

Cancer, nutrition and kidney disease the focus of new Indigenous health research funding

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Australia's emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers will be able to expand their critical work in Indigenous health following a recent funding announcement made to the Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies).

Bellberry Limited has announced \$200,000 in funding to Menzies to support three Indigenous Post-Doctoral Fellowships across a range of priority areas such as Indigenous women's participation in cervical screening; improving research capacity in the field of nutrition; and reducing the devastating burden of dialysis within Indigenous communities.

Welcoming the announcement, Menzies Director Professor Alan Cass said the funding would address a critical gap for highly skilled Indigenous researchers.

"We have identified and recruited three Indigenous women health professionals, who are already recognised as emerging leaders in their respective fields," Professor Cass said.

"The Fellowships will enable our researchers to achieve their full potential and make a measurable impact in Indigenous health through high quality research.

"The support provided by Bellberry, and the expansion of other critical partnerships, continue to underpin Menzies' capacity to deliver pioneering research."

Bellberry Limited Chief Executive Kylie Sproston said the funding announcement was yet another example of Bellberry's ongoing commitment to promote research on a national level.

"This donation is the latest in a long line of opportunities provided by Bellberry to focus on improving outcomes for Indigenous Australians and we look forward to learning of the research outcomes," Ms Sproston said.

Bellberry Limited is a national, private not-for-profit organisation providing streamlined scientific and ethical review of human research projects across Australia.

Professor Cass said that Menzies has identified Indigenous research workforce and leadership as a key priority in its Reconciliation Action Plan.

"We are working to implement an Indigenous Employment Strategy and to mentor and support our researchers to enhance staff retention," he said.

"Receipt of the Bellberry funding will directly support and critically enable these core strategic directions."

Prospective candidates for funding include Lisa Whop, Leisa McCarthy and Jaqui Hughes.

Dr Jaqui Hughes

Dr Hughes is Australia's only Indigenous specialist kidney physician. She completed her PhD with Menzies in 2013 and is uniquely placed to become a national and international leader in kidney research. She is now working to develop a program of research at Menzies aiming to intervene to reduce the premature mortality associated with kidney disease and to prevent progression of disease to reduce the heavy burden of dialysis within Indigenous communities. Dr Hughes brings key insights as a clinician researcher and will collaborate with other chronic disease, nutrition and health services researchers across Menzies to undertake priority-driven chronic disease research.

Lisa Whop

Ms Whop is an Indigenous PhD student and project manager with Menzies' cancer research division. Her research to date has focused on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with cancer. Her PhD project is the first population-based study in Australia to investigate Indigenous women's participation in cervical screening, utilization of cancer treatment services and health outcomes. She is a dynamic and articulate future leader in Indigenous health research.

Leisa McCarthy

Leisa McCarthy is completing her PhD with Menzies and has supported nutrition programs with Queensland, Northern Territory and Commonwealth governments, as well as with the NGO and Aboriginal Community Control Health Sectors. Her PhD research focussed on food security issues for Indigenous Australian families in Darwin and its surrounding areas.

Leisa is about to commence her post-doctoral research in nutrition with Menzies in Central Australia, developing an exciting research position where she will work to support research capacity development and to improve research governance and systems in partnership with Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, the largest Aboriginal Medical Service in the Northern Territory. This will also provide her with an ideal base to develop her research program in nutrition, as part of Menzies' dynamic nutrition research team.

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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.