

Chronic hepatitis B elimination partnership launched

10 September 2018

A collaboration working to eliminate chronic hepatitis B (CHB) from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the Northern Territory (NT) is being launched in Darwin today by NT Health Minister the Hon Natasha Fyles.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) partnership grant totaling \$5.2 million dollars is led by Dr Jane Davies at Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) and supported by the NT Department of Health who have contributed more than \$3.2 million dollars over five years.

The partnership also includes 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).

Minister Fyles, said that this partnership provided an important opportunity for the Territory Labor Government through NT Health to work with Menzies and other health service providers to make hep B infection a problem of the past.

“Hep B can be potentially forgotten about in a busy health system but we are committed to wiping it out,” Ms Fyles said.

“Better treatment for chronic hep B has provided a sense of urgency to diagnose and offer treatment to all people with a chronic infection.

“That’s why we are providing \$3.2 million in support and funds to help this important partnership eradicate hep B once and for all.”

Dr Davies, an infectious diseases expert at Menzies and specialist physician at Royal Darwin Hospital, said the project was designed to rid the chronic disease from the NT’s Indigenous population.

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.”

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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.