care principles.

The integrated digital platform underpins real-time monitoring, supports clinical and organisational decision-making and creates a transferable data structure for future RFBI/Masonic implementations.

4. TWO-YEAR BUDGET REQUEST (JUNE 2026 – JUNE 2028)

The requested research and implementation grant of AUD 120,000 from the Masonic Board will fully cover, over the period June 2026 – June 2028, the development and production of the digital technology, delivery of the healing-arts program, and associated labour and evaluation costs, and will also cover tuition and research-associated fees at the University of New England for the lead investigator's Master of Social Work (Qualifying) candidature commencing in Trimester 2, June 2026.

Within this June 2026 – June 2028 budget envelope, indicative allocations are as follows.

(a) Program delivery and coordination – AUD 60,000

Facilitators, session materials, co-design workshops, family engagement and trauma-aware practice and supervision across the two-year implementation period.

(b) Digital platform R&D and production – AUD 30,000

Technical discovery, UX design, prototype build, iterative testing, secure hosting and deployment of the web/mobile app, and incremental refinements informed by field use over two years.

(c) Evaluation, data analysis and reporting – AUD 20,000

Psychometric data collection, app analytics, qualitative interviews, and preparation of an interim report and a final board-ready evaluation note and practice pack by June 2028.

(d) Governance, training and dissemination – AUD 10,000

Staff training modules, ethics/governance liaison, dissemination to RFBI/Masonic stakeholders and knowledge translation activities over the two-year project.

Total requested from Masonic Board (June 2026 – June 2028): AUD 120,000.

5. DECLARATION OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Project Title: Healing Arts and Digital Wellbeing Monitoring in Residential Dementia Care

Institution: University of New England (UNE)

Primary Funder to be Acknowledged: Masonic Care

This declaration is made in connection with the project titled "Healing Arts and Digital Wellbeing Monitoring in Residential Dementia Care", undertaken through the University of New England, with project collaboration involving aged-care, research and technology partners as described in the supporting project materials. The funding provided by Masonic Care explicitly encompasses both the costs of the June 2026 – June 2028 healing-arts and digital wellbeing monitoring pilot and the tuition and research-associated fees at the University of New England for the lead investigator's Master of Social Work (Qualifying) program, commencing 22 June 2026 as set out in the UNE Offer of Admission.

The proponents hereby declare and undertake that Masonic Care shall be formally acknowledged as the primary source of funding for this healing arts research project at the University of New England.

The proponents further undertake that all publications, reports, conference papers, presentations, dissemination materials, digital platforms, software applications, mobile applications, web applications and any other technology products or research outputs associated with this project will expressly acknowledge the financial support provided by Masonic Care.

This acknowledgment obligation applies to academic dissemination as well as practitioner-facing, policy-facing and implementation-focused outputs arising from the project, including evaluation reports, practice packs, training materials and digital monitoring tools contemplated in the project documentation.

This declaration is intended to provide assurance to Masonic Care that its financial contribution to the project will be transparently and consistently recognised in all relevant public, professional, academic and technological outputs generated in connection with this research.

This undertaking remains in effect for the duration of the project and for all subsequent publications or products materially based on, derived from, or developed through the funded research activities.

Signed:

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