

## **Menzies delivers evaluation of federal Indigenous chronic disease package**

Tuesday, 29 October 2013

Primary healthcare policy and planning experts from the Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) have welcomed the release of the report into the landscape of chronic disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Chronic disease contributes to two-thirds of the health gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Commissioned by the federal Department of Health and Ageing, the Sentinel Sites Evaluation (SSE) is a holistic evaluation of the \$805m Indigenous Chronic Disease Package (ICDP); a federal initiative designed to improve the capacity of primary health care services to more effectively prevent and manage chronic disease among Indigenous populations.

Menzies Senior Researcher and SSE project leader, Professor Ross Bailie said health authorities around the world were struggling to re-orient their health systems to address the epidemic of chronic disease.

“In 2010, the Australian Government engaged Menzies to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the Indigenous Chronic Disease Package,” Prof Bailie said.

“The evaluation was undertaken to inform ongoing refinements in design and implementation of the program.”

The evaluation team conducted 72 community focus groups with a total of 670 participants, and over 700 interviews with key informants from community controlled, government services and GP sectors. Findings were reported back to local health services and to government in six-monthly cycles between 2010-2013.

Prof Bailie said the effective completion of the SSE shows Menzies’ capacity to inform and impact national policy with the view to maximise the potential benefit to Indigenous communities across the country.

“The challenges of providing high quality chronic illness care remain complex and will require stakeholders at multiple levels of the system to grapple with new concepts, and develop and implement sophisticated strategies to address health disparity in Australia,” Prof Bailie said.

Professor Bailie said the implementation of the ICDP to date has shown some notable achievements. These include:

- improved access to primary health care services and to affordable medication for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People
- improved orientation of the General Practice sector to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People
- significant steps towards the early establishment of a new workforce that is focused on health promotion and in development of local health promotion initiatives
- increased attention to enhancing access to specialist, allied health and team-based approaches to chronic illness care.

Professor Bailie emphasised that the evaluation report had been informed by frontline evidence from a variety of healthcare providers and community members. The report provides some direction for how service organisations and policy makers can build on the existing strengths of the ICDP priority areas.

“It is clear that the evaluation has influenced program refinement and policy discussions within government, particularly with regard to how the wide variation between regions in service capability can be addressed. This is vital to enhancing efforts to improve prevention and management of chronic illness for those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are most in need.”

**Interviews:**

Interviews are available with [Professor Ross Bailie](#). Professor Bailie is the Scientific Director of the Centre for Primary Health Care Systems and leads the NHRMC funded ABCD National Research Partnership on quality improvement in Indigenous primary health care. He is also involved in research on food supply and environmental health and housing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

**Media Contact:**

Richmond Hodgson, Senior Communications and Events Officer, 0408 128 099 / [communications@menzies.edu.au](mailto:communications@menzies.edu.au)

**Further Information:**

The *Sentinel Sites Evaluation report* is available here:

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/ctg/publishing.nsf/Content/monitoring-and-evaluation>

**Menzies Background**

Menzies School of Health Research is Australia’s only Medical Research Institute dedicated to improving Indigenous health and wellbeing. We have a 28-year history of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies works at the frontline, partnering with over 60 Indigenous communities across Northern and Central Australia. We collaborate to create resources, grow local skills and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.