

New grant to investigate climate preparedness of remote communities

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A new project led by Menzies School of Health Research is working to co-design effective adaptation solutions to help remote desert communities manage the health impacts of climate change.

This has been made possible through [new funding announced recently](#), from a targeted call for research by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

Receiving funding of just under \$1 million, the five-year project will work with remote communities in central Australia to better understand the impacts of the environment on health. This project adds to the growing climate change research program at Menzies' Remote Health Systems and Climate Change Centre, which is based in Alice Springs.

Aboriginal people living in remote communities have deep knowledge of their local environment. The research team will work in partnership with these communities and primary health care services to develop strategies to address the emerging health impacts of climate change.

Remote communities in Australia are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to their geographic isolation, lower quality infrastructure, limited economic resources and restricted access to health services. Those living in these communities are also likely to have existing health burdens and their wellbeing is more greatly influenced by the environment.

As climate change continues to intensify, primary health care services are expected to face greater strain. This highlights the urgent need to better equip these services' ability to monitor climate-sensitive illnesses, improve the resilience of healthcare systems, train the health workforce on these risks and integrate climate considerations into policy and planning. These services also play a crucial role in responding to climate change, through awareness programs, community advocacy and implementing preventive health measures.

With investigators from Charles Darwin University's Northern Institute, Flinders Poche SA +NT Centre, Griffith University, the HEAL Global Research Centre at the University of Canberra, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress and Ngaanyatjarra Health Service, the team will synthesize citizen scientists' data, primary health care staff observations and local knowledge to co-design community centered risk reduction measures to address climate related health risks.

Learn more about this project:

https://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Indigenous_Health/Primary_health_care_and_health_systems_research/Climate_preparedness_in_very_remote_desert_communities/

Quote attributable to Chief Investigator of the project, and Principal Research Fellow from Menzies School of Health Research, [Associate Professor Supriya Mathew](#):

"Local data is crucial to design and implement adaptation measures that could reduce current and future climate health risks in remote Australia. There is an urgent need to take a precautionary approach to climate change."

Quote attributable to Central Australian Aboriginal Congress researcher, Dr Vahab Baghbanian:

“Our research partnership with Menzies School of Health Research has provided evidence to support the link between extreme weather conditions, poor housing and our clients' health and well-being. Effective climate responses are needed to ensure climatic changes do not exacerbate the already high chronic disease rates in central Australia and further burden the primary health care sector.”

Quote attributable to Ngaanyatjarra Health Senior Medical Officer, Dr Rosalie Schultz:

“Ngaanyatjarra communities already suffer in extreme heat and just this week we've needed to respond to a heat-related emergency. Though the *Yarnangu* people thrive outdoors, new strategies will be needed for outdoor safety as climate change intensifies. I'm excited that this need has been recognised through the receipt of this research grant. We health professionals will work together with community and expert researchers to better understand and adapt to the changing climate.”

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Menzies School of Health Research

Menzies is one of Australia's leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and is a leader in global and tropical health research. Menzies continues to translate research into effective partnerships and programs in communities across Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.