

## Indigenous kidney specialist named NT's Young Tall Poppy

**Monday, 29 October 2012**

Australia's first Indigenous kidney specialist has been announced as the Northern Territory's Young Tall Poppy as part of the recent 2012 NT Research and Innovation Awards.

Dr Jaqui Hughes, a Research Fellow with the Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) in Darwin, was named the NT's premier young researcher for 2012 for her forward-thinking approach to Indigenous health research.

As Australia's first Indigenous nephrologist, Dr Hughes is working towards reducing the risk and impact of kidney disease in Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

"The death rates from kidney disease are 8 to 10 times higher among Indigenous Australians, who are also 14 times more likely to need in-hospital care for kidney dialysis," Dr Hughes said.

With obesity and diabetes key drivers of kidney disease in Indigenous Australia, Dr Hughes' research has focused on body composition.

"Indigenous Australians tend to accumulate fat around their mid-sections, rather than other areas of the body which could greatly influence kidney function," Dr Hughes said.

Dr Hughes, a Torres Strait Islander, began a PhD on the topic and has recently submitted the complete work for examination.

"My research with Menzies showed that young, healthy adult Aborigines develop a very high risk pattern of intra-abdominal fat while only modestly overweight, which is not seen in people with a European background," Dr Hughes says.

"Controlling weight gain in this age group should be a priority because it may save people from developing diabetes and kidney disease, or prevent a heart attack before they reach the age of 40."

Dr Hughes' win marks the second time in a three year period a Menzies researcher has won the award, with Dr Kate Mounsey named the NT's Young Tall Poppy in 2010.

Another Menzies project was also in the spotlight on the evening with former staff member, Anne Hanning taking out the McArthur River Mining Indigenous Innovation Award for her lead role in the project, *Your Child, Your community: it's just so important*.

Ms Hanning worked closely with Menzies' Professor Sven Silburn and Bonnie Moss in the cultural adaptation of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) for use with Indigenous children. Her innovative use of Indigenous art in a workshop process for communities to discuss their AEDI results and what they can do in supporting early child development has now been used in Indigenous communities throughout the Territory and elsewhere in Australia.

Menzies' Dr Louise Maple-Brown was also named a finalist in the Southern Cross Television Tropical Knowledge Research Award for her research program into diabetes and chronic kidney disease.

**Media contact: Richmond Hodgson**

communications@menzies.edu.au; 08 8922 8598; 0447 275 415

## **Background**

Menzies School of Health Research is a national and Asia-Pacific leader in tropical health research. It is the only medical research institute in the Northern Territory. Menzies has more than 300 staff and students working in central northern and central Australia, as well as low and middle-income countries across the Asia-Pacific region. Menzies is also a significant contributor to health education and research training in tropical Australia and neighbouring countries.