Professor Manuela Ferreira
BPhysio, MSc, PhD

Professor Manuela Ferreira is a globally recognised musculoskeletal health researcher, who leads an extensive program of research that has driven changes to the management of low back pain worldwide.

Professor Ferreira is NHMRC Research Fellow at the Kolling Institute and Professor, Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of Sydney.

She has published more than 215 papers, her work has been cited more than 15,800 times across at least 30 disciplines, and she is ranked second in the world for research impact in back pain.

In addition to researchers and clinicians from the Kolling Institute, NSLHD and the University of Sydney, she has collaborated with around 1600 researchers across Australia and internationally, and leads extensive research collaborations with the UK, US, Brazil, the Netherlands and Denmark.

Professor Ferreira's research is focused on evaluating the benefits of common treatments for low back pain, with the aim of improving management of a condition that is currently the main cause of disability worldwide and the number one reason for early retirement in Australia.

Her research has provided evidence that the most common pain medications for the low back pain (e.g., paracetamol, anti-inflammatory drugs, opioids) offer little or no benefit, resulting a shift in focus to exercise and self-management.

She has also quantified the risk of common work-related activities, fatigue and stress on the development of new episodes of low back pain and osteoarthritis – and debunked the myth that weather can affect pain in the back and joints.

This body of work has driven a global shift in the management of back pain over the past five years: it has informed guidelines in at least 19 countries, many of which have removed pharmacological management as first-line care for low back pain and now place greater emphasis on active treatments.

The findings shaped drug deprescribing guides for non-cancer pain in Australia and informed more than 16 international clinical decision-support tools and training resources on better use of analgesics for low back pain and osteoarthritis.

The research program also informed a global call to improve care of low back pain published in *The Lancet*.[1]

Professor Ferreria's research has also influenced the way in which surgical procedures are scientifically evaluated and how clinical trials are designed, conducted and reported.

Her world-first design of a placebo trial of lumbar decompression has been adopted in international recommendations for placebo trials of surgery, and her work on how results of clinical trials (i.e., effect sizes) should be interpreted using the patient's perspective has been adopted in cardiovascular and nutrition clinical trials globally.

1. What is low back pain and why we need to pay attention. Lancet. 2018;391:2356-2367.