

## **Menzies' lung and cancer programs win \$5 million in 'research excellence' funding**

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Two esteemed lung health and cancer research programs from the Menzies School of Health Research were today declared 'Centres for Research Excellence' and awarded funding of \$2.5 million each over five years.

The Minister for Indigenous Health, Warren Snowdon today announced the Australian Government will allocate \$7.5 million to three 'Indigenous Health Research Centres', two of which are Menzies-based.

Associate Professor Gail Garvey will lead Menzies' cancer research centre from Brisbane which aims to improve the quality of life and survival rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders cancer patients.

"Until now cancer has not been a high priority on the Indigenous health agenda, despite being the second leading cause of death among Indigenous people.

"This funding will allow us to bring together key researchers, practitioners, and consumer advocacy groups from across Australia, and actively promote the translation of research knowledge into Australian public health policy and practice.

"Most importantly it will allow us to train a new generation of researchers – including Indigenous researchers - in Indigenous cancer control," A/Prof Garvey said. Staff from the Centre will work alongside esteemed researcher Professor Joan Cunningham and in collaboration with researchers from several centres across Australia.

Professor Anne Chang will head the Menzies' Centre of Research Excellence (CRE) in Respiratory Health of Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Children from Darwin to focus on improving the lung health of children, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This is in collaboration with researchers from several centres, in particular the Queensland Children's Medical Research Institute at the Royal Children's Hospital in Brisbane and Professor Ngiare Brown at Wollongong University.

Professor Chang, one of Menzies' most prolific researchers – with 240 peer-reviewed research papers to her name – said the Centre will consist of a large team of researchers and clinicians dedicated to addressing lung health of children.

"Lung conditions are the most common reason why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders see a doctor and the second most common reason for hospitalization. It is increasingly appreciated that a lot of lung disease seen in adults starts in children, and many of these lung conditions can be prevented and/or treated if they are recognised and managed before irreversible lung damages sets in."

Menzies' Acting Director, Associate Professor Ross Andrews, said the announcement was a huge boon to the Institute, "Getting the formal recognition as a Centre for Research Excellence in these two areas is great news for the team of researchers and a great encouragement for the people and communities who work with us in trying to find real solutions to improve the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians."

The \$7.5 million that the Australian Government has made available was part of a competitive process where only the best of the best were funded. As Associate Professor Andrews said, "It's like there were three gold medals available and we have managed to win two of them. You only do that by building on good work over a long period of time. Importantly, each of these Centres will have a key role in continuing to build research capacity for the future - it's our version of hours on the training track."

### **Minister Plibersek's media release:**

<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/media/releases/2012/researchers-deadly-esophagus-cancer-share-42-million-grants>

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**Images available on request:** High resolution portraits of Professor Anne Chang and Associate Professor Gail Garvey

## **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 in the Northern Territory 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. Menzies is largely funded through competitive research grants provided by the Australian Government's National Health and Medical Research Council, in addition to funding from the Northern Territory Government.