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Jessica Mauboy sings out to end Indigenous diabetes and heart disease epidemic

Singer Jessica Mauboy is calling for Darwin-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women to complete a quick survey as part of the *Diabetes and Related Conditions in Urban Indigenous People in the Darwin Region (DRUID)* study, a ground-breaking diabetes and heart disease study.

The DRUID study, conducted by the Menzies School of Health Research, is the largest Australian research project to probe risk factors for diabetes and heart disease among urban Indigenous communities.

“Indigenous Aussies are three times more likely to die from heart disease and stroke. We need to work out why that is, and then stop this from happening,” says the 23-year-old star.

Mauboy is a strong advocate for advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, and took part in the 2003-5 first-phase of the Menzies project.

The first study involved blood tests and physical examinations for more than 1000 men and women, and at the time Mauboy was photographed giving blood by local newspaper, the *NT News*.

“I got involved in Menzies' DRUID study because diabetes and heart disease are huge threats to Indigenous health – something I'm passionate about all Australians banding together to improve,” she says.

“I encourage those who took part in the first part of the study to step up and do part two as well. We need your health info to get to the bottom of how chronic disease affects Indigenous people differently. Once we understand that, we can get started making change that matters.”

As lead researcher Dr Elizabeth Barr says: “We are now interested to find out whether the participants from our first study have experienced any further health problems in particular heart disease, stroke, diabetes or kidney disease over the past seven to nine years. This information is collected via a questionnaire, so it's quite a straightforward process and no testing or examinations are involved.”

Strategies that prevent diabetes and heart disease are urgently needed to improve the health and well-being of Indigenous people, Barr says.

“We have some good ideas about the risks for diabetes and heart disease in non-Indigenous Australians, but we don't know for sure whether these are the same for Indigenous Australians,” she says.

“We hope that the DRUID follow-up study – supported by the Diabetes Australia Research Trust and a National Health and Medical Research Council Program Grant – will answer important questions on what influences people's risk of developing heart disease, stroke, diabetes and kidney disease. Findings from DRUID will help health workers detect and treat risk factors for diabetes and heart disease much earlier so as to help people stay strong and live longer.”

As Mauboy says, “people who want to be involved in the second part of the study are invited to answer a questionnaire that Menzies will be posting out. Or, if you prefer, Menzies can talk to you on the phone or come and talk to you in person. This research can help us unlock vital parts of the health puzzle and give us the tools to improve our wellbeing.”

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Images available on request: #1 Jessica Mauboy portrait, high resolution; #1 Jessica Mauboy giving blood to researchers in 2004, newspaper clipping, medium resolution.

Background

Menzies School of Health Research is the national leader in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research. It is the only medical research institute in the NT and the only one in Australia with a major focus on Indigenous health. Menzies has more than 300 staff working in over 60 communities in Central and Northern Australia, as well as developing countries in the region. Menzies is also a significant contributor to health education and research training. Its major research programs include infectious diseases, chronic diseases, environmental health, health services research, social determinants of health, mental health, and international health. Menzies is largely funded through competitive research grants provided by the Australian Government's National Health and Medical Research Council, in addition to funding from the Northern Territory Government.