

MEDIA RELEASE

Menzies Timor-Leste anniversary marks achievements and challenges, tackling infectious diseases old and new

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Three years ago today, Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) officially established an office in Timor-Leste, working with the government and partners to strengthen health systems in the country to better respond to infectious diseases challenges.

The third anniversary provides an opportunity to celebrate many achievements, but it also serves as a reminder of the many challenges ahead.

Menzies and the Timor-Leste Ministry of Health (MoH) are currently working on a large project looking into vaccine preventable diseases such as measles, rubella, dengue, COVID-19 and Hepatitis B – with the aim of understanding the level of immunity to vaccine preventable diseases in Timor-Leste.

The research is conducted through the ARIA-RISE project, which works in partnership with the MoH, the National Health Laboratory (NHL), and the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS).

Financial support is provided by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Co-lead of Menzies Timor-Leste projects Associate Professor Dr Joshua Francis said he hopes the research will help guide the development of vaccine policy over the coming months and years.

“This year Timor-Leste is seeing one of the worst outbreaks of dengue that it’s seen in many years, and so, in response to that, Menzies is working with the Timor-Leste Ministry of Health and the World Mosquito Program in Australia, to look at the possibility of a new strategy to address dengue in Timor-Leste.”

“This new strategy involves using a bacteria called *Wolbachia* which infects mosquitoes.”

“When a mosquito carrying dengue becomes infected, it is then unable to pass on the disease, which should result in an overall reduction of dengue in Timor-Leste,” A/Prof Francis said.

The project is a good example of how research can be taken and used to inform best practice in developing strategy to help reduce the burden of infectious disease.

“Three years ago, much of our work was concentrated in Dili, but with the help of all our supporters we’re excited to see the work expand further afield, in many municipalities across Timor-Leste,” A/Prof Francis said.

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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.

