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## **Menzies to lead development of Australia's first National Indigenous Suicide Prevention Strategy**

Menzies School of Health Research has welcomed the Australian Government's decision to appoint it to help develop the nation's first National Indigenous Suicide Prevention Strategy.

A leading Indigenous Health research institute, Menzies researchers have over 20 years experience in Indigenous suicide research and the development of suicide prevention programs.

Menzies will partner with the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) and work closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Advisory Group to develop the strategy.

The project's Team Leader, Associate Professor Gary Robinson, says the Indigenous Suicide Prevention Strategy will be an essential step towards addressing the high rates of Indigenous suicide across the country.

"Indigenous suicide is a tragedy that is unfolding before our eyes, with rates from three to seven times higher than the general population. A serious epidemic of suicide in a number of Indigenous communities highlights the need to take urgent action and develop an Indigenous Suicide Prevention Strategy.

"The development of a national strategy is also significant because it will take the lead in setting national benchmarks for effective action for the first time. Currently there is a patchwork of suicide prevention strategies and there is much variation between them and what they achieve," said A/Prof Robinson.

Over the coming months, Menzies School of Health Research will develop and release a discussion paper, conduct nation-wide consultations, and establish a website to provide information and receive submissions on the proposed strategy. The consultations will hear from a wide range of people, from communities to health professionals about what is needed.

Menzies researchers have recently drawn attention to the increased rate of suicide among children and youth in the Northern Territory (NT), which is well above the national suicide rates for young people.

A report by Menzies found a significant increase in the rate of suicide amongst Aboriginal people in the NT over the past decade.

The report involved a detailed examination of 18 cases of suicide in the NT between 2006 and 2010 by people under the age of 18. They occurred across the NT, in major centres and in remote communities of different sizes.

Research cited in the report refers to four-year-olds threatening suicide, and distressed parents threatening suicide in a desperate attempt to exert control over their children. Suicide is clearly having a major impact on communities and families

"Our evidence has suggested that suicide rates may continue to rise if decisive action is not taken. In light of that a national suicide prevention strategy, funded by the Australian Government, is a vital contribution."

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### **Background**

Menzies School of Health Research is the national leader in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research. It is the only medical research institute with its headquarters in the NT and the only one in Australia with a major focus on Indigenous health. Menzies has more than 300 staff working in over 60 communities in Central and Northern Australia, as well as developing countries in the region. Menzies is also a significant contributor to health education and research training. Its major research programs include infectious diseases, chronic diseases, environmental health, health services research, social determinants of health, mental health, and international health.