



Menzies honour for specialist



LONG-serving Darwin paediatrician and specialist in Aboriginal health Sue Sayers has

been awarded the Menzies Medallion, the highest award offered by the Menzies School of Health Research.

Dr Sayers was the founder of the longest and largest study of Aboriginal people in Australia and was presented with the award in recognition of her contributions to improving Aboriginal health for more than 20 years.

Working as a paediatrician at the Royal Darwin Hospital (RDH) from 1981, Dr Sayers was struck by the high frequency of low birth weights among

Aboriginal babies.

From 1987-1990 she recruited the families of 686 Aboriginal babies born at RDH and launched the Aboriginal Birth Cohort (ABC) study, a project analysing the effects of early-life factors on later physical and mental health.

The study aims to identify early those most at risk of developing chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular, kidney and mental health problems and help target intervention strategies at the most appropriate age.

The ABC study has been highly successful, resulting in more than 30 publications in peer-reviewed journals.

Wave four of the study is set to be launched in August.

Menzies Foundation executive director Professor John Mathews said Dr Sayers had left an indelible mark on the landscape of Aboriginal health.

"Her important results have been fed back to the Aboriginal communities involved as well as being published in the academic literature," he said.

Opposition Indigenous affairs spokesman Nigel Scullion said Dr Sayers' ground-breaking research had made a 'significant contribution to improving the wellbeing of Aboriginal people'.

"Her research has greatly increased the understanding of the long-term effects of low birth weights in Aboriginal communities and will have a lasting impression in Aboriginal health," he said.

