

## **Menzies School of Health Research takes the stand to address the diabetes epidemic**

**7 March 2024**

Improving awareness, increasing access to healthcare, addressing the social determinants of health and having appropriate research and governance were today highlighted as priority areas for action to address the type 2 diabetes epidemic in the Northern Territory.

These were the key areas discussed as part of the presentation by researchers from Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) and the Diabetes Across the Lifecourse: Northern Australia Partnership (the Partnership), at the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport Inquiry into Diabetes in Australia.

The team offered insights from their research, including the crucial need for co-design and collaboration to address the skyrocketing rates of type 2 diabetes experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Chair of the Partnership's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory group and Menzies researcher, Sian Graham, also shared her lived experience of the intergenerational impacts of diabetes.

As detailed in the Partnership's written submission to the Inquiry, it is imperative to act now to stem the tidal wave of type 2 diabetes. Research by Menzies has uncovered that 40% of remote Aboriginal adults living in central Australia are living with diabetes, which is the highest rate of diabetes recorded. Australia also has the highest rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth-onset type 2 diabetes worldwide.

The submission highlighted that greater community awareness of diabetes needs to be underpinned by resources and campaigns that are culturally appropriate, prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's voices, and consider cultural differences in conceptualising health.

It raised how incorporating community-led design of diabetes prevention and management programs is crucial to success. It was recommended that this is coupled with addressing key factors which affect health, such as racism, food insecurity, high cost of food, inadequate housing and lack of appropriate healthcare services.

Access to high quality care is a basic human right that not only affects diabetes, but other long-term health outcomes. The team also advocated for workforce strategies to ensure communities, regardless of their location, can access appropriate health services across their lifespan. Adequately resourcing primary health care and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-based workforce was also among recommendations made.

The Partnership led by Menzies originally began in the Northern Territory in 2011. It is a partnership between researchers, policy makers and health service providers, aiming to improve care for people with diabetes in northern Australia. Based at Menzies, it has since grown to include many partner organisations from across the Territory, Far North Queensland and Western Australia.

Founder of the Partnership and Menzies Deputy Director (Research), Prof Louise Maple-Brown and Chair of the Partnership's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group, Menzies Senior Research Officer and lived experience speaker, Sian Graham presented for both the Partnership and Menzies. Joining the Partnership's presentation was Menzies Senior Research Fellow, Dr Matthew Hare, and presenting on behalf of Menzies, was Menzies Director, Prof. Alan Cass AO.

For more information read the Diabetes Across the Lifecourse: Northern Australian Partnership's complete submission on [the Inquiry's submission portal](#).

Watch their audiovisual submission: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHiB-LHHYWI>

**Quotes attributable to Menzies Deputy Director (Research) and Diabetes Across the Lifecourse; Northern Australian Partnership Founder, [Professor Louise Maple-Brown](#):**

"It is imperative that we address the social determinants of health, which are a key factor for the perpetuating cycle of diabetes.

"Our research has highlighted the intergenerational nature of type 2 diabetes impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from a young age. Working in partnership with communities, health services, researchers and policy makers we are reducing risks of type 2 diabetes as early as possible in the life-course, with a particular focus before, during and after pregnancy. Raising the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with lived experience of type 2 diabetes is critical to our partnership."

**Quotes attributable to Diabetes Across the Lifecourse; Northern Australian Partnership - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group Chair, [Sian Graham](#):**

"The current systems are failing our people. Watching my family and people get sick young, live with horrific complications and not live the lives they deserve is not OK.

"I urge the Government to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to deliver community-led programs and adopt community led strategies to stop the devastating outcomes of this preventable and manageable condition.

"Greater funding needs to be placed in supporting co-designed, community led programs to prevent, treat and manage diabetes."

ENDS

**Media contact:**

Email: [media@menzies.edu.au](mailto: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 Islanders, 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.