

ProBrain Lab Research Update: CR-Ireland and SUSTAIN-CST Projects

Dr Michelle Kelly & Dr Caoimhe Hannigan
NCI Research Day, 18th June 2026

ProBrain (Promoting Brain Health in Ageing) Lab

- Established at NCI in 2022
- €63,000 in research funding – 3 funded projects
 - 2 x Research Ireland New Foundations Awards
 - Alzheimer's Society of Ireland Dementia Research Award
- Supervision of 1 PhD student, 1 postdoctoral researcher, 7 research assistants, 12 placement students
- 6 peer-reviewed publications, 4 manuscripts in press/preparation
- 14+ collaborators: NGO's, hospitals, universities (UK & Ire)
- Research featured in World Alzheimer Report 2025



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THE **Alzheimer**
SOCIETY OF IRELAND



Taighde Éireann
Research Ireland

Interventions for people living with dementia in Ireland

Cognitive rehabilitation (CR):

evidence-based intervention for people with early-stage dementia that improves behavioural and functional outcomes (Clare et al., 2019; Hindle et al., 2018)

- ✓ Individualized (1:1)
- ✓ Goal-based, person centered
- ✓ 8-10 sessions (~weekly) at home
- ✓ Carer involved

Cognitive stimulation therapy (CST):

evidence-based intervention that improves cognition and quality of life for people with mild-moderate dementia.

- ✓ Group-based
- ✓ 14 twice weekly sessions
- ✓ Themed activities
- ✓ Provides stimulation and engagement

Interventions for people living with dementia in Ireland

- Both CR and CST meet the demand for early interventions.
- Both are **recommended** in international guidelines and in the **HSE Model of Care for Dementia (2023)**
- **'Implementation gap'**: CR and CST are not widely available, often due to a lack of available staff and resources
- Our projects aim to **understand** this implementation gap (barriers and facilitators) and **evaluate innovative solutions to increase implementation**



The logo features a large blue circle containing the text 'CR Ireland Project' and 'ASI Dementia Research Award'. To the left of the circle is a series of five teal dashes of varying lengths, and at the bottom right of the circle is a small purple circle.

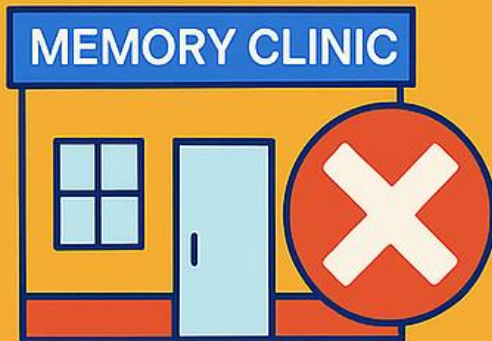
CR Ireland Project

ASI Dementia Research Award

Innovative Service Delivery Model for Cognitive Rehabilitation in Ireland

Limited Access to CR in Memory Services

- CR is under-delivered due to lack of staff/ resources
- Memory clinics want to offer it but can't



Trainee Psychologists Need Supervised Placements

- Demand for dementia placements
- Placements currently limited



Match Need with Need

- Trainees placed in memory clinics
- Supervised to deliver home-based CR
- People with dementia access supports





Cognitive Rehabilitation: What We Did & What Improved

Goals Targeted

- Everyday tasks: memory aids (calendar, Alexa, diary), household duties.
- Social interaction: calling/texting, Google Maps, face-name recall
- Meaningful activities: music, drawing, clubs, independent shopping

Programme Delivery

- 12 trained CR practitioners
- 36 PwD consented → 33 set goals → 27 completed CR



