

Making a SPLASH to Close the Gap in Central Australia: new funding to strengthen health systems research in Alice Springs

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Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) has secured almost \$1 million in funding from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) under its Collaborations in Health Services Research scheme to support a ground-breaking new initiative in Central Australia: *Strengthening PLace-based health services research collaboration and capacity in Mparntwe (Alice Springs) - an important strategy to close the gap in Health outcomes (SPLASH)*.

Led by Associate Professor Deborah Russell and running over two years, the SPLASH project will strengthen partnerships and grow health service research capacity in Mparntwe (Alice Springs). It recognises that locally relevant, community-informed evidence is essential to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples in Central Australia – where the average age at death remains 26.5 years below the national average.

SPLASH comprises a collaborative partnership between researchers at Menzies' Remote Health Systems and Climate Change Centre (RHC3) in Alice Springs and NT Health Central Australia acute and primary care services, Aboriginal consumers, and major regional stakeholders including Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (Congress), Central Australia Academic Health Science Network (CAAHSN), and the NT Primary Health Network (NT PHN).

The research program will focus on five priority issues identified and co-designed by local health service providers and Aboriginal community stakeholders. These include improving discharge experiences for Aboriginal patients at Alice Springs Hospital through Aboriginal Health Practitioner-led models of care; enhancing the use of continuous glucose monitoring for people with type 2 diabetes following kidney transplant; and better understanding post-extraction bleeding complications in dental care.

SPLASH will also address culturally safe care in intensive care units (ICUs) through improved use of Patient Reported Outcome and Experience Measures Survey (PROEMS) in collaboration with Australian and New Zealand Intensive Care Society's (ANZICS) clinical Quality Registry, and work to improve emergency department triage processes for Aboriginal patients at Alice Springs Hospital.

These focus areas are designed to generate high-quality, context-relevant evidence while developing sustainable local research capability. By embedding research within health services and ensuring Aboriginal leadership and input at every stage, SPLASH seeks to directly improve service quality and health outcomes across Central Australia.

Learn more about this project:

[https://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Indigenous Health/Primary health care and health systems research/SPLASH Strengthening health services research in Mparntwe Alice Springs/](https://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Indigenous%20Health/Primary%20health%20care%20and%20health%20systems%20research/SPLASH%20Strengthening%20health%20services%20research%20in%20Mparntwe%20Alice%20Springs/)

Quotes attributable to Menzies Principal Research Fellow and SPLASH Chief Investigator, [Associate Professor Deborah Russell](#):

“Through SPLASH we are seeking to increase the capacity of local health providers in Mparntwe, Alice Springs, to engage in and lead health systems and clinical research. This will result in stronger research partnerships in the region, greater use of evidence to inform policy and practice, and, in the medium and longer term, improvements in population health and wellbeing.

“SPLASH represents a timely and vital investment in health services research collaboration in one of the nation’s most underserved regions. With a focus on local leadership, capacity building, and co-production of knowledge, the project aims to make a real and lasting difference in the lives of Aboriginal people in Central Australia.”

Quotes attributable to Deputy Director of Medical and Clinical Services, Alice Springs Hospital, Richard Johnson:

“SPLASH brings much-needed funding for research to help improve patient experiences at Alice Springs Hospital, including for patients admitted to ICU, to general wards and to the Emergency Department. This collaboration and the suite of projects offers an unprecedented opportunity to identify solutions to the challenges of providing effective holistic and community led care to patients across Central Australia. It is exciting to see research engagement across the multi-disciplinary spectrum with these projects and research involvement all the way from frontline staff to executives”

Quotes attributable to Alice Springs Hospital Aboriginal Engagement and Strategy Unit Director, Justine Swan-Castine:

“SPLASH projects will help improve cultural safety of Aboriginal people attending Alice Springs Hospital through developing and strengthening a learning health system. Importantly, the research approach will be guided by our local ‘Doing It Right’ research guidelines for conducting safe, respectful engagement in Central Australia.”

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About Menzies School of Health Research

Menzies is at the forefront of health and medical research dedicated to improving the lives of peoples across the Northern Territory, Asia Pacific and beyond. By joining scientific knowledge with community wisdom, Menzies strives to Close the Gap, and shape a healthier, more equitable future where communities can thrive.