



Healthy skin in remote communities

Skin sores and infections are worldwide problems but are particularly important health issues for remote-living Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia. With one study finding impetigo prevalence as high as 70%, these problems are so prevalent that they have come to be considered ‘normal’ – by children, their families and even by health care providers. NHMRC-funded researchers at the Menzies School for Health Research in Darwin and the Kids Research Institute in Western Australia (WA) have made major contributions to improving skin health in these communities.



(See, Treat, Prevent) Skin Sores and Scabies



Origin

Skin infections such as scabies, impetigo and tinea are serious problems within remote-living Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These infections impair wellbeing on their own, and they can also lead to kidney and heart disease.

The ultimate cause of these health issues is unsafe living conditions, including inadequate food, water, sanitation, housing, health care provision and infrastructure. However, improved knowledge is also needed to improve health.



Investment

NHMRC supported a number of researchers at the Menzies School of Health Research in Darwin and other locations to improve skin health. These researchers included: Asha Bowen, Bart Currie, Jonathan Carapetis, Steven Tong, Shelley Walton, David Kemp, Deborah Holt, Ross Andrews, Kerry Gaudry, Elizabeth McDonald and Therese Kearns.

Funding to support this research was also provided through the Australian Government’s Cooperative Research Centres (CRC) program.



Research

Commencing in 1992, the NHMRC-funded researchers undertook a range of projects to improve skin health in Australia’s tropical north. These projects included a mass drug administration (MDA) of permethrin in the Northern Territory (NT), the East Arnhem Healthy Skin Project (EAHSP), an Ivermectin MDA in eastern Arnhem Land, the Skin Sore trial in NT, the SToP trial in the Kimberley (northern WA).

They also led the development of the National Healthy Skin Guidelines (NHSKG).



Translation

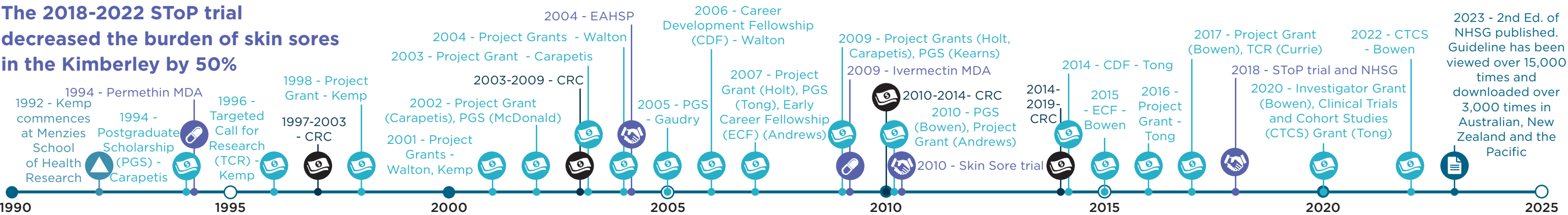
These research activities have had an ongoing effect on community capability and resilience through: school based screening and surveillance activities; training for health care workers, school staff and community members in screening and education; providing clinics with safe, effective, less invasive and easier to use best practice treatments; the co-design of community driven health-promotion; and the development of a suite of resources for the diagnosis and treatment of skin infections including flip-charts and other documents in local languages.



Impact

The projects have produced a range of positive effects on health in tropical north communities. For example, the 1994 permethrin MDA reduced scabies prevalence from 32% to 6% while the SToP trial decreased the burden of skin sores by 50%. The research has informed and improved both clinical and health resource allocation decisions. It has also increased prevention. However, the major cause of skin sores - unsafe living conditions - must be addressed before skin health in these communities will improve in the longer-term.

The 2018-2022 SToP trial decreased the burden of skin sores in the Kimberley by 50%



Researchers

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