MENZIES HEALTHLAB: EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES TO TAKE OWNERSHIP OF THEIR HEALTH

PARTNERSHIP SOUGHT: $286,000 OVER 18 MONTHS

Menzies HealthLAB is an innovative and interactive educational experience combining the use of modern technology to measure an individual’s biomedical risk factors for chronic disease in a mobile “pop-up” laboratory.

Test results and immediate and long-term health implications will be explained to the participant in detail, at the point of measurement by the Menzies clinical coordinator and trained staff. The laboratory has the capacity to visit off-campus Darwin and Alice Springs areas, rural and remote Northern Territory schools and Indigenous communities.

Real-time engagement on a personal level has proven to successfully influence healthy lifestyle choices that positively affect immediate and long-term personal health and, in time achieve improved generational health outcomes.

HealthLAB is for all Territorians but will have special programs for youth and Indigenous people; aiming to help them make positive lifestyle decisions as well as encouraging them to take ownership of their own health.

THE NEED

- Currently there are no NT programs targeting youth to ensure they make informed decisions at a time of establishing their lifestyle behaviours.

- Chronic diseases are the leading cause of illness and disability in Australia accounting for 90 per cent of all deaths. Diabetes and heart disease alone cost the health system more than $6 billion each year and Indigenous Australians are three times more likely to report having diabetes than non-Indigenous Australians.

- Maternal smoking causes low birth weight with risk of later chronic disease. Alcohol consumption during pregnancy increases the risk of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

- Of the Australian population aged 12-24 years – one third are overweight or obese, less than half meet the recommended National Physical Activity Guidelines, 11 per cent smoke daily and 30 per cent drink alcohol at risky levels in the short term with 12 per cent involved with long-term, high-risk consumption.

- The obesity prevalence is 50 per cent higher for Indigenous Australians compared to non-Indigenous Australians; 62 per cent of Indigenous people in non-remote areas report being physically inactive, 43 per cent report eating an adequate amount of fruit, only 5 per cent report eating an adequate amount of vegetables each day.

- More than 40% report smoking on a daily basis and over 50% of Indigenous women smoke throughout pregnancy.

PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY

HealthLAB enables face-to-face interactions between the participants, clinical coordinator and trained staff at various hands on workstations around the fixed core themes of obesity, diabetes, alcohol literacy and smoking. Each workstation will assess a participant’s own health relating to these themes using modern technology.

Measures like total body fat percentage, oxygen saturation, blood pressure and grip strength are offered. Some measures such as for blood glucose and cholesterol will be dependant on the age of visitors. The test results and immediate and long-term health implications will be explained to the participant in detail, at the point of measurement by the clinical coordinator and trained staff.

A successful pilot program launched in 2014 as a part of National Science Week engaged more than 750 Territorians who conducted their own health tests to find out what the results meant for their general wellbeing. Feedback received throughout the various events was overwhelming with 96 per cent of those surveyed saying the workshop had helped them better understand their health.

Three programs have been designed for specific populations focussing on lifestyle choices and their consequences.

1. A secondary school program, targeting Year 10 students will be developed in collaboration with the NT Department of Education.

2. A community population program will be delivered in public spaces, in Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs, rural towns and communities, sporting clubs, business corporations and public events.

3. An extended program for Indigenous communities with additional themes at workstations highlighting the importance of hygiene and consequences of infections which disproportionately affect these populations. A ‘meet the Indigenous scientist and the Indigenous doctor’ opportunity will be incorporated into this program.
The HealthLAB will translate Menzies research knowledge into action and improved health. It will fill a void in public health education in the Northern Territory for specific population groups and have positive short-term impacts on health outcomes and potentially over the entire life course. By ensuring the wider community, particularly young and Indigenous people, are fully informed about all the health implications of the lifestyle choices they make, and supporting them to take ownership of their health, HealthLAB will empower them to make healthy lifestyle decisions for better outcomes in the future.

Through these HealthLAB activities we seek to deliver the following outcomes:

1. To increase awareness in the community about the health consequences of lifestyle choices made today on an individual’s later personal health and the health of their children yet to be born.

2. To change behaviours linked to smoking, alcohol and the development of obesity and diabetes.

3. To immediately improve the health and wellbeing of the population, and in the long-term, decrease the adult onset of chronic disease and improve the health of the next generation.

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