

Chronic hepatitis B to be eliminated from the Northern Territory

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An important collaboration which will work to eliminate chronic hepatitis B (CHB) from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the Northern Territory (NT) has been established.

Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) has received National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) funding and will work in partnership with the NT Department of Health and community service providers to eliminate the chronic disease from the NT.

The NHMRC funding of \$1.4 million will assist the \$5.2 million Hep B PAST project, led by Menzies, which will identify and treat those suffering the burden of CHB.

Menzies' infectious diseases expert and Royal Darwin Hospital specialist physician, Dr Jane Davies, says the project is designed to rid the chronic disease from the Indigenous population in the NT. CHB infection is very common in the Indigenous communities of the NT with a prevalence of up to 12 per cent, of those living with CHB 25 per cent will die from it with either liver failure or liver cancer.

"By elimination we mean no more new cases acquired in the NT alongside providing gold standard care for existing cases," Dr Davies said.

"We have two main aims; the first is to focus on improving health literacy about hepatitis B among Indigenous communities, people living with CHB and primary health care providers, with the use of the Hep B Story app, which will be translated into 10 more Aboriginal languages and delivered by trained Aboriginal Health Practitioners.

"Secondly, to improve the care for individuals living with CHB by establishing an NT HBV clinical register, supporting ongoing healthcare provider training, and the coordinated transition of CHB care into primary care.

"A register of people living with CHB will be created and a core clinical care team allocated to facilitate the organised delivery of recommended care to everyone who needs it."

Public Health specialist Dr Christine Connors the General Manager, Darwin Region and Strategic Primary Health Care, Top End Health Service says this partnership provides an important opportunity for NT Health to work with Menzies and other health service providers to make Hep B infection a problem of the past.

"Hep B is one of these hidden diseases that can be easily forgotten in the health system.

"Better treatment for chronic Hep B has provided a sense of urgency to diagnose and offer treatment to all people with a chronic infection," Dr Connors said.

The collaborative team will be led by Dr Jane Davies through Menzies and the NT Department of Health, in partnership with Katherine West Health Board Aboriginal Corporation, Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation, the NT Aids and Hepatitis Council and the Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine (ASHM).

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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.