

NHMRC funding awarded to tackle malaria and pneumonia on a global scale

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Two top researchers from Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) are closer to tackling life-threatening diseases and improving global health approaches after securing competitive national funding.

The clinical researchers, who are leaders in their respective fields, have attained support from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to progress their work in improving treatment for vivax malaria and reducing the severity of pneumonia in malnourished children.

Public health and malaria expert, Associate Professor Kamala Thriemer, will lead a randomised trial in collaboration with colleagues at research sites in Brazil, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea.

The trial will determine safety and efficacy of a revised weight-based dosing strategy of a new antirelapse treatment, tafenoquine.

A/Prof Thriemer and her team will receive \$2.9 million over four years to conduct the study.

The second trial to be funded is led by Menzies Senior Research Fellow and paediatrician, Dr Nicholas Fancourt, who will focus on preventing pneumonia in children recovering from malnutrition.

Malnutrition is a global public health problem worsening due to effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery from malnutrition is often complicated by pneumonia. It is critical that malnourished children receive vaccines like the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine, which prevents pneumonia.

The trial will be carried out in Timor-Leste where 11 per cent of children aged less than five years are acutely malnourished and pneumonia causes 18 per cent of child deaths.

Dr Fancourt and his team obtained \$2.4 million to conduct the trial over five years.

Menzies welcomes the significant funding announcement awarded to both researchers, totaling more than \$5.3 million.

These projects are at the heart of Menzies' work in achieving sustainable health improvements on a global scale.

Quotes attributable to 2023 National Health and Medical Research Council Clinical Trial and Cohort Studies funding recipient and Menzies School of Health Research Principal Research Fellow, [Associate Professor Kamala Thriemer](#):

"Vivax malaria is hard to tackle because after the initial infection, it can hide in the liver and reappear weeks, even months later. Traditionally a long period of treatment is required which patients often don't complete, so they get sick again.

“Finally, a new single dose treatment is available, but it’s likely marketed at a suboptimal dose.

“This multi-center trial will provide much needed evidence for a revised treatment dose of tafenoquine and is likely to directly inform global treatment policies.”

Quotes attributable to 2023 National Health and Medical Research Council Clinical Trial and Cohort Studies funding recipient and Menzies School of Health Research, Senior Research Fellow, [Dr Nicholas Fancourt](#):

“11 per cent of children aged less than five years in Timor-Leste have acute malnutrition and pneumonia causes 18 per cent of child deaths in the country.”

“At this stage, we don’t know when the best time is to vaccinate malnourished children, so they have the best chance of avoiding the potentially fatal illness.”

“Nutrition and vaccination are identified as global health priorities to reduce child deaths.”

“The study will answer important questions about when to use pneumococcal conjugate vaccines in children with severe acute malnutrition – leading to improved early intervention within public health approaches to the disease.”

ENDS

Read more about these projects:

- [TADORE study: A revised tafenoquine dose to improve radical cure for vivax malaria](#)
- [Delayed versus early pneumococcal conjugate vaccination in malnourished children in Timor-Leste](#)

Media contact:

Phone: (08) 8946 8658 | Email: media@menzies.edu.au

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 people and a leader in global and tropical research into life-threatening illnesses. Menzies continues to translate research into effective partnerships and programs in communities across Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.