



MENZIES SCHOOL OF HEALTH RESEARCH

2020-21 Pre-Budget Submission

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Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) is pleased to put forward its 2020-21 Pre-Budget submission.

1. Summary of recommendations

The medical and health research sector has an important role in supporting economic growth, job creation and attracting investment to Australia.

This role has been further emphasised in key policy statements from both the Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments to ensure the future prosperity of northern Australia.

For example, medical and health research is a stated economic priority in the Northern Territory Economic Development Framework and its Economic Reconstruction Priorities, as well as being highlighted as a strategic priority in the Commonwealth's White Paper on Developing Northern Australia.

Directly related to supporting medical and health research in northern Australia, this pre-budget submission requests that the Commonwealth provide \$5m to support a four (4) year extension to the Northern Australia Tropical Disease Collaborative Research Program (NATDCRP), administered by Menzies School of Health Research in collaboration with seven (7) of Australia's leading health research organisations – James Cook University, Telethon Kids Institute, Burnet Institute, The University of Sydney, the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute, Doherty Institute and QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute.

The NATDCRP – now referred to as the *HOT North Program* - was announced as a \$6.8m budget measure by the Minister for Trade and Investment, the Hon Andrew Robb on 10 May 2015. *HOT North* is a five (5) year investment in tropical health that resulted from the Commonwealth's White Paper on Developing Northern Australia and is scheduled to conclude at the end of 2021.

Headquartered in the Northern Territory, and covering an area from the Pilbara and Kimberley in Western Australia to Cape York and the Torres Strait in Queensland, *HOT North* is a health research, translation and capacity building partnership contributing to the healthcare needs of the north.

We believe that the benefits of continued Commonwealth Government funding support for *HOT North* would be significant, leading to real improvement in health and wellbeing, and advancing the prosperity of northern Australia.

As identified in the Commonwealth's White Paper on Developing Northern Australia, advances in tropical medicine and healthcare service delivery are critical to unlocking the potential of northern Australia.

2. Menzies School of Health Research

Menzies, proudly headquartered in the Northern Territory, has conducted health and medical research that makes a difference to the lives of people across northern Australia and the region for the past 35 years.

Despite the challenges of remoteness, on many measures we are one of Australia's most successful medical research institutes.

Menzies' work has led to fundamental changes in health policy and practice across northern Australia and the globe. Our research has saved and improved countless lives.

As a leader in health research, education and training, Menzies employs more than 330 people in Darwin, Alice Springs and across Queensland.

Our world-class research and collaborations generate significant economic and social contributions.

For example, our activities have been assessed as generating \$1.1b of total benefit and \$698m net benefit at a benefit-cost ratio of 2.7 across Australia and Asia. For the Northern Territory, Menzies' activities generated a total benefit of \$309m, with a net benefit of \$168m¹.

3. Building on a proven success story: *HOT North*

HOT North supports researchers and practitioners working to improve the health of all people living in northern Australia, with a strong focus on closing the gap in Indigenous health.

More than two-thirds of *HOT North* activities to date have focused on addressing the main diseases causing Indigenous health disadvantage, such as youth and maternal diabetes, rheumatic heart disease, respiratory infections and skin diseases. Remaining activities have enabled research into emerging health threats, such as antimicrobial resistance of tropical diseases, which disproportionately affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations.

HOT North has had remarkable success in supporting almost 100 research projects, fellowship and scholarships across Northern Australia.

Examples of impact are provided below. Additionally, *HOT North's* most recent impact report is available [here](#) and provided as a separate attachment.

HOT North Impact:

- The [Communicate study](#) led by [Professor Anna Ralph](#) increased access to Aboriginal language interpreters at Royal Darwin Hospital. Within its first year of intervention, there was a **significant decrease in early self-discharge rates** for Aboriginal inpatients during that time.
- The [HOTspots surveillance system](#), developed by [Dr Teresa Wozniak](#) with colleagues across the three northern jurisdictions, enables health workers and policy makers to access real-time data on antimicrobial resistance patterns, supporting **more rational and strategic use of antibiotics**.
- The [HOT NORTH Diabetes in Youth collaboration](#), led by [Professor Louise Maple-Brown](#), has become a strong advocate for better prevention and care. Clinicians and health providers across the Kimberley, Northern Territory and Far North Queensland report that engagement with the HOT NORTH collaboration has **led to a marked increase in screening and diagnosis for Type 2 diabetes in people under 25**, with Darwin-based paediatric and adult endocrinologists receiving more referrals for young people diagnosed with the condition.
- Mosquito-borne virus [surveillance methods](#), developed by *HOT North* investigators in [Professor Scott Ritchie's](#) Queensland group, are now **used by multiple state and**

¹ Deloitte Access Economics, 2015.

Commonwealth authorities to monitor for incursions of Murray Valley and Japanese encephalitis viruses.

- **Strengthening the research workforce in the north** through initiatives such as establishing the 147-member [Women in Tropical Health \(WITH\) Network](#) and by supporting 14 undergraduate and postgraduate students, 23 early-career and mid-career fellows and 13 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders working in health research.
- [Child lung health communication tools](#) developed by [Pam Laird](#) in Western Australia have begun to reverse the “normalisation” of chronic wet cough among clinicians across northern Australia, resulting in **important improvements in quality of care** for children at risk of bronchiectasis.
- Healthy skin research, such as the SToP trial led by [Associate Professor Asha Bowen](#) has resulted in the National Healthy Skin Guideline, a new tool **now widely used across the remote health sector to prevent and manage skin infections.**

Critical to *HOT North’s* success has been its core focus on translation, demonstrated by the fact that more than 80 health sector organisations including health departments, hospitals and Aboriginal Medical Services have participated in these projects.

Additionally, *HOT North* has enabled and built cross-jurisdictional capacity and networks across northern Australia.

With additional funding support from the Commonwealth, *HOT North* will continue to focus on key health research priorities and transition over the next four (4) years to become a fully sustainable centre underpinned by philanthropic, industry and state and territory funding.

More specifically, Commonwealth funding will:

- Generate new knowledge that leads to improved health outcomes;
- Promote effective transfer of research outcomes into health policy and practice;
- Attract, develop and retain health and medical expertise in northern Australia by providing opportunities to advance the training of new researchers, particularly those with a capacity for research and clinical leadership.

Requested Budget

Items	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24	Total
Priority Health Research Projects (<i>surveillance, case management and prevention, policy and practice</i>)	\$200,000	\$600,000	\$600,000	\$600,000	\$2,000,000
Research Translation	\$120,000	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$1,320,000
Capacity Building and Training	\$100,000	\$325,000	\$325,000	\$325,000	\$1,075,000
Centre Operations	\$80,000	\$175,000	\$175,000	\$175,000	\$605,000
	\$500,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$5,000,000

We look forward to discussing this submission with you.