Guest editorial

Reflections from WSMC15: celebrating some big steps forward and recognising some tensions holding us back

The field of social marketing has grown exponentially since its tentative inception in the early 1950s and its identification as a discipline in 1971 (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971). The 2015 World Social Marketing Conference (WSMC) demonstrated that the scope and application of social marketing thinking has extended beyond issues of public and personal health; we are incorporating new ideas and fresh thinking in our work, and we are seeing important conceptual and theoretical developments in our research and practice.

We have also seen substantial progression and growth in the social marketing community. The number of doctoral dissertations on the subject of social marketing has increased dramatically since the first dissertation on this field in 1971 (Truong *et al.*, 2014), giving us a growing and dynamic workforce. Also, a number of social marketing associations have been established, offering a platform for policymakers, governments, practitioners, not-for-profits, social enterprises, and academics to connect, interact, learn from one another, and collaborate. The Australian Association of Social Marketing was first established in 2009, followed by the European Social Marketing Association and International Social Marketing Association in 2012.

The establishment of the *Journal of Social Marketing* in 2011, and subsequent inclusion in the Australian Business Deans' Council rankings in 2013, served to complement the role of *Social Marketing Quarterly*, which since 1994 has served an important role in informing social marketing practice. The *Journal of Social Marketing* allows social marketers an additional platform to discuss and disseminate ideas concerning conceptual and theoretical developments in our field. Conferences in social marketing have also grown from strength to strength. In addition to the WSMC, the International Social Marketing Conference (formerly the Australasian Nonprofit and Social Marketing Conference), one of the oldest social marketing conferences, was first launched in 2004 and is still going strong today with its next offering to be held in late 2016[1].

Despite the rapid growth, and many achievements, of our social marketing community, a number of tensions still exist. These tensions limit our ability to realise the full potential of social marketing and raise a number of questions for us to consider as a field: Do people really work together? Are we as interdisciplinary as we would like to think? Are junior researchers and drivers of new ideas being supported? Is our collective voice representative of the global population?

Reflections on the conference and of social marketing

In 2015, the WSMC was held in the Southern Hemisphere for the first time. As the Academic Co-Chairs of this conference, we were delighted to see that people travelled to Sydney, Australia, from both the hemispheres, presenting research and practice from 21 different countries. We were particularly pleased to see a number of submissions from developing countries. Paper submissions from developing regions of our world are an encouraging sign that the developing world is taking steps towards greater engagement with the global social marketing community. A recent series of social marketing events

in South East Asia in early 2016 suggested that there is a lot of good social marketing work that is being undertaken in these regions. However, the submissions from developing countries also highlighted for us one of the tensions in social marketing. Much of the work from the developing world is rarely heard or represented outside of those regions and we should reflect on why this happens. We surmise that perhaps, there is limited support for professional development activities such as writing and a greater emphasis on teaching in many academic institutions. In addition, the tightening of purse strings is not limited to academic and non-academic institutions in the developed world, but also extends to those in the developing world and financial support and funding to attend conferences can be limited. Addressing the resource barrier means that we need to be prepared to provide financial support; for WSMC15, Australian Catholic University's Centre for Health and Social Research sponsored a speaker from India, but we need many more organisations to do so if we are going to increase representation. Addressing the language and writing experience barrier requires more creative solutions; at WSMC15, we took the novel step of accepting "workshop" papers where speakers attended a pre-conference workshop run by Nadia Zainuddin to improve their papers and refine their presentations. For future conferences, we suggest this could be done online, and much earlier, to assist authors in preparing their submissions.

Another key observation as Academic Co-Chairs of WSMC15 and Editors of this special issue was the diversity of the work presented and the greater acknowledgement of the complexities of social problems and issues. At the conference itself, the keynote presentations by Joel Bakan and Adrian Bauman highlighted the complexities of social problems, eliciting meaningful discussion on the need for a systems approach in social marketing. It was also valuable to have the participation of those who work in the social and behaviour change space, rather than only hearing from those within our own discipline. As many already know, Joel Bakan is a Professor of Law, while Adrian Bauman is a Professor of Public Health. The very nature of social problems requires us to consider inter-disciplinary approaches to solve them, and therefore the sharing of ideas from experts from alternative fields of expertise is essential if we are to maximise the impact of social marketing. There is a need to recognise the strengths of other disciplines and to read more broadly, beyond marketing sources, and to acknowledge and address "contested spaces". For example, what we refer to in our discipline as "upstream" social marketing shares a great deal with what those in public health call "building healthy public policy" (embedded in the Ottawa Charter back in 1986); recognising our synergies, rather than "claiming" our spaces, will increase our ability to move forward in research and practice. There are many other disciplines we can, and should, collaborate with as social marketing extends its areas of impact – moving beyond health to issues such as environmental sustainability, climate change, human rights, and other social issues.

