

Creating health apps that work for Indigenous youth

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Public health professionals working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are urged to take a new and engaging approach to delivering positive health messages based on recent research by Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) published in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research mHealth and uHealth* recently.

The paper, 'A Smartphone App to Reduce Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Consumption Among Young Adults in Australian Remote Indigenous Communities: Design, Formative Evaluation and User-Testing', outlines recommendations for the development of successful behaviour change smartphone applications for young people living in remote Indigenous communities.

Lead author, Menzies public health researcher, Dr Emma Tonkin said the recommendations would help public health professionals develop apps that engage their target audience while delivering positive health outcomes in a timely manner and within budget.

"Our study documented the process of developing an app for young Indigenous people to reduce their sugary drink consumption," Dr Tonkin said.

"We learned it is essential to carry out formative research because every population is unique; for instance, only one of our participants had a Facebook account. If we had tried to use a Facebook login to access the app, we would have failed.

"Our findings also showed it was important to include social features like leader boards as well as individual and team challenges. Games and sounds were also important to keep users engaged."

The app, which was piloted in two communities, tracked drink consumption by users, whether it was water, diet soft drink, regular soft drink, or cordial.

"It gave participants an indication of how much sugar or energy they could save by choosing water over sugar-sweetened options," Dr Tonkin said.

"This was an important area of focus because data from Menzies' SHOP@RIC (Stores Healthy Options Project in Remote Indigenous Communities) study showed around 25 per cent of the household food income is spent on sugary drink, with young people consuming more of these beverages."

Dr Tonkin said the findings from the study were important as young people were still forming lifelong habits and often shaping those of their children.

"Smartphones and apps represent a promising method to engage them in programs to improve nutritional intake, attitudes and intention to make positive lifestyle behaviours such as reducing sugar-sweetened beverage consumption," she said.

The study was a collaboration with the University of South Australia.

The full article is available [here](#).

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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.