

Dance Movement Therapy and Mild Cognitive Impairment: Exploring Mind–Body Connection to support cognitive and emotional well-being.



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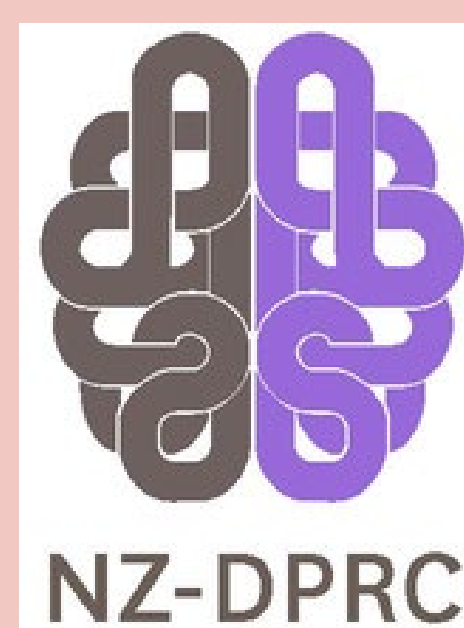
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(Photo: A dance movement therapist in Italy leads a session in a museum. Used with permission.)

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Background:

Mild cognitive impairment (MCI) is recognised as a diagnostic entity where individuals experience greater memory or thinking difficulties than expected for their age. It is considered a **transitional stage between normal ageing and dementia, particularly Alzheimer's disease**. Most people with MCI remain independent, though those with additional health conditions may need professional support. Although progression to dementia cannot be fully prevented, research shows that addressing modifiable lifestyle factors can reduce risk, delay onset, or slow progression. In some cases, symptoms remain stable or improve with therapy. **Family involvement** is important for monitoring daily functioning, supporting adherence to interventions, and addressing psychosocial impacts. **Dance movement therapy (DMT)** is emerging as a promising non-pharmacological intervention for people with neurodegenerative diseases.

Research question:

Can DMT be an effective intervention for individuals living with MCI and their families?

