

Pioneering asthma education program and research in Darwin schools

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An innovative asthma awareness and self-management program with tobacco uptake prevention funded by Asthma Australia's National Research Program is being introduced to school students in Darwin.

The pioneering Adolescent Asthma Action (Triple A) peer education program that has been rolled out effectively in other schools across Australia will be implemented in Rosebery Middle School and St John's Catholic College in early 2014. Developed by Associate Professor Smita Shah, Director of the Primary Health Care Education and Research Unit of the University of Sydney, the program has trained more than 2,000 students as respiratory health peer leaders.

This has had a positive influence on the lives of thousands of other students and their families, including reduced asthma attacks and school absenteeism.

Executive Officer of the Asthma Foundation NT, Jan Saunders said the Triple A program was a proven model of peer education for students to learn about asthma management and resisting peer pressure to smoke.

Another dimension to the program is a research project among students with signs of respiratory illness that aims to identify if they have asthma or another lung sickness like bronchiectasis.

Head of Menzies' Child Health Division, Professor Anne Chang will lead the project that will involve a clinical assessment, including blood, sputum samples and lung function tests.

As one of Australia's leading respiratory clinicians, Prof Chang said the program would explore why students, in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children diagnosed with asthma have a poorer response to standard treatments.

"Our project will shed some light on this situation and we hope it will be extended beyond Darwin to provide new treatment and management strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, who are at greater risk of severe lung diseases with serious cardiovascular complications," she said.

NT Thunder has also given their support for the program. Chief Executive Officer, Jarred Ilett said that NT Thunder supports local initiatives that promote healthy and active lifestyles among young Territorians.

"One of the core objectives of NT Thunder is to assist in inspiring all young Territorians to participate in sport in order to contribute to improved education, employment, training, health, leadership and wellbeing in Indigenous communities and across the Northern Territory."

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Menzies Background

Menzies School of Health Research is Australia's only Medical Research Institute dedicated to improving Indigenous health and wellbeing. We have a 28-year history of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies works at the frontline, partnering with over 60 Indigenous communities across Northern and Central Australia. We collaborate to create resources, grow local skills and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.