

## **Menzies supports release of new National Indigenous Suicide Strategy**

23 May 2013

Indigenous suicide prevention experts from the Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) have welcomed the Australian Government's new National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy released today.

Last year Menzies, Australia's only Medical Research Institute whose major focus is improving Indigenous health and wellbeing, conducted research and national consultations on behalf of the Australian Government's Department of Health and Ageing to underpin and shape the Strategy.

In partnership with the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), more than 500 people were consulted from all states and territories, and over 50 submissions were received.

Leading Indigenous suicide prevention researcher Professor Sven Silburn congratulated the Australian Government for progressing the Strategy to help reduce the distressingly high rates of suicide in Indigenous communities around Australia.

"The Australian Government has shown courage and leadership by releasing the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy and committing the level of funding it has. This is a great outcome for the many Indigenous families and communities that have been devastated by suicide.

"During our national consultation there was strong resolve on the part of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who attended the sessions to apply themselves to the problem and work hard to develop answers to the scourge of Indigenous suicide," Prof Silburn said.

Importantly, this strategy has been informed by evidence so that individuals and communities are able to build on their existing strengths and improve the effectiveness of suicide prevention endeavors.

Prof Silburn said the Strategy represents a paradigm shift in the way Indigenous suicide prevention is being approached.

"It has a holistic approach which aims to facilitate a more community-focused and integrated approach to prevention. It also commits the Government to better engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in developing local, culturally appropriate strategies to identify and respond to those most at risk," he said.

"Importantly it recognises new evidence regarding the biological effects on the child's developing brain of high levels of family stress and disadvantage. This has a much greater long-term effect on subsequent rates of youth and adult suicide than previously recognised.

"This is especially relevant for highly disadvantaged Northern Territory communities where far too many children are exposed to damaging levels of stress and neglect."

However, Prof Silburn said the good news is that research also shows that investments in strengthening Indigenous early child development through parent-child programs to improve skills in parenting, and age 3 preschool and family support programs like Families as First Teachers really can make a difference.

"Such programs not only benefit children doing better at school, they also can substantially reduce the

number of children who end up with mental health and behavior problems that put them at risk of suicide when they are teenagers and young adults.”

**Interviews:** Interviews are available today with Professor Sven Silburn, Indigenous suicide researcher and Director of the Centre for Child Development and Education. Prof Silburn has a 25 year history of research in suicide prevention was previously a member of the National Suicide Prevention Advisory Council. He chaired the WA Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention from 2000-2008 and was responsible for leading the community consultations and development of the \$16million WA Suicide Prevention Strategy 2009-14.

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**Further Information:**

The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy* is available here:

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-pub-atsi-suicide-prevention-strategy>

The Australian Government release is available here:

[http://www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/DE9C3D24FD15611ACA257B73007B551E/\\$File/MB036.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/DE9C3D24FD15611ACA257B73007B551E/$File/MB036.pdf)

Background media releases on the consultation to inform the strategy is available here:

<http://www.menzies.edu.au/sites/menzies.edu.au/files/file/media%20releases%202012/National%20consultations%20seek%20answers%20to%20Indigenous%20suicide%20MR%20August%208%202012.pdf>

<http://menzies.edu.au/node/54961>

Background on Menzies research in Indigenous Suicide:

<http://ccde.menzies.edu.au/our-projects/suicide-prevention-research>

**Background**

Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) is 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.