



Improving models of care for Central Australian youth with obesity and/or diabetes

Why this research is needed: This project was developed in response to requests from NT communities and clinicians to address the issue of increasing rates of youth-onset obesity and diabetes. Disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians with diabetes are most striking in young people. Western Australian data have shown that the incidence of type 2 diabetes among Indigenous young people (aged 17 years and under) is 20 fold higher than among non-Indigenous youth (Hayes et al 2016). Available evidence in Australia and internationally reports substantially higher rates of premature diabetes complications among those with youth-onset diabetes, with particularly high rates of early onset end-stage kidney disease (Dart et al 2012).

Obesity is a key risk for type 2 diabetes, and addressing this is vital in reducing risk of youth-onset type 2 diabetes. International evidence suggests youth obesity rates track from 6-7 years of age into adulthood, thus we need to intervene within this life stage (Cunningham et al 2014). Adaptations of youth obesity programs for Australian Aboriginal children have had limited success thus far (NSW Ministry of Health 2016; Binge 2015) and have highlighted the need to develop a culturally-appropriate and family-focused program.

What this research will do: This research project has two aims, both intended to inform larger grant submissions to improve health outcomes and models of care for Central Australian Aboriginal children and youth. Firstly, it will develop a behavioural intervention to improve cardio-metabolic risk of 7-10 year old youth with overweight or obesity, in partnership with health services and other sectors. Specifically, it will adopt a qualitative action research approach to assess the suitability of Tribal Turning Point and other possible locally informed interventions for the Central Australian context, including potential adaptations.

Second, the project will undertake formative qualitative work with Aboriginal young people with diabetes and health professionals regarding their experiences and suggestions for improvements in models of care for Central Australian Aboriginal children and youth with type 2 diabetes. This will include performing case studies and other qualitative investigations to map the patient journey of young people and to understand the interplay of health services caring for young people with diabetes, focus group discussions with young people and health care professionals, as well as quantitative analysis demographic and clinical data.

How this research will be used: This research will have significance nationally among Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and be of relevance to the increasing global issue of youth onset obesity and diabetes. Findings from this formative research will inform larger grant application/s to design, implement and evaluate interventions, including models of care changes, to improve health of Aboriginal youth with overweight/obesity and type 2 diabetes.

Project details

Lead partner: Menzies School of Health Research

Collaborating partners: Central Australia Aboriginal Congress, Baker Heart & Diabetes Institute, Central Australia Health Service

Key contact: Professor Louise Maple-Brown

Email: Louise.maple-brown@menzies.edu.au

Phone: 08 8922 8888



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