

## Five Menzies researchers awarded NHMRC Investigator Grants

15 December 2023

Five researchers from Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) have been awarded National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Investigator Grants in today's [funding round announcement](#).

The researchers' work will further our understanding of infectious diseases and culturally safe care through their successful grants totalling more than \$9 million.

Investigator Grants support researchers at all career stages to pursue new directions, foster innovation and grow programs of research. Grants were awarded to Menzies researchers across all grant categories, from emerging leadership to the most senior level (Level 3), reflecting the high calibre of research and a pipeline of talent at Menzies.

The work taking place over the next 5 years will include ongoing collaborations with global networks, health service providers and communities across northern Australia.

The following researchers were awarded grants in recognition of their research portfolios:

- Professor Anne Chang AM received a Leadership 3 (L3) Grant of \$2,608,931.28 for her research: Improving children's lung health especially for First Nations children through feasible interventions, complemented by novel discovery science.
- Professor Anna Ralph received a Leadership 2 (L2) Grant of \$2,717,732 for her research: Improving health outcomes for First Nations Australians through communicable disease control and culturally safe practice.
- Associate Professor Sarah Auburn received a Leadership 1 (L1) Grant of \$2,670,201.45 for her research: Accelerating Plasmodium vivax malaria elimination with molecular information.
- Dr Steven Kho received an Emerging Leadership 1 (EL1) Grant of \$587,040 for his research: Understanding the large Plasmodium reservoir in the spleen – a hidden barrier to malaria elimination.
- Dr Angela Devine received an Emerging Leadership 1 (EL1) Grant of \$587,040 for her research: Economic analyses to optimise malaria control and elimination.

These projects support Menzies' purpose to improve the health and wellbeing of people in our region through genuine partnerships and excellence in research, translation and education.

**Quotes attributable to Menzies Senior Principal Research Fellow and Child and Maternal Health Division Lead, [Professor Anne Chang AM](#) (childhood lung health, L3 grant):**

"National data highlights that respiratory disorders are the most commonly reported chronic illness for First Nations people aged under 35 years and the second most common cause of hospitalisation.

"This grant will help global and local research into childhood lung health to help reduce the burden of poor lung health, with a focus on First Nations children.

"By addressing child lung health conditions, this supports better health for youth and can put them on track for better lung health as they enter adulthood."

**Quotes attributable to Menzies Senior Principal Research Fellow, [Professor Anna Ralph](#) (infectious diseases and culturally safe care, L2 Grant):**

“New solutions are needed to address the dual impact of infectious diseases in remote communities and the adverse health outcomes that can arise if we’re not getting cultural safety in healthcare right.

“This ongoing work will see co-designed, community-based strategies implemented, updates of clinical guidelines, and further research to tackle infectious diseases. It will also support more healthcare delivery in First Nations languages through Aboriginal interpreters.

“We hope to see better prevention, detection and treatment of key infections and enhanced patient experiences, which supports better health.”

**Quotes attributable to Menzies Principal Research Fellow, [Associate Professor Sarah Auburn](#) (effective malaria treatment, L1 Grant):**

“Many *Plasmodium vivax* malaria infections are not treated effectively owing to dormant parasites in the liver and resistance to antimalarial drugs.

“My research aims to use novel genetic methods to improve the detection of awakened parasites coming from the liver as well as drug resistant infections and monitor their spread across communities.

“Our work will help to inform malaria control programs to effectively target and treat *Plasmodium vivax* infections, particularly in the dormant stages of infection.”

**Quotes attributable to Menzies Senior Research Fellow, [Dr Steven Kho](#) (malaria splenic parasites, EL1 Grant):**

“Global malaria elimination is complicated by the presence of infectious reservoirs hiding in areas of the body outside the bloodstream.

“I recently discovered a large number of malaria parasites hidden in the human spleen (referred to as a reservoir) and a new malaria parasite lifecycle in this organ.

“By working within a global collaborative network we will deepen our biological understanding of the major splenic malaria parasite reservoir and identify ways to overcome splenic parasite survival, to further improve malaria elimination strategies.”

**Quotes attributable to Menzies Senior Research Fellow, [Dr Angela Devine](#) (health economics, EL1 Grant):**

“My broad programme of work is focused on the economics of infectious diseases, with a particular focus on strategies for the control and elimination of malaria.

“This grant will support ongoing research on the cost-effectiveness and return on investment for malaria interventions in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea and enable the expansion of this framework into other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

“An exciting component of this grant will be methodological research on best practices for estimating the cost of time losses due to illness in unpaid populations. The findings will have global applications for patient populations who lose time due to illness and treatment seeking.”

ENDS

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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.