

\$3.5 million granted to improve diabetes care for First Nations youth

Under embargo
30 October 2023

Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) has received funding to improve clinical care, support and education provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people living with type 2 diabetes (T2D).

The Menzies-led Diabetes across the Lifecourse: Northern Australia Partnership (the Partnership) was awarded more than \$2.5 million through the Medical Research Future Fund's Indigenous Health Research Fund. The grant is to enhance T2D management among First Nations youth in remote Northern Australia over the next 4 years.

The Partnership's lead [Associate Professor Renae Kirkham](#) is the Chief Investigator for the project, 'Multi-pronged approach to enhance type 2 diabetes management among First Nations youth in remote Northern Australia'.

The Partnership will implement and evaluate culturally safe models of diabetes screening and care. The focus will be on mental health, wellbeing and improved diabetes management for 10 to 24-year-old First Nations youth. The work will take place in 3 remote regions in Far North Queensland and the Northern Territory's Big Rivers and Central Australia regions.

The models of care work will focus on:

- the best ways to screen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people for T2D.
- better recognising the complex needs of young people living with T2D, including mental health challenges.
- growing the skills and capacity of primary health staff to support young people.
- better ways to care for young people immediately after a diagnosis of T2D to improve diabetes management and reduce hospitalisation.

Menzies has also been awarded more than \$995,000 through the Australian Government's Targeted Translation Research Accelerator program for Diabetes and Cardiovascular Disease, delivered by MTPConnect. This is for the 'Doing it together' project and the Chief Investigator is [Dr Angela Titmuss](#).

This project will develop innovative, co-designed peer-support and peer-led education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people living with T2D in the Northern Territory's Big Rivers region over 2 years.

Both projects recognise the importance of First Nations-led research. They highlight the need for governance structures and partnerships that enable First Nations people to have genuine decision-making responsibility in all research. The projects will consider the mental health challenges faced by many young people living with type 2 diabetes. Poor mental health negatively impacts primary healthcare service engagement, diabetes management, overall health and wellbeing, and life expectancy.

Menzies' research teams will work with a range of partners and communities for the projects. These partners include a number of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services such as Wurli Wurlinjang Health Service, Katherine West Health Service and Gurriny Yealamuka Health Service, as well as government organisations.

These funding announcements come as the Partnership prepares to host its 12th Annual Educational Symposium on Friday 3 November 2023. This will see more than 140 healthcare professionals and researchers converge both in Darwin, at satellite sites in Alice Springs and Cairns, and online to discuss diabetes and mental health.

This event will highlight the latest updates in diabetes research as well as insights from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members with lived experience of successful diabetes management and mental health challenges.

More information on Menzies' diabetes work is available [here](#).

Quotes attributable to Menzies School of Health Research Principal Research Fellow and Chief Investigator [Associate Professor Renae Kirkham](#):

"First Nations Australian youth have the highest prevalence of youth onset type 2 diabetes in the world, especially in Central Australia. It is 20 times higher than non-Indigenous Australian youth.

"We're in the midst of a type 2 diabetes epidemic and this project is a continuation of our current work and also developed in response to requests from clinicians, communities and partner organisations to prioritise research that enhances the culturally safe and clinically effective management of youth type 2 diabetes in our regions.

"The findings of the Partnership's research will help to optimise earlier diagnosis and the delivery of culturally appropriate and clinically effective care of First Nations youth living with type 2 diabetes.

"It aims to address the priorities of First Nations people to improve social and emotional wellbeing and diabetes outcomes for this very high-risk group of youth in remote Australia."

Quotes attributable to Menzies School of Health Research Senior Research Fellow and Chief Investigator, [Dr Angela Titmuss](#):

"The 'Doing it Together' project grew from the work that Menzies has already been doing across northern Australia regarding youth-onset type 2 diabetes.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have the highest prevalence of type 2 diabetes in the world however young people, communities and health services have clearly told us that current models of care struggle to meet their needs or improve health outcomes.

"This project aims to draw on the strengths, skills and capacity of young people living with type 2 diabetes to overcome the shame, stigma and isolation that many feel.

"We know that young people have skills and capacity as agents of change and support to each other and we want to build on these strengths."

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Menzies School of Health Research



Menzies is one of Australia's leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and a leader in global and tropical research into life-threatening illnesses. Menzies continues to translate research into effective partnerships and programs in communities across Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.