

Data miners seek treasure for NT children

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A new research project will draw on data from over 60,000 children born in the Northern Territory as Menzies researchers seek to discover why Territory children suffer disadvantage.

The project will explore four key issues for children in the Northern Territory:

- early childhood development and readiness for school learning
- school attendance, literacy and numeracy
- the child protection system
- the juvenile justice system.

The Menzies Centre for Child Development and Education (CCDE) recently received federal funding of \$900,000 and NT Government funding of \$509,000 over three years for this data-linkage project to be run in partnership with the NT Government and the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT).

CCDE Co-director, Professor Sven Silburn said the research will advance our understanding of the factors critical to improving educational and developmental outcomes for children in the NT.

“A great deal of information has been collected over time by NT Government agencies working in the fields of health, child protection, education, and juvenile justice,” Prof Silburn said.

“Once this data is linked to obtain a holistic picture of children’s development, this makes it possible to investigate research questions not previously possible. This has very significant potential to inform more integrated policy and better targeting of services to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children, particularly in health and education.”

The project team will analyse health and education data and other key information held on over 60,000 children born in the NT between 1994 and 2011.

Prof Silburn emphasised the importance of protecting the privacy of the individuals to whom the data relates.

“We need to be up-front in informing the community about the benefits of this research, which has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). People need to understand that there are highly effective safeguards in place to guarantee data confidentiality.”

Prof Silburn said that the research will be particularly useful in identifying the policies that are of most assistance to families and children.

“The project findings will enable economic modelling of the longer-term costs of these policies in the NT. They will help us to estimate the costs and benefits of various evidence-based preventative measures in improving outcomes for children.”

Researchers at the Menzies Centre for Child Development and Education are appreciative of the financial support of the National Health and Medical Research Council and the NT Government as they continue to strive to improve the lives of families and children across the Northern Territory and beyond.

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Media note: Prof Silburn is a national leader in clinical, epidemiological and evaluative research in child development and education, youth mental health and suicide prevention. He was a chief investigator on the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey of over 5600 children, young people and their families.

View his profile at: http://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Our_People/Researchers/Sven_Silburn/

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Menzies Background

Menzies School of Health Research is Australia's leading Medical Research Institute dedicated to improving Indigenous health and wellbeing. We have a 29-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.