

\$2m grant to combat drug resistant malaria and tuberculosis

7 October 2016

A \$2m research grant to work towards the prevention, control and elimination of malaria and tuberculosis (TB) in Southeast Asia and the Pacific has been awarded to a consortium led by Menzies School of Health Research, in collaboration with Burnet Institute, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade announced today.

Menzies malaria expert, Professor Ric Price said drug resistant malaria and TB are life threatening diseases and pose serious economic consequences and public health threats to Australia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Malaria is a major cause of death in Southeast Asia, infecting around 500 million people each year, while TB is one of the world's leading infectious causes of death.

Professor Price said, 'The most worrying reports of drug resistant malaria are in Southeast Asia, where malaria is almost untreatable in some areas in Cambodia'.

'Our research will track drug resistant malaria within countries and across borders so that treatment can stay one step ahead of the spread of resistance, using new technologies to test, treat and monitor populations at greatest risk', Professor Price added.

The research to control escalating multidrug resistance in malaria and TB in the region will be led by Menzies malaria experts Professor Nicholas Anstey and Professor Ric Price, and TB expert Dr Anna Ralph.

'TB spreads easily, can be difficult to treat, in particular drug-resistant TB, and can cause death or long-term disability,' said Dr Ralph.

In collaboration with Burnet TB expert, Professor Steve Graham, the research will progress and assess innovative strategies to address drug-resistant TB, including in neighboring countries, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia.

Burnet is working with a range of partners in Western Province PNG, a 'hot spot' for drug-resistant TB.

This project will work towards halting the spread drug-resistant TB to contain and reverse the public health threat.

Professor Graham said the aim will be to strengthen local capacity to detect, treat and prevent new TB cases.

'Effective and innovative strategies to test and treat TB are needed, and their impact evaluated', explained Professor Graham.

The World Health Organization has set an ambitious target for TB elimination by 2035, but drug-resistant TB is a threat to achieving this.

The consortium will work hand-in-hand with partners in Indonesia, PNG and Malaysia to strengthen local health systems and build local capacity.

Southeast Asia and the Pacific suffer major health and economic tolls as a result of these infections.

Control efforts are hampered by escalating multidrug resistance in both diseases.

The grant will be funded under DFAT's *Tropical Disease Research Regional Collaboration Initiative* with an objective to build and strengthen research collaboration on tropical diseases which pose a trans-boundary threat in Australia's region.

Media contact:

Emmanuelle Clarke, senior media and events officer

Phone: 0415 512 109 or (08) 8946 8485 | Email: communications@menzies.edu.au

Menzies School of Health Research

Menzies School of Health Research is one of Australia's leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving Indigenous, global and tropical health. Menzies has a history of over 30 years of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies works at the frontline, joining with partners across the Asia-Pacific as well as Indigenous communities across northern and central Australia. Menzies collaborates to create new knowledge, grow local skills and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.