



THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP
Minister for Health and Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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NR08/

NHMRC FUNDS AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE HEALTH

Today, I am pleased to announce more than \$357 million to support health and medical research.

Six hundred and eighty-eight National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) grants are being awarded to universities and research institutions across the country to enable Australia's best and brightest health and medical researchers to continue their research.

Research into how to increase physical activity among children, nanopatches as a new form of flu vaccine and work on the next genetic frontier, epigenetics, are among the NHMRC grants being announced.

Funding this year has increased from \$336 million funding 660 projects in 2008.

Supporting medical research is a crucial investment in our nation's future – it allows our best and brightest to work at the frontiers of scientific discovery, and helps ensure the health of our population for years to come.

The range and diversity of research among these projects is extraordinary.

I am particularly pleased that the Government's focus on public and preventative health is well represented, with a total of almost \$46.5 million going to these important areas of research. Almost \$19 million is being spent specifically on Indigenous health.

I commend the researchers who have received grants. It is a highly competitive process, but we know this research will repay us three times over in its benefits to health.

Among the grants are:

- **Playgrounds: a simple intervention for childhood obesity.** Professor Anita Bundy of the University of Sydney receives \$486,250 to investigate whether the increasing rates of childhood obesity are related to a decrease in outdoor play because parents think it is too risky. A trial will put play high on the priority list of teachers and parents and modify the playground environment to increase activity.
- **Nanopatch vaccines to fight flu.** Professor Mark Kendall of the University of Queensland receives \$491,251 to examine a new way to vaccinate against pandemic influenza using a nanopatch that will make standard vaccines 100 times more potent than conventional syringe injection. The nanopatch uses micro-nanoscale spikes to painlessly deposit vaccine under the skin.

- **Epigenetics, the next genetic frontier.** Professor Emma Whitelaw of Queensland Institute of Medical Research receives \$1,211,250 to address our lack of knowledge about the genetic development of the human embryo, and the epigenetic changes in each cell type as they differentiate into a diverse array of tissues, errors in which process can lead to death and disease.
- **Are you too tired to drive?** Professor Anne Williamson of the University of NSW receives \$427,200 for research that will help determine whether drivers are really able to detect when they are too tired to drive safely or, if they can make this judgment, what motivates them to stop driving.
- **Sun and vitamin D – a protective effect?** Professor Anne-Louise Ponsonby of Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, Victoria, receives \$330,625 to determine what level of sunlight and vitamin D children need to prevent type 1 diabetes.
- **Controlling that cough.** Dr Stuart Mazzone of the University of Melbourne receives \$414,000 to study how the brain regulates coughing and identify new therapies for relieving the condition.
- **Strengthening primary health to reduce sexually transmitted infection in remote Aboriginal communities.** Professor John Kaldor of the University of NSW receives \$1.74 million for a clinical trial testing best practice aimed at reducing the high rates of sexually transmitted infection in remote Aboriginal communities. The trial will take place in 21 communities.
- **Does green tea protect against cancer?** Professor D’ Arcy Holman of the University of WA receives \$913,288 to determine if the chemicals in green tea protect against breast cancer, bowel cancer and leukemia.
- **Beating the obesity epidemic.** Associate Professor Christine Feinle-Bisset of the University of Adelaide receives \$ 714,000 for research into diets that help people to lose weight, only for their body weight to stabilise over time despite continued dieting. This research aims to understand the mechanisms that respond to acute and longer-term dietary restriction and will help to develop successful, long-term weight loss strategies.
- **Reducing respiratory illness in Indigenous infants.** Dr David Thomas of the Menzies School of Health Research, Northern Territory, receives \$864,875 to test whether a family-based program about environmental tobacco smoke will reduce the number of clinic presentations of infants for respiratory illness. Over 60 per cent of Indigenous children live in households with one or more regular smokers, where they are exposed to high levels of environmental tobacco smoke, a significant and preventable cause of respiratory illness. If successful, the study has the potential to improve the health of Indigenous children across Australia.
- **Risk factors for obesity, heart disease and diabetes in young adults.** Associate Professor Alison Venn of the Menzies Research Institute, Tasmania, receives \$349,700 to research how depression, smoking, poor diet, physical inactivity and alcohol consumption in young adults influences the risk of developing obesity, heart disease and diabetes. Understanding these risk factors as part of this study will then aid in developing appropriate prevention strategies.
- **Web-based support to prevent anxiety.** Professor Helen Christensen of the Australian National University, Canberra, receives \$605,125 to evaluate the effectiveness of a new automated Internet program which is designed to reduce the risk of generalised anxiety disorder and to promote self help. If found to be effective, this website will provide assistance to those at risk living in rural and remote areas without access to other resources, and individuals who prefer to seek help anonymously.

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