

The MECSH Evaluation Project

PhD and Master of Research Opportunities

INFORMATION SHEET

1. Background

The Centre for Child Development and Education (CCDE) is a division of the Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies). The Strong Parents and Children research program at CCDE aims to investigate the effectiveness of programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and their children. As part of this program of work, the Centre conducts applied research which aims to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of maternal and child health services in remote communities.

2. The research program

The MECSH evaluation project is funded by the Northern Territory Government Department of Health from 2019-2024 and includes researchers at Menzies/CCDE and the College of Indigenous Futures, Arts and Society (CIFAS) at Charles Darwin University.

MECSH is an evidence-based program of sustained nurse home visiting intended for mothers from pregnancy through their child's third year. It is being implemented by four remote Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, Miwatj Aboriginal Health; Katherine West Health Board; Sunrise Health Aboriginal Corporation and Anyingingyi Health Aboriginal Corporation. It is a complex program involving development of systems of nursing practice, collaboration with social care workers and Aboriginal community-based practitioners and the formation of partnerships between practitioners, parents and their families.

The evaluation project will investigate a number of areas of the MECSH program and maternal and child health services, including the implementation and delivery of MECSH services, the long and short term outcomes for children, the perspectives of mothers and their families and the cultural context of delivery of a safe and effective service. The evaluation aims to develop reports and methods that can contribute to ongoing quality assurance initiatives for use by health services.

3. Project opportunities

We aim to support Indigenous and non-Indigenous early-career researchers to carry out innovative, collaborative, outcomes-focused work in partnership with Indigenous people. The program will involve a range of project opportunities and methods of investigation ranging from epidemiological research, to evaluation of quality of care and qualitative inquiry. Candidates involved in community-based research will work in partnership with community-based researchers to engage parents and community practitioners and to gather data. They will work with senior Investigators to build the capacity of community personnel through training and other support.

Project opportunities for PhD and/or Masters by Research candidates are outlined below. We encourage the design and development of additional projects consistent with MECSH evaluation project's main areas of research:

1. To investigate the implementation of MECSH in the context of existing maternal and well child healthcare in participating services and communities
2. To investigate medium- and long-term health and developmental outcomes for mothers and their children.
3. To understand the perspectives of mothers and their families and their experiences and understanding of birth, care and the parenting of small children and their responses to healthcare services received.

4. Scholarship opportunities

The candidate will be encouraged to seek scholarship funding through the Charles Darwin University Research Training Program Scholarship (RTP) scheme or from other sources for the duration of their candidature.

A successful candidate who is a recipient of a primary scholarship such as RTP scholarship, may also be eligible for a top-up scholarship valued at \$9,000 p.a. Top-up scholarships will be offered for the duration of the primary scholarship, for the maximum 3.5 years FTE for PhD, or maximum 2 years FTE for Master by Research. All candidates are also eligible to receive up to \$3,500 p.a. in student support funds which can be utilised for the direct cost of research. In addition to the financial provisions of the award, candidates will benefit from a range of professional development opportunities throughout their tenure (e.g. writing and research design workshops, travel & training support).

For further information regarding eligibility and application process for RTP scholarships please contact Jasmina Sesar at researchdegrees@menzies.edu.au.

5. Eligibility

Applicants must be enrolled in, or satisfy the admission requirements for entry to a PhD program or Masters by Research at Charles Darwin University.

Candidates must first contact the NT MECOSH evaluation project leader. Either a primary supervisor or an associate supervisor must be a Chief Investigators of the NT MECOSH Evaluation Project. Shortlisted applicants will be interviewed.

Candidates must be a citizen or permanent resident of Australia

- Part-time candidature may be acceptable with negotiation
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates are strongly encouraged to apply.

