

Funding 'REACT'ion: Menzies PhD student receives NHMRC Scholarship

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A prestigious National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) scholarship has been recently awarded to Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) PhD student, Dr Emma Smith, to tackle tuberculosis (TB) in the Top End.

The NHMRC Postgraduate Scholarship supports exceptional graduates to develop their capability for independent research and pursue their objectives to address some of Australia's biggest health challenges.

Dr Smith's PhD research, called 'Remote Aboriginal Communities Ending Tuberculosis' (REACT) will begin in early 2024. It will be a collaboration with Mala'la Aboriginal Health Service, Sunrise Aboriginal Health Service, the Northern Territory Centre of Disease Control and participating Top End remote communities, aiming to reduce the impact of TB.

This project will see Dr Smith and the research team work closely with individuals, families and communities that have been affected by TB. The work will focus on how to help increase TB prevention, improve screening and diagnostic testing and build primary health services' capacity for patient-centered care of TB.

TB is an infectious disease, caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. It's spread by inhaling the bacteria, which causes an infection that can damage the lungs or other parts of the body.

TB is one of the leading infectious causes of death worldwide and remains a condition of public health importance in the Northern Territory, where it still causes severe disease, life-long lung disability and preventable deaths.

With a scholarship of \$140,000 over 3 years, Dr Smith, an infectious disease physician will be supervised by the following researchers:

- Menzies School of Health Research – Professor Anna Ralph
- Menzies School of Health Research – Dr Chris Lowbridge
- Menzies School of Health Research – Associate Professor Jane Davies
- Burnet Institute Tuberculosis Elimination and Implementation Science Working Group – Dr Philipp du Cros.

Quotes attributable to Menzies School of Health Research PhD Student, Dr Emma Smith:

“While overall incidence of tuberculosis in Australia is low, TB still remains a preventable cause of disability and death among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, highlighting that more work needs to be done to close the gap.

“This project aims to put communities and those who have experienced TB at the heart of our work, empowering people to help shape the way the disease is managed.

“Through supporting health services to improve diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of TB in remote communities, we will strive to reduce the impacts of this preventable infectious disease.”

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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.