

## Condolence Statement – Dr M Yunupingu

Monday, 3 June 2013

The staff and students at Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) offer their deepest condolences to the Yunupingu family on the passing of Dr M Yunupingu.

The achievements of this great Australian educator and musician will continue to inspire the work of those across the country who seek to 'Close the Gap' in Indigenous disadvantage.

Dr Yunupingu was patron of Menzies' Centre for Child Development and Education, and his partner Gurruwun worked at Menzies for two years as an educator and a researcher.

Director of Menzies, Professor Alan Cass described Dr Yunupingu's passing as a tragedy.

"The nation has lost a remarkable man. Dr Yunupingu was the first Aboriginal person from Arnhemland to gain a university degree, taking a Bachelor of Arts (Education) from Deakin University.

"He was one of the pioneering leaders in Aboriginal education in the Northern Territory and had national impact through his championing the ideas of 'both-ways' learning and reconciliation.

Prof Cass had the privilege of spending time with Dr Yunupingu and his family as he received dialysis treatment for kidney disease.

"His commitment to health education is demonstrated by his generous agreement to allow us to film his story to raise awareness about kidney health."

Prof Cass said Dr Yunupingu's passing is a stark reminder that as a nation we still have a lot to do in 'Closing the Gap' in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

"Dr M Yunupingu's was only 56 years old, like so many Indigenous Australians dying too young.

"He was passionate to educate his community about preventing kidney disease, for which Indigenous Australians are eight times more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to need dialysis treatment.

"He wanted his own experiences and understanding to be shared with others to stop the devastating impact on families, especially when people need to leave their communities to receive dialysis treatment in urban centres hundreds of kilometres away."

Prof Cass recalled the words of Yolngu researcher Elaine Maypilama (Lawurrpa), who said Dr Yunupingu's actions in influencing change gave Yolngu people 'dignity, authority and power'.

As a songwriter and musician he brought contemporary Indigenous culture to the world with the Yothu Yindi band.

In 1998, he was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of the University (DUniv) by the Queensland University of Technology, "in recognition of his significant contribution to the education of Aboriginal children, and to greater understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians."

The first Indigenous principal of Yirrkala Community School, Dr Yunupingu was also the pioneer of 'both-ways' learning, which is centred around respecting Western and Indigenous culture and both ways of learning .

Dr Yunupingu recognised that good health and wellbeing starts in the early years, and identified the critical importance of young people being strong in their cultural identity.

Staff at Menzies were honoured last year when Dr Yunupingu agreed to be the patron of the Centre for Child Development and Education. He gave the Centre advice and support to advance community understanding and action to improve the health and education outcomes of Indigenous children and young people.

Prof Cass said that with Dr Yunupingu's passing "Australia has lost a great leader, and his family has lost a loving father and mentor."

"Our thoughts go to his partner Gurruwun Yunupingu, Dr Yunupingu's children, and his extended family."

**Director of Menzies, Professor Alan Cass**

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**Background:** Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) are Australia's only Medical Research Institute dedicated to improving Indigenous health and wellbeing. We have a 27-year history of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies work at the frontline and collaborate broadly, partnering with over 60 Indigenous communities across Northern Australia to create resources, grow local skills, and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.