

## **Study outlines opportunities for improving reproductive health among young Indigenous women**

Tuesday, 11 December 2012

A Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) study has identified areas for improvement in reproductive health services currently provided to Indigenous women in Central Australia.

Menzies Research Fellow, Bronwyn Silver has found that Indigenous women may not be receiving effective primary health care for diagnosis and treatment of Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID).

PID is associated with reproductive complications such as ectopic pregnancy and infertility. Born from infectious origin, chlamydia and gonorrhoea are important causes of PID in populations where sexually transmissible infections (STIs) occur at high levels.

The study was conducted in five primary health care centers in remote Central Australia.

In a two year period, Ms Silver found that approximately one in 10 women aged less than 35 years presented to the health centre with symptoms consistent with PID. However, very few were investigated for PID according to clinical guidelines and when PID was diagnosed, it was not treated appropriately.

“Increased awareness of symptoms, diagnosis, treatment and a revision of the guidelines is needed to improve detection and management of PID in a high risk STI setting such as Central Australia,” Ms Silver said.

“Early detection and effective management of PID in primary care settings can prevent complications and hospitalisations.”

Ms Silver said the findings, published in the 10 December issue of the Medical Journal of Australia, also underscored the importance of implementing a sustained, comprehensive sexual health program in remote communities to prevent infections being contracted in the first instance.

“This study will help inform ongoing efforts to promote the quality of reproductive health care for Indigenous women in remote communities.”

Ms Silver is the Central Australian coordinator of the STRIVE study; a community randomised trial aimed at addressing the long-standing disparity in rates of sexually transmissible infections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

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**Background**

Menzies School of Health Research is a national leader in Indigenous and tropical health research. It is the only medical research institute in the Northern Territory, with more than 300 staff working in over 60 communities across Central and Northern Australia, as well as developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Menzies is also a significant contributor to health education and research training.