MEDIA RELEASE  

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New research to prevent Indigenous youth suicide

Four new National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) grants which aim to put a stop to escalating rates of Indigenous youth suicide were announced today.

The grants are the result of an NHMRC Targeted Call for Research, a scheme which enables the Council to fund research into urgent health priorities.

“NHMRC’s targeted calls for research allow us to ‘commission’ research in areas of high need, and Indigenous youth suicide certainly qualifies as a priority. Young Indigenous Australians have the highest reported suicide rates in this country, which is just devastating,” NHMRC CEO Professor Anderson said.

In 2010, suicide rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females aged 15–19 years were 5.9 times higher than those for non-Indigenous females in this age group, while for males the corresponding rate ratio was 4.4.

“Suicide is a very complex issue to tackle and research so far has indicated that there are many complicating factors that contribute to people taking their own lives. These grants aim to build on this research and find ways to prevent suicide in future,” he said.

The grants fit with the NHMRC’s commitment to improving health outcomes of Indigenous Australians by ensuring 5% of all funding is directed to researchers conducting Indigenous health research.

“The health issues faced by our Indigenous people are our nation’s responsibility to solve so it is important that NHMRC funds high quality research that can make a lasting difference,” Professor Anderson said.

The NHMRC Mental Health Targeted Call for Research was one part of an announcement made by Minister Dutton today, which also included $8 million for Practitioner Fellowships and $54.6 million for Research Fellowships.

Mental Health Targeted Call for Research Grants

Dr Roxanne Bainbridge, James Cook University ($824,876)
Dr Bainbridge and her team will implement a mentoring program to help Indigenous secondary students who have moved from remote communities to attend boarding schools across Queensland. This program will seek to improve students’ psychosocial resilience; the mentors will be supported throughout and the impact of the program will be measured.

Professor Anthony Jorm, University of Melbourne ($1,140,372)
Professor Jorm and his team will develop new guidelines to support Indigenous communities to prevent suicide and self-injury amongst their young people. Community members will be trained to act as gatekeepers, identifying young people who are at risk and referring them to health workers with greater health expertise.

Associate Professor Gary Robinson, Menzies School of Health Research ($1,745,899)
Associate Professor Robinson will trial an intervention that aims to build resilience and social-emotional skills among middle school aged youth in remote Indigenous communities of the NT. This intervention is intended to form part of a community-based suicide prevention strategy.

Dr Maree Toombs, University of Queensland ($804,737)
Dr Toombs and her team will develop a training program that links health providers, community members, peers, school leaders and mentors. The program will include members who will serve as “gatekeepers”, identifying at-risk youth and referring them to specialist health professionals. Dr Toombs will also use new technologies such as a smartphone application and social media to help implement and assess the program.

A full list of the outcomes from today’s grants announcement is available on the NHMRC website.

More information about NHMRCs commitment to Indigenous health research is available here.

CONTACT: NHMRC MEDIA TEAM

M: 0422 008 512
E: media@nhmrc.gov.au