Our research aims

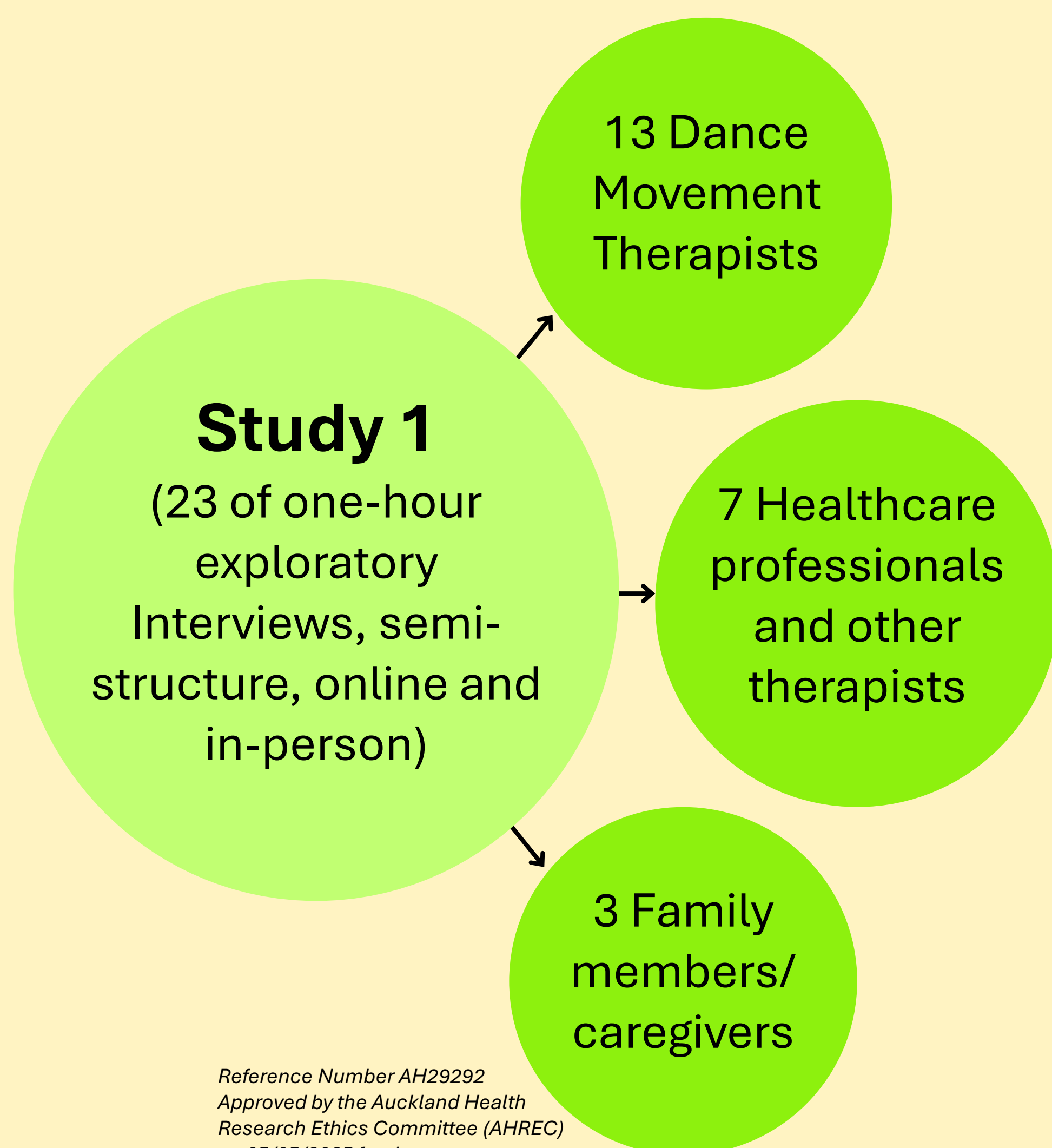
- to design a DMT pilot programme for individuals living with MCI in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and
- to examine the effectiveness of this programme while also addressing the relational care for family members and caregivers' involvement.

Research Methodologies:

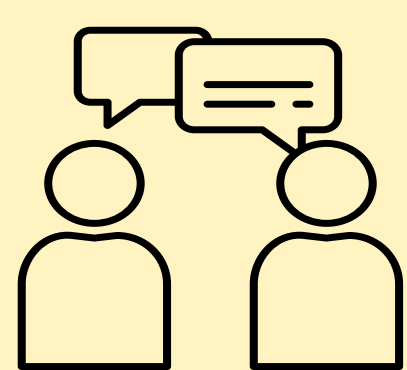
Our research is a staged project that uses various methodologies. We conducted a scoping review in 2025 and found no results that met our selection criteria. We are currently completing an exploratory qualitative study (Study 1).

Analysis of Study 1:

NVivo 14 for coding and Thematic Analysis with an inductive (reflexive) approach.



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Approved by the Auckland Health
Research Ethics Committee (AHREC)
on 05/05/2025 for three years.



Preliminary results of Study 1:

Potential **Theme 1**: How do dance movement therapists work with cognitive impairment?

Potential **Theme 2**: Recreation and Leisure

Potential **Theme 3**: What does cognitive decline look like in a person?

Potential **Theme 4**: Do we meet the needs?

Want to know more about the project? I will present in person on Day 2, Stream B

Sub-theme 1a: Music, dance and movement are a great combination

Sub-theme 1b: Repetition, Mirroring, and Creativity

Sub-theme 2a: Everyday activities, Exercise and Excursion

Sub-theme 3a: Masking and diagnostic

Sub-theme 3b: Managing strategies

Sub-theme 3c: Cautious of talking about the changes

Sub-theme 4a: Lives must continue

Conclusions: A DMT intervention tailored for people with MCI should establish clear guidelines, principles, and protocols for achieving clinical goals (e.g., supporting verbal memory and abstract thinking). Specific testing measures for cognitive function and quality of life should be included.

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