

Understanding how NT Aboriginal school attendance could be improved 25 September 2018

Regular attendance at preschool in remote Northern Territory communities will improve a child's school attendance and learning outcomes, a study by the Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) has found.

The NT Data Linkage study reviewed health, education and other government data of over 60,000 children, to develop a 'big picture' understanding of factors impacting on school attendance and education outcomes.

Professor Sven Silburn is the lead author of the *Early Pathways to School Learning – Lessons from the NT data linkage study* launched today by Ms Olga Havnen, Chief Executive, Danila Dilba, and Ms Marion Guppy, Deputy Chief Executive, NT Department of Education

"Current policy efforts to improve Aboriginal school attendance have had limited success because they have not adequately addressed the roots of the problem.

"The study findings show children's patterns of attendance are established very early in their school career. They are also strongly influenced by their developmental readiness for school learning, which in turn is shaped by their early-life health and social circumstances."

"Analysis of the main factors associated of children being developmentally ready for school showed Aboriginal status had no significant effect as a predictor once early life health and socioeconomic circumstances are taken into account. It also showed that, apart from a few notable exceptions (e.g. overcrowded housing), the early life factors most significant for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children were much the same. However, many more Aboriginal children had experienced these factors."

"Statistical modelling of the longitudinal linked data indicates that policy investments to strengthen maternal and child health, and early learning services such as the 'Families and First Teachers' preschool program could yield substantial improvements in Aboriginal school attendance."

"No less than 13 early life health and social factors made a significant independent contribution to children's school attendance. Just one of these factors, overcrowded housing, accounted for children missing an average of 35 more days of school in a school year after taking account of the influence of the other child, family and community factors" said Professor Silburn.

The study was funded by the Northern Territory Government and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and undertaken in partnership with the NT Departments of Health, Education and Territory Families, and the Aboriginal Medical Service Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT).

"This study provides the Northern Territory with quality independent research to inform our work and engage our strategy to ensure every child has the opportunity to engage, grow and achieve" said Department of Education Deputy Chief Executive, Marion Guppy.

The Early Pathways to School Learning – Lessons from the NT data linkage study is available [here](#) a summary document 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.