HEALTHLAB: A NEW APPROACH TO TACKLING CHRONIC DISEASE IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

THE GAP

"Engaging people to make lifestyle changes for better health is challenging. HealthLAB takes a unique approach by giving health information a context. It’s personalised and it shows from a scientific perspective how lifestyle decisions such as diet and substance-use impact the body, and therefore, why they matter."

Associate Professor Heidi Smith-Vaughan
Menzies School of Health Research

It is estimated that CHRONIC DISEASE costs Australians around $35 BILLION EVERY YEAR

In addition, chronic diseases are responsible for nearly 80 per cent of the total burden of disease and injury in Australia and more than two-thirds of all health expenditure. While access to services is an issue for all Australians who live in very remote communities, a high proportion of these people are Indigenous Australians. The burden of chronic disease is therefore disproportionately carried by Indigenous Australians.
This disproportionate rate of chronic disease sits at the heart of the gap in Indigenous and non-Indigenous life expectancy. It is therefore critical that health education services be provided to all Indigenous communities.

Menzies is leading the way in providing these important services through HealthLAB, which is an interactive and educational experience run as a mobile pop-up laboratory. HealthLAB shows participants the workings of their body and measures their biomedical risk factors for chronic diseases. Through HealthLAB, participants are being empowered to make the positive lifestyle choices which will improve their health in the long-term.

Because the people we most need to reach live in Australia’s most remote areas, our trailblazing, mobile HealthLAB travels to these communities to deliver these services.

There is a 10 YEAR GAP in the AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians

80% OF THE HEALTH GAP between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is DUE TO CHRONIC DISEASE

This is largely a result of a LACK OF ACCESS TO GOOD EDUCATION AND SUPPORT

This disproportionate rate of chronic disease sits at the heart of the gap in Indigenous and non-Indigenous life expectancy. It is therefore critical that health education services be provided to all Indigenous communities.
BRIDGING THE GAP

HealthLAB will visit high schools in urban, regional, and remote communities across the Northern Territory. The program has a growing number of stations dedicated to the core themes of diet, exercise, smoking and alcohol intake. It also includes equipment to test blood pressure, body mass index and exhaled carbon monoxide to gauge the impact of smoking and passive smoking. There are hands-on displays and experiments demonstrating the sugar content in common drinks, the poisons in a cigarette, and the effect of alcohol on coordination.

Participants have the unique opportunity to speak directly with a dietician, clinician and other health experts. With an ultrasound and sonographer on-board, participants can even see their own organs at work in their bodies. Direct visualisation of the heart beating and the blood flow in major vessels and the kidneys, facilitates health ownership and encourages discussion about the body and how it functions.

There has been a **SIGNIFICANT DECLINE in RISKY DRINKING**

*down from 32% to 23%*

A totally immersive experience, HealthLAB provides visitors with their own personalised health 'report card', along with an enriched understanding of their own health and the impact that their lifestyle decisions have on this.

**SMOKING, POOR NUTRITION, ALCOHOL MISUSE & PHYSICAL INACTIVITY**

are among the main drivers of **CHRONIC DISEASE**

---

There has been a **SIGNIFICANT DECLINE in RISKY DRINKING**

*down from 32% to 23%*
THE STRATEGY

This initiative is about reducing the prevalence of chronic, preventable disease in Australia. It starts where the greatest need lies, in remote Indigenous communities. It seeks to short-circuit the development of chronic diseases, and has the potential to benefit thousands of people across all generations.

Diabetes and heart disease alone cost the Australian health system more than $6 billion each year, and we know that there are four modifiable lifestyle factors: smoking, physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and alcohol misuse, that have a huge influence on the development of these conditions.

By targeting these four lifestyle factors, HealthLAB aims to decrease the rates of onset of chronic disease and improve the health of all generations.

This project will also test HealthLAB’s potential for wider uptake in every age group and other communities across Australia, looking