

New research identifies co-designed school-based recommendations to support First Nations youth living with type 2 diabetes

7 August 2025

A new study by the Menzies-led DIABETES Across the LIFECOURSE: Northern Australia Partnership (the Partnership) has identified seven co-designed recommendations for schools to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people living with type 2 diabetes.

Published this week in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, the research highlights the important role schools can play as a key setting for supporting the health and wellbeing of those living with type 2 diabetes.

Informed by lived experiences and insights of First Nations youth in the Top End, the study calls for school-wide measures to address diabetes stigma, nutrition and targeted support for clinical management of type 2 diabetes.

The key recommendations focus on:

- Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership into strategies and supports,
- Reducing shame and stigma around type 2 diabetes, with a greater focus on overall wellbeing,
- Creating individualised school support plans for students with type 2 diabetes,
- Strengthening connections between schools with local primary health services,
- Providing training for school staff to build confidence in supporting students with type 2 diabetes, and
- Creating safe spaces for students to store and take medications and monitor their blood glucose levels.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people living in the Northern Territory (NT) currently experience the highest reported rates of youth-onset type 2 diabetes in the world.

The research findings present a clear need for strengths-based engagement and co-designed models of care that support wellbeing, with researchers emphasising the powerful role of lived experience in driving positive change for young people living with type 2 diabetes.

This study comes as the Partnership hosts its 14th Annual Educational Symposium on Friday 8 August 2025, focused on the importance of community led partnership and co-designed research to drive change in diabetes.

More than 300 diabetes experts, health professionals and stakeholders from across the Northern Territory and Far North Queensland will converge at event sites in Darwin, Alice Springs, Cairns or online to hear the latest in diabetes research and care.

Youth-onset diabetes is set to be a focus, with international keynote speaker, Professor Brandy Wicklow from the University of Manitoba in Canada presenting from Darwin about her work in reducing complications for youth diabetes.

Learn more about the Partnership's Annual Educational Symposium:

<https://diabeteslifecourse.org.au/>

Read the school-based recommendations study in full:

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anzjph.2025.100265>

Quotes attributable to Lead of the DIABETES Across the LIFECOURSE: Northern Australia Partnership and Menzies Principal Research Fellow, Associate Professor Renae Kirkham:

"The impact of our work in the Partnership is largely dependent on the longstanding collaborations we have with our partnering organisations, stakeholders and communities. Our co-design research enables the voices of those living with diabetes across our region to be heard and inform recommendations for change. In the case of enhancing support for young people with type 2 diabetes in schools, this includes developing individualised support plans that respect the need to reduce stigma and focus on overall wellbeing."

Quotes attributable to Menzies Peer-Facilitator and Youth type 2 diabetes lived experience speaker at the Partnership's Annual Education Symposium, Waylon Murphy:

"When I was at school and I would wake up to go eat breakfast, or something like that, I would totally forget about my [diabetes] medication. If changes could be made to schools from this study, it would be good because staff could have asked me if I had taken my medication today and reminded me to take it."

ENDS

Media Contact

Phone: (08) 8946 8680 | Email: media@menzies.edu.au

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.

About the DIABETES Across the LIFECOURSE: Northern Australia Partnership 14th Annual Educational Symposium:

This full day event is focused on the theme: *From Research to Change: the Impact of Community-led Partnership in Diabetes*, and will hear from two keynote speakers, presenting in-person from Darwin:

- **Professor Brandy Wicklow** (University of Manitoba, Canada) – *Reducing complications for youth-onset diabetes*
- **Associate Professor Jacqueline Boyle** (Monash University) – *Diabetes in pregnancy*

Attendees will also hear a range of research updates and insights from lived experience speakers about youth diabetes and diabetes in pregnancy.

- **When:** Friday 8 August 2025, from 8am (ACST)
- **Where:** Menzies School of Health Research, Darwin with satellite sites in Alice Springs and Cairns.