



Dr Melissa (Liss) Brunner

Liss is a certified practising speech pathologist, lecturer at the University of Sydney, and an ECR internationally recognised in the fields of acquired brain injury (ABI), social communication, and digital health. From 2001-2014, Liss worked clinically in several different states around Australia, across a variety of settings (ranging from regional to metropolitan locations, and across public, private, inpatient and community settings).

Her doctoral research laid the necessary groundwork in understanding the complexity of the issues surrounding people with traumatic brain injury (TBI) using social media and how it may (or may not) be addressed during their rehabilitation. Liss's doctoral thesis was recognised on both The Chancellor's List (2020) and The Dean's HDR List (Faculty of Health, 2020) as being of 'the highest calibre' among all thesis submitted at the University of Technology Sydney in 2020. On completing her PhD in 2020, Liss was awarded a Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship in the ABI communication lab at the University of Sydney (2020-2023) and commenced in a full-time continuing lecturer role at the University of Sydney in 2023.

Liss's research projects have included observational, experimental, cohort, and multi-phased designs and incorporated quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Liss has successfully collaborated with diverse stakeholders across health, education, non-government, and advocacy sectors to improve communication, participation, and accessibility in healthcare. Liss developed the world's first self-directed social media skills training program for people with ABI called *social-ABI-lity*. The program was collaboratively designed with key stakeholders, piloted with people who have an ABI in 2021, and launched as a freely available self-directed online course in 2022.

Liss is a committee board member of speechBITE, a database of intervention studies to inform evidence-based practice across the scope of speech pathology; Conference Chair for Digital Health Week, a digital health and informatics conference jointly run by the University of Sydney, UNSW, and the University of Melbourne; and is on the Australasian Society for the Study of Brain Impairment Editorial Board (Social Media Editor) for the journal Brain Impairment.



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Dr Rachael Rietdijk

Dr Rachael Rietdijk is a certified practising speech pathologist and Lecturer at the University of Sydney, with research interests in acquired brain injury, communication partner training and digital health. Dr Rietdijk completed her PhD in 2020 and her work received the Peter Bancroft Prize for a thesis awarded without emendations within the Faculty of Medicine and Health at the University of Sydney. Her PhD research produced a new evidence-based intervention called TBIconneCT, which is the only communication skills program for people with TBI proven to be effective for use via telehealth. TBIconneCT is now used by clinicians

internationally in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

Dr Rietdijk was the project manager overseeing the development of the social brain toolkit from 2020 to 2022, which includes interact-ABI-lity, the first free evidence-based online program for family members, friends, or health professionals about how to communicate successfully with people with a brain injury. This program has reached over 1500 people from over 25 countries since it launched to the public in 2021. She continues to be involved as a collaborator across multiple projects including the Communication Connect NHMRC Ideas Grant (\$1.81M; 2021-2025) and the Communication for Safe Care NDIS Information, Linkages and Capacity Building grant (\$2.35M; 2021-2023).

Dr Rietdijk's research in the areas of brain injury and communication partner training is internationally recognised, with 24 publications and three book chapters. She is currently working with honours and higher degree research students to continue further projects investigating the use of digital health for communication partner training.

 Twitter: @RachaelReedake



Professor Leanne Togher

Professor Leanne Togher is a full professor at The University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia, and conjoint professor of allied health for the University of Sydney and western Sydney local health district, based at Westmead. Professor Togher holds a PhD in speech pathology, and is internationally recognised with more than 200 papers, 4 books and over 20 book chapters. She has attracted over AUD\$30 million in external national and international grant funding including consistent NHMRC funding since 2003. She was awarded the 2018 NHMRC Elizabeth Blackburn - Clinical Research Fellowship prize as the highest ranked female research fellow applicant in the field of Clinical Science and Medicine in the NHMRC

Fellowships scheme. Professor Togher has supervised more than 30 higher degree research students and more than 30 first class honours students to completion.

Professor Togher's communication treatments for people with brain injury and their families, carers, service providers and community agencies include [TBI Express](#), [TBI ConneCT](#) and the *Social Brain Toolkit*. She is Director of speechBITE.

Professor Togher is vice chair of the International Brain Injury Association and chair of Brain Injury Australia. Professor Togher is honorary professor at City University, London, UK, and Visiting Professor, Education University of Hong Kong, international board member for the journals board of ASHA (USA), chair of the editorial board for *Brain Impairment*, and editorial board member for numerous high-quality journals.

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