One of the challenges we observed from the conference itself, as well as from our broader discussions with our social marketing colleagues, was concern for the increasing challenges and expectations of performance faced by junior researchers. Junior researchers in academia today are increasingly expected to possess not only research capabilities, but also the ability to deliver university courses to a high standard, and to engage with the wider academic and research community. It is challenging for any newcomer to break into a field; however, the increasing

expectations of performance of junior researchers and the dearth of tenured employment in academia create additional tension and strain for many junior researchers. So what can we do about this?

We encourage junior researchers to actively seek out opportunities to collaborate with senior researchers; if there is someone whose work you admire, approach them and ask them whether they would be willing to mentor you or involve you in their research. Before you make the approach, work out your unique selling proposition and identify the key skills that you can bring to a team. Many junior researchers are young and enthusiastic, which is a great asset, but offering something concrete such as a specific skill, area of knowledge, or a commitment of time is important. If you want to work with industry, develop a list of organisations you would like to work with and prepare your "pitch" before approaching them, and consider asking a mentor or other senior researcher for an introduction. It is also increasingly important to join professional associations to get involved in the wider research community and raise your profile. This sounds like a lot to ask already busy junior researchers, but it is the reality of the career you have chosen and a path many senior researchers have also travelled to get to where they are now.

We also encourage senior researchers who are in a position to nurture junior researchers to be open to approaches from early career researchers (ECRs). A key part of our role is to mentor junior researchers on important learning areas such as how to build a track record, to give them opportunities to co-supervise students, and collaborate on appropriate grants and research partnerships with industry. More, senior researchers can support research students by being honest in their feedback, being a mentor not a superior, and viewing the PhD process as an apprenticeship, rather than a course of study. Practitioners and their organisations can also contribute to the growth and development of the next generation, by recognising the diversity that a team of mixed backgrounds can bring. Working with senior and junior researchers together allows for the provision of different forms of contributions to a collaboration and ensures that there will be an ongoing supply of academic collaborators in the future.

Another tension we observe, albeit not limited to the social marketing discipline, is the role of conferences in the academic landscape. Most would agree that the research presented at conferences often represents the latest thinking, newest innovations, and most exciting ideas in the field. Conferences offer major benefits to those who participate in them. First, they offer a platform for the dissemination and sharing of ideas amongst the community, creating opportunities to explore cross-collaborations and establish working relationships with others in the field. Second, conferences offer researchers the opportunity to release their latest ideas and findings far more rapidly than journal publications, allowing researchers to get a foothold in the intellectual property stakes for their ideas and innovations. Third, the process of preparing a conference submission enables authors to practice getting to the heart of their message. The page restrictions on conference paper submissions force authors to write concisely, an essential training tool for eventual journal manuscript preparation. Finally, the process of revising a conference paper in response to review comments allows authors the opportunity to incorporate an additional layer of feedback towards the improvement of their work and to develop the "thick skin" they will need to deal with future feedback from reviewers on journal article submissions.

Despite these benefits, conferences remain one of the biggest tensions in our research and academic community. Institutional support for attending and participating in conferences has dwindled. Funding for conference attendance has shrunk, if not disappeared, from many institutions. This creates barriers for many – not just junior researchers – and removes key opportunities for strengthening one's profile, widening professional networks, and setting the foundations for a successful career based on partnerships and collaborations. This is a challenge that is likely to grow, rather than decline, over the next few years. Many countries are experiencing increasing focus on assessment exercises which place little value on conference papers and presentations. Many academics are finding it impossible to obtain institutional funding for conference attendance, and this is unlikely to change. While nothing can replace the benefits of meeting face-to-face and having the time to discuss ideas, we need to explore more innovative approaches to sharing our work and collaborating with each other. Recent years have seen an increase in virtual conferences and the use of a range of technologies to facilitate knowledge sharing and interaction. As a discipline, we should be looking for ways to integrate these approaches into our work and increase our multi-disciplinary and multi-country collaborations.

