

Five medical research projects recognised in the Northern Territory

20 May 2020

Five researchers based at Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) have received recognition in the form of Investigator Grants from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF).

The projects will focus in the areas of improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kidney health, diabetes, early detection and treatment of rheumatic heart disease, moving towards the elimination of Chronic Hepatitis B in the Northern Territory and international work advancing the cure of malaria.

Prof Cass says the Menzies projects, which support staff for five years will enable research teams to address critical health issues and find the best ways to tackle them.

“Through our research, based on rigorous methods and strong community engagement, we aim to make the maximum difference.”

“Attracting recognition from the NHMRC and MRFF, the premier funder of health research in Australia, proves that world class research with real impact can be conducted in northern Australia” Prof Cass said.

The NHMRC Investigator Grant scheme is designed to support the research programs of outstanding investigators at all career stages.

\$5.6 million in research funding has been provided for five projects in the Northern Territory at Menzies School of Health Research

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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.

Menzies Investigator Grants

Emerging Leadership 1

Doctor Robert Commons - *Advancing the radical cure of Plasmodium vivax malaria through optimal antimalarial regimens*

Forty percent of the global population are at risk of vivax malaria and its associated morbidity. Complete cure of vivax malaria can result in severe anaemia caused by adverse effects of primaquine in vulnerable individuals. My research will provide important evidence for national malaria programs and clinicians, identifying the optimal dosing regimen across different ages and locations, that balances the risks and benefits of primaquine treatment.

Doctor Joshua Francis - *Early detection and treatment of rheumatic heart disease in high risk communities using community-led approaches for active case finding, education and engagement in care*

Rheumatic heart disease (RHD) affects many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Early detection using an ultrasound of the heart (called an "echo") can help children access treatment. Echo screening in remote communities needs active community participation and leadership in order to succeed. I will study new approaches to community-led echo screening to see if they are accurate enough, evaluate the impact of community involvement and describe outcomes for those diagnosed with RHD.

Emerging Leadership 2

Doctor Jane Davies - *Moving together towards the elimination of Chronic Hepatitis B in the Northern Territory*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are disproportionately affected by chronic hepatitis B infection and liver cancer. As a specialist doctor and clinical-researcher, I am working in partnership with Aboriginal people to eliminate hepatitis B from the Aboriginal population of the Northern Territory (NT). Together with Aboriginal people in the NT, scientists and health professionals, I will provide evidence for improved culturally safe care for people living with hepatitis B.

Leadership 1

Professor Louise Maple-Brown - *Improving diabetes-related health outcomes with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the lifecourse*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people bear a disproportionate burden of type 2 diabetes at all ages. My program of work aims to slow the progression of type 2 diabetes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, through early-life prevention: pre-conception, pregnancy, childhood. I lead a partnership of researchers, health services and policy makers across Australia to improve diabetes-related health outcomes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Leadership 3

Professor Alan Cass - *Driving change to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kidney health.*

The burden of kidney disease affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is devastating. Community members prioritise prevention of kidney disease, early detection and treatment to stop progression to dialysis. In remote areas, people requiring dialysis have to move away from their family and supports. This work will focus on innovative ways to address this disparity to improve care, treatment and services for Indigenous people living with kidney disease.