Outcomes

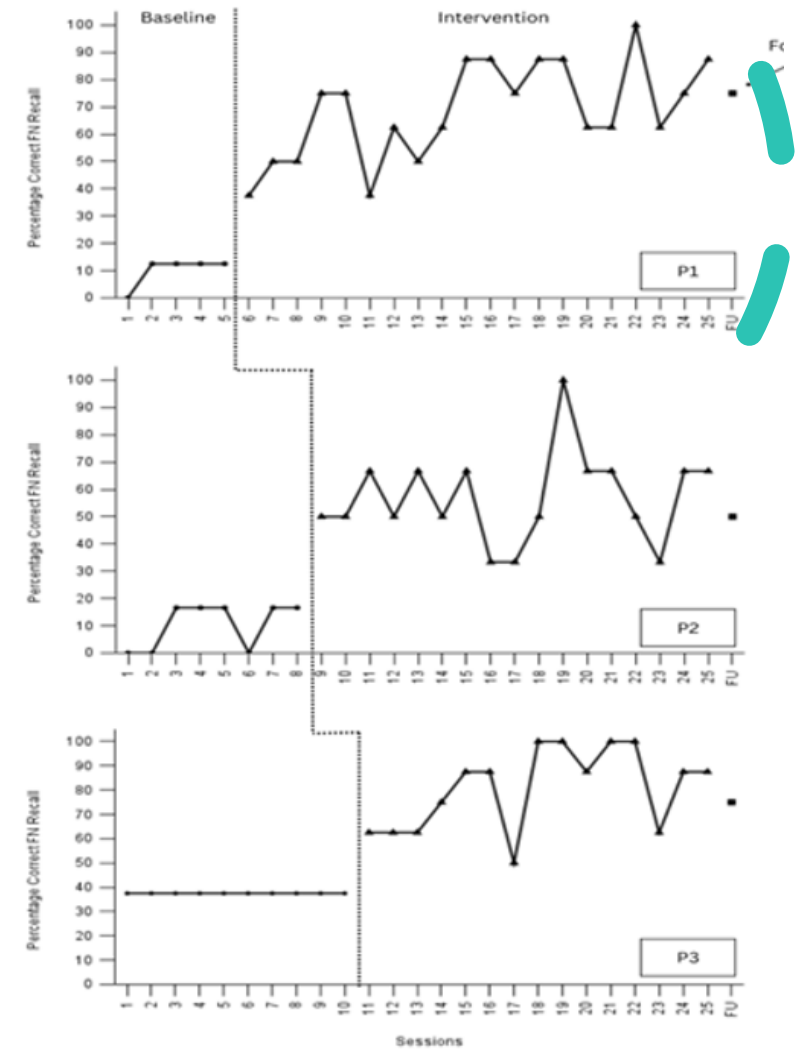
- Significant gains in goal attainment & satisfaction (all $p \leq .017$)
- Improvements maintained at follow-up

Face-Name Recall Study (Randomised N-of-1 MBD)

- Significant improvement T1→T2 ($p=.0208$; $d=7.96$)
- Accuracy increased from 10-37.5% to 56.9-80.8%
- Strong, consistent effects

Qualitative Findings (Sub-study 2)

- Interviews: 9 PwD, 9 family members, 5 students, 3 supervisors, 4 clinic staff
- PwD: greater awareness, confidence, motivation
- Families: improved daily functioning, independence, engagement
- Clinicians: CR is highly valuable but limited by availability



Identifying a novel pathway for the implementation of cognitive rehabilitation in Ireland

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FAB-CST and SUSTAIN-CST

Research Ireland New Foundations
Awards

What did we do?

Online survey with people trained to deliver CST (62 responses)

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graph TD; A[Online survey with people trained to deliver CST (62 responses)] --> B[Interviews with people living with dementia and family carers/loved ones (10 responses)]; B --> C[Interviews with healthcare professionals and policy professionals (10 responses)];
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Interviews with people living with dementia and family carers/loved ones (10 responses)

Interviews with healthcare professionals and policy professionals (10 responses)

Key Findings

- Over half of those who complete training do not deliver CST.
- Positive attitude to CST across all groups – evidence base crucial.
- Increased awareness and more accessible information is needed.
- PwD desperately want additional support at an early stage.
- Lack of resources – staff, funding, space, time – key barriers.



Cognitive Stimulation Therapy for People Living with Dementia

An evaluation of facilitators and barriers
to intervention delivery in Ireland

Summary Report: Study Findings

Awareness and Information

Staffing and Resources

Training

Coordination and Ownership

Research



NEXT STEPS



Taighde Éireann
Research Ireland

- Mapped findings to 23 suggested implementation activities (CFIR).
- National Dementia Office – Special Interest Group on CST Implementation.

SUSTAIN-CST

- Scoping exercise – evaluate the current status of CST.
- Evaluate implementation plan at pilot sites.



Thank you

Any
questions?

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