

Thursday 22 September

New Centre links child health and education – an Australian first

A new research centre dedicated to improving the lives of children in the Northern Territory will be launched by the Chief Minister Paul Henderson in Darwin today.

The Centre for Child Development and Education is the first research centre in Australia with a dedicated focus on the links between health, early childhood development and education, with a particular emphasis on Indigenous children.

Director of Menzies School of Health Research Professor Jonathan Carapetis said the Centre fulfills one of the first recommendations of the *Territory 2030* strategy to establish a centre of excellence in child development and education research.

“The Centre brings education and health researchers together to focus effort, share knowledge and provide high-level advice to government,” Professor Carapetis said.

The Centre for Child Development and Education is a joint initiative of the Northern Territory Government, Charles Darwin University and the Menzies School of Health Research. It has also received philanthropic support from the Ian Potter Foundation and the Sidney Myer Fund.

It brings together a team of 25 researchers, including four of Australia’s leading child and family research experts and 11 post graduate students, who will be based at a new building on the Charles Darwin University campus in 2013.

The Centre’s work is overseen by a scientific and community advisory board chaired by Dr Chris Sarra, a leading Indigenous educator and head of the Queensland based *Stronger Smarter Institute*.

Centre Director Professor Sven Silburn said the most important time for a child’s development is from before birth, through infancy and the pre-school years.

“We know that far too many Indigenous children are continuing to be born underweight and into circumstances of poverty,” Professor Silburn said. “This puts them at risk before they even set foot in school.

“We work closely with communities to ensure our research is relevant to real community needs, including schools, health, education and childhood services sectors.”

The goal of the Centre is to support evidence informed practice and community understanding of what can be done to help children arrive at school ready to learn, succeed in their schooling and leave school with the skills for participation in their own communities and wider society.

Professor Carapetis welcomed the launch of the Centre.

“There is no doubt that investing in children’s early development and making sure they succeed at school is the most effective way of improving health and wellbeing and, for Indigenous children, closing the gap,” he said.

"Unfortunately, very few of the strategies used until now in Indigenous education have been based on high-quality evidence about what works and what doesn't. This is one of Australia's greatest challenges, so we need to bring Australia's, and the world's, best minds together to provide solutions. That is what this new Centre is all about."

As part of the Centre's launch, information about its publications, evaluation results and current projects are available to view online at <http://ccde.menzies.edu.au>.

Background

Menzies School of Health Research has a national reputation as a leading research institute in Indigenous and tropical health research. With its head office in Darwin in the Northern Territory, Menzies has been conducting its ground-breaking research for more than 25 years. We have more than 300 dedicated staff and work hand in hand with communities throughout Australia and across the tropical region to our North.

Media opportunity

Event: Launch of the Centre for Child Development and Education

Venue: Members and Guests Lounge, Level 4, Parliament House

Date: Thursday, 22 September 2011

Time: 2.30pm to 4.00pm

2.45pm - Gray Primary School Children's drum band performance

3.00pm - Chief Minister Paul Henderson officially launches the Centre

Professor Sven Silburn, Professor Jonathan Carapetis, Chief Minister Paul Henderson and His Honour the Administrator Tom Pauling AO QC will be attending the event along with the Centre's leading researchers Associate Professor Fiona Arney (child protection), Associate Professor Gary Robinson (Indigenous Parenting and Family) Georgie Nutton (Project Leader Mobile Preschools).

For more information please contact Jenna Hoare at Michels Warren Munday on 0407 181 894.