About the papers in the special issue
The five papers that were selected for this special issue reflected some of the key themes we observed from the WSMC15 and in social marketing. Four of the five papers are first-authored by emerging researchers (junior/PhD researchers or ECRs) and represent collaborations between junior and senior researchers. This demonstrates the emergence of new ideas from the new voices in the field, reinforcing the need to invest in the future by supporting junior researchers and providing them with a platform to be heard. The papers in this special issue also represented collaborative efforts between academia and practice, with government and industry working in partnership with academic researchers in the various research projects discussed in four of these five papers. These collaborations demonstrate the efficacy of partnerships not only between junior and senior researchers, and between academia and industry, but also across disciplinary boundaries beyond marketing. These outcomes reinforce the need to invest in diverse collaborations to not only address complex societal problems, but to develop and progress the academic and research community.

In keeping with the standards of the *Journal of Social Marketing*, all submissions were desk-reviewed to ensure academic quality and consistency with the submission requirements of the journal. Submissions that were successful at this initial stage of review were then sent out for triple-blind peer review. As guest editors, we also sought to provide editorial direction to submitting authors based on our own reading of the submissions as well as the review feedback received.

The first paper (Kamin and Kokole) reflects a collaborative effort between academia and practice, and examines alcohol retailers' compliance with the minimum legal drinking age law in four cities in Slovenia. This study extends the growing body of social marketing research at the midstream level, an important growth area in social marketing. The authors identified an increase in the compliance rates of retailers between the pre- and post-intervention stages of a social marketing programme, but also a number of key dilemmas faced by retailers, arising out of a potential conflict between private and public interests.

The second paper (Mohiuddin, Gordon, Magee and Lee) is lead-authored by a junior researcher and PhD candidate, and examines the concept of "cool" and its use in social marketing through a cross-disciplinary literature search and review. The authors explain the efficacy of using cool in social change programmes, particularly in those that target young people, by identifying key characteristics of cool, allowing for the development of a conceptual framework of cool.

The third paper (Butler, Gordon, Rogeveen, Cooper and Waitt) is lead-authored by an emerging researcher, and this study takes an inter-disciplinary approach using public health, marketing, human geography, and engineering to tackle the complex social problem of energy efficiency amongst a vulnerable population in society. The study provides an empirical exploration of the concept of value-in-behaviour amongst older, low-income residents living in regional New South Wales, Australia, and their energy consumption practices. The authors found empirical evidence for value-in-behaviour, a concept recently introduced to the social marketing domain, and demonstrated the efficacy of using value theory in social marketing programmes through an understanding of social practices.

The fourth paper (Mitchell, Madill and Chreim) is lead-authored by another junior researcher and PhD candidate, and examines the growth of social enterprises – organisations engaging in for-profit activities to address social problems and achieve social change. Although addressing social concerns has traditionally fallen within the domain of government, not-for-profit, and other public sector organisations, the authors identify an important growth area in the social enterprises sector. The Canadian study conducted in Eastern Ontario examined the tensions experienced by social enterprises arising from the blending of social and economic interests within the same organisation, and identified four overlapping dualities that refer to strategic aspects of the organisations.

The final paper (Schuster, Kubacki and Rundle-Thiele) is lead-authored by an ECR and emerging scholar, and examines the effect of increased visibility of a desired behaviour on community norms. The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation's Walk to School (2013) programme in Australia was examined and evaluated, utilising a repeated measures, quasi-experimental design method. The authors found evidence for the efficacy of community-based social marketing in shaping social norms, which has traditionally been reliant on communications-based approaches.

Conclusion
To conclude this editorial, we would like to thank the many reviewers from around the world who took the time to read the papers submitted to this special issue and provided constructive feedback to the authors. Without their time, effort, and expertise, this special issue would not have been possible. We would also like to thank Sharyn Rundle-Thiele, Editor of the *Journal of Social Marketing*, for allowing us a special issue dedicated to the conference, for entrusting us with the guest editing of this special issue, and for her support and encouragement throughout this process. We would also like to acknowledge the contributions of the Emerald publishing team, in particular, Melissa Fojt, Jenny Chester, and Alison Hawker. Finally, we thank each of the authors in this special issue for their patience and cooperation throughout this process and for their interesting and thought-

provoking articles that not only push the boundaries of social marketing, but also signify a start in overcoming some of the tensions holding us back.

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Note

1. International Social Marketing Conference, available at: www.aasm.org.au/international-social-marketing-conference-2016/

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