

Tuesday 5 November 2013

## Beating rheumatic heart disease: Experts converge in Darwin

Experts from around the country will meet in Darwin today at the *RHD Australia Conference 2013: Practice and Culture* to strengthen Australia's fight to prevent rheumatic heart disease (RHD).

Australia has the highest recorded rate of RHD in the world; with the majority of reported cases in Indigenous children aged five to 14 years who live in the Northern Territory.

Esteemed paediatrician and Indigenous child health expert, Professor Jonathan Carapetis will present new approaches to control RHD in Australia, advances in heart screening, vaccine development, and an understanding of what causes rheumatic fever.

Professor Carapetis said, "Rheumatic heart disease is a big problem. It often kills children or young adults who are in their most productive years, and the sad thing is it's preventable."

The Conference aims to provide valuable information to people who work with RHD to continue to improve state and territory prevention and management programs, government policies and community engagement.

Deputy Director of RHD Australia, Claire Boardman said, "We will hear stories from Indigenous health workers including Leslee Warrior who is a survivor of acute rheumatic fever (ARF) – the cause of RHD."

Leslee currently works as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer at the Royal Perth Hospital supporting patients and families through cardiac treatment for RHD.

There will be sessions on five research projects run by the Menzies School of Health Research to prevent people getting RHD, as well as treating people who already have RHD to keep them healthy, including:

- RHD Immunology - Identifying a unique inflammatory signature in acute rheumatic fever – a pilot study
- RHD Genetics - Evaluating the genetic contribution to rheumatic heart disease pathogenesis in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- improving delivery of secondary prophylaxis for RHD: a stepped-wedge, community-randomised trial
- analysis of mortality trends for rheumatic heart disease and rheumatic fever in Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians; and
- RHD in pregnancy.

The RHD Australia Conference 2013 will be held from 5-6 November 2013 at the Darwin Convention Centre, Level 2, Waterfront Room 3. For more information visit [www.rhdaustralia.org.au](http://www.rhdaustralia.org.au).

### Media Opportunities

Interviews are available with Professor Jonathan Carapetis (10:30am, Tuesday, 5 November) and media are welcome to attend the conference. For more information contact Emmanuelle Clarke, RHD Australia on 0415 512 109 or email [emmanuelle.clarke@menzies.edu.au](mailto:emmanuelle.clarke@menzies.edu.au).

### Background information:

RHD Australia is Australia's national rheumatic heart disease coordination unit and aims to reduce death and disability from acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease. Funded by the Australian



Government Department of Health and Ageing RHD Australia is an initiative of Menzies School of Health Research. The unit was established in 2009 as part of the National Rheumatic Fever Strategy.