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Sounds like progress

LAUREN ROBERTS
Health Reporter

A \$7.9 million investment in remote NT

ABORIGINAL kids living in remote NT communities will benefit from a five-year, \$7.9 million investment – aiming to help improve their hearing and boost educational opportunities.

The money will fund the new "Hearing for Learning" initiative, founded on research by Territory scientists at Menzies School of Health Research.

Balnaves Foundation founder Neil Balnaves donated \$2.5 million to the project. He said

90 per cent of Aboriginal kids under the age of three in the NT had ear disease and most of them would experience hearing loss.

"This is an epidemic," he said. "When we learned about the chronic nature of ear disease in children living in remote communities in the NT, we could not ignore the fact that this likely leads to profound disadvantage in health, education and employment outcomes. "We believe more

must be done and the next step is to support the community to deliver a solution."

The project will reduce the need for fly-in fly-out specialists and cut the treatment waiting period by upskilling community members to support health and education services on the ground.

It's expected to reach 5000 children with a focus on kids under 3. The project will be rolled out in up to 20 communities and employ up to 40 local

workers. The NT Government is giving \$2.4 million to the project, and the Federal Government is providing \$3 million.

Chief Minister Michael Gunner said he wanted to focus on the first 1000 days of a child's life.

"There's about 4000 kids born a year in the NT, a third of those are Aboriginal, and 90 per cent of those kids have hearing difficulties," he said.

"We know we get better outcomes for their future, and

that's what this partnership aims to do. Hearing health has an enormous impact on a child's development, and by addressing this at a community level, the entire community will benefit."

Menzies director Professor Alan Cass said it would make a difference to the lives of thousands of Territorians.

"Hearing is essential for strong early childhood development and chronic hearing problems in children cause education difficulties leading to entrenched disadvantage," he said.