

Natasha Berthold BBiomedSci (Hons)

PhD student, The University of Western Australia &
The Perron Institute, & Visiting Scholar,
University of North Carolina's Centre of Excellence
for Eating Disorders, **North Carolina, USA**

Natasha Berthold is a PhD student at The University of Western Australia and the Perron Institute researching the genetics of eating disorders.

She graduated from the University of Notre Dame Australia with a Bachelor of Biomedical Sciences. Her First-class Honours thesis investigated the role of short, structural genetic variants in anorexia nervosa.

In 2022, she undertook a summer fellowship at the University of North Carolina's Centre of Excellence for Eating Disorders. In 2023 she received a grant from

The Perron Institute to conduct a year's research at University of Otago Christchurch, New Zealand, using nanopore sequencing to explore anorexia nervosa genetics.

Natasha is currently completing the final year of her PhD as a visiting scholar at the University of North Carolina's Centre of Excellence for Eating Disorders, as part of the 2024 Quad Fellowship program by the Institute of International Education.

Here, she is working on the Eating Disorders Genetics Initiative (EDGI) 2 – the world's largest genetic investigation of eating disorders ever performed, that aims to identify the hundreds of genes that influence a person's risk of developing the complex, devastating illnesses of anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge-eating disorder and avoidant restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID), to improve treatment, and ultimately, save lives.

She is working with EDGI2 Global Investigator, Professor Cynthia Bulik, and the US EDGI2 team in recruitment for EDGI2 and initial data analysis for EDGI.

EDGI2 follows the ground-breaking advances made in the initial EDGI investigation and collaborative Anorexia Nervosa Genetics Initiative (ANGI), in which researchers, including the EDGI team, identified the first genetic risk loci for anorexia nervosa that implicate both psychiatric and metabolic causes for the condition. This finding was only the beginning, and it is imperative to continue to expand genetics research for ALL eating disorders – hence the need for a much larger sample size, which is the aim of EDGI2.

With first-hand experience of an eating disorder, Natasha is passionate about increasing understanding of psychiatric disorders to help develop personalised therapies.



"All eating disorders can significantly impact the physical health and quality of life of people affected by them.

"By including anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge-eating disorder and avoidant restrictive food intake disorder in EDGI2, we can better understand the similarities and differences to guide both intervention and prevention," said Natasha.

"One of the main goals of EDGI2 is to look at genes *and* environment. In eating disorders, genetics is a big player, but it's not deterministic.

"So by getting detailed questionnaire information from lived experience participants, we can start to understand how these different factors work together in eating disorders in lots of different people," Natasha said.

"Science has repeatedly saved me from my own eating disorder. It's given me hope for the future of eating disorder prevention and treatment.

"I now want the research, like EDGI2, that I get to be involved in, to give others affected by these terrible conditions that same hope," said Natasha.

To volunteer for the EDGI2, head to edgi.org.au or email edgi2@qimrberghofer.edu.au.

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To coordinate an interview with Natasha Berthold, please contact:

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