

Michael Gunner

Chief Minister



Media Statement

Investing in Territory Kids and Generational Change – Hearing for Learning

A public private partnership between the Northern Territory Government, Australian Government and the Balnaves Foundation is addressing chronic hearing problems in Territory children.

90% of Aboriginal children under the age of three in the Northern Territory have ear disease and most of them will experience hearing loss that will affect early brain development and can ultimately lead to entrenched disadvantage.

The Hearing for Learning is a ground-breaking 5-year initiative by the Northern Territory Government, founded on scientific research by Northern Territory scientists at Menzies School of Health Research, combining public and private funding to solve this serious health and education problem.

- \$2.4 million from NT Government
- \$2.5 million from The Balnaves Foundation
- \$3 million from the Federal Government

Prompt diagnosis and optimal treatment in the first 1,000 days of a child's life can treat the disease, and vastly improve learning outcomes.

The Hearing for Learning Initiative is an innovative project founded on ground-breaking research by Menzies School of Health Research, focused on employment and training of community members to assist the diagnosis and treatment of ear disease and hearing problems.

The initiative aims to reduce the need for fly-in fly-out specialists and reduce the treatment waiting period by upskilling community members to support health and education services on the ground where they are needed.

The initiative is expected to reach 5,000 children with a focus on children under 3 and is co-led by Australia's first Indigenous surgeon - ear, nose & throat specialist Dr Kelvin Kong.

This important project commences with 4 remote sites and expected to be rolled out in up to 20 communities employing up to 40 community based workers who will be locally trained and supported.

Quotes from Chief Minister Michael Gunner

“The Territory Labor Government promised to put children at the centre of our decision-making, because we want a brighter future for our kids – a future filled with opportunity.

“When we focus on the first 1000 days of a child's life, 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.

Quotes from Indigenous Health Minister Ken Wyatt AM:

“This is an exciting new opportunity to remove the preventable blight of hearing loss from current and future generations.

“These local ear health warriors will integrate with existing primary care services, strengthening the work of health professionals to combat ear disease.

“Lifting the capacity of local families to recognise, report and treat ear problems early promises to help our children reach their full potential.”

Quotes from Professor Alan Cass Director Menzies School of Health Research.

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

“The Hearing for Learning Initiative is a ground-breaking 5-year investment combining public and private funding to solve this serious health and education problem.

Quotes from Neil Balnaves AO, Founder, The Balnaves Foundation and Chancellor, Charles Darwin University.

“When we learned about the chronic nature of ear disease in children living in remote communities in the Northern Territory, 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.

“Philanthropy plays a unique role in recognising and piloting new approaches, however, it requires partnership with government to deliver these approaches at scale.

“The Government is to be applauded for putting this unique partnership together to solve what has now become a serious epidemic.”

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