

## Funding boost to tackle health challenges in northern Australia

**Monday, 21 November 2016**

Work will begin to help close critical gaps in healthcare across northern Australia as the result of a \$6m grant awarded today to Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

The project will create opportunities to attract health and medical staff to northern Australia and provide professional development and interdisciplinary training in disease surveillance, policy and practice, case management and prevention, and build capacity to respond to emerging infectious threats.

Chief investigator and team leader for *Tropical and Emerging Infectious Diseases* at Menzies, Professor Bart Currie, said building capacity of health professionals and scientists in northern Australia will improve health outcomes for not only Australia, but also the Asia Pacific region.

'Our research will focus on skin and respiratory health, chronic diseases such as diabetes, and emerging threats, including increasing antimicrobial resistance and diseases transmitted by mosquitoes,' Prof Currie said.

Menzies and partner research institutes in Australia will work with Indigenous stakeholders to improve health service delivery in remote communities.

'Building strong primary health care systems is recognised worldwide as a key element to improve health outcomes, reduce inequity and close the gap,' Prof Currie added.

Menzies will draw from more than three decades of research leadership in northern Australia to establish a Research Academy to train and develop medical and other health professionals beyond their core discipline, by promoting interdisciplinary thinking and collaboration.

The national collaborative team will mentor and develop the next generation of health and research leaders for northern Australia.

The research program will accelerate translation of new knowledge into regional and national guidelines for the prevention and management of diseases relevant to the north and to Australia's northern neighbours.

'This exciting program will be directed by five peak committees with an emphasis on innovation and translation.

'We are extremely grateful to the NHMRC for this opportunity to bring together leading researchers from across Australia to expand our work in northern Australia,' Prof Currie said.

In addition to improving health outcomes the grant will have flow on economic benefits.

A recent independent economic report announced Menzies was one of Australia's most cost-effective health research institutes working to close the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with a return on investment of \$2.70 to the economy for every dollar invested.

The grant will be funded as part of the Australian Government's *Northern Australia Tropical Disease Collaborative Research Programme* derived from policies outlined in the White Paper, *Developing Northern Australia*.

Improving Health Outcomes in the Tropical North: A Multidisciplinary Collaboration (HOT NORTH) participating institutions:

- Menzies School of Health Research, Charles Darwin University
- Telethon Kids Institute
- James Cook University
- The Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity, The University of Melbourne and The Royal Melbourne Hospital
- Marie Bashir Institute, The University of Sydney
- Burnet Institute
- South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute
- QIMR Berghofer

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**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.