6. Application process

Applicants should submit the following:

- Completed application form
- Current CV
- Copies of certified academic transcripts
- Proof of Residency (not required for Australian citizens)
- Copy of submitted PhD or Masters by Research Candidature Application or proof of enrolment

For further information, including contacts for CIs can be obtained by contacting the MECOSH Evaluation Project Coordinator, Danielle Aquino at danielle.aquino@menzies.edu.au

7. Project Areas

Title	Project Summary	Supervisors
1. Parents' perspectives on child development, parenting and care: the social and cultural context of maternal and infant care in remote communities.	The MECOSH program of nurse home visiting is being implemented for Aboriginal mothers in remote communities. The Evaluation will investigate determinants of outcomes of care for mothers and their babies in the social and cultural context of remote NT communities. This project will involve qualitative or mixed methods of investigation to understand the social and cultural context and determinants of parenting and its contribution to children's development and early learning. The	Prof Gary Robinson Prof Ruth Wallace Dr Anita D'Aprano

	project will involve work with community-based research associates in multiple communities. It will study experiences of remote Aboriginal mothers during pregnancy and childbirth, their use of maternal and child health services, understandings of child development and social and cultural influences on parenting. Mixed methods using formal questionnaires, exploratory focus groups or structured interviews are proposed.	
2. Supporting maternal and infant health in remote communities: Capacity-building for improved outcomes	This project will be located within the framework of the evaluation of the MECSH program of sustained nurse home visiting for Aboriginal mothers and their infants in remote communities. It will investigate determinants of processes of capacity building to support the MECSH program in remote NT communities and the development of specific elements of the model of care: for example, the roles of MECSH Nurses, Social Care Practitioners, and Aboriginal Community practitioners in engagement and delivery of quality services. It will involve qualitative or mixed methods of investigation of the outcomes of training and support for practitioners and the determinants of successful engagement of remote Aboriginal mothers during pregnancy and after the birth of their children.	Prof Gary Robinson Prof Ruth Wallace
3. Epidemiological study of outcomes of maternal and infant healthcare in four remote regions of the NT	This project will be located within the framework of the evaluation of the MECSH program of sustained nurse home visiting for Aboriginal mothers and their infants in remote communities. It will be responsible for quantitative investigation of outcomes of the implementation of the MECSH program in remote NT communities utilising health services and administrative data from multiple sources. It may contribute to mixed methods investigation of specific components of the MECSH program evaluation. Depending on timing of commencement, there are opportunities in at least two study areas: 1. Study of the first years of MECSH implementation (2020-2023), investigating program implementation, participant characteristics, health service utilisation, and key indicators of maternal and child health outcomes; 2. Data linkage study of medium- and longer-term outcomes of maternal and child healthcare before and during implementation of the MECSH program from 2013-2023.	Prof Steve Guthridge Prof John Condon
4. A study of fathers' roles and contribution to child development in NT remote communities	There have been many disruptions to the role of fathers in Aboriginal communities, and today, fatherhood is characterised by great uncertainty. External family services are most likely to engage fathers in respect of problems like family violence, substance misuse, etc., but offer little to enhance father's wellbeing and to build their capacity as	Prof Gary Robinson

	<p>parents. In many remote communities there is interest in re-envisioning fatherhood and strengthening fathers' pride and confidence in their role, partly by reclaiming a sense of tradition, and partly by building new strengths, especially with respect to the capacities of young men as fathers.</p> <p>Menzies and CDU are currently evaluating the MECSH program of maternal and early childhood services in remote communities in the East Arnhem, Big Rivers and the Barkly regions. This project will be undertaken in collaboration with the MECSH evaluation in some of the participating communities. It will explore fathers' role in parenting and family wellbeing with a particular emphasis on young fathers, their relations with partners and their contribution to raising their children. Factors affecting fathers' wellbeing and influencing their parental role, their relations with partners and effects on early child development can be explored. The project may include quantitative research, including analysis of healthcare data and some use of surveys or questionnaires linked to sampling within the larger evaluation project. However, it is to be anticipated that the process of community engagement and development of qualitative strategies including conversation and participant observation over time will form a substantial component of this project.</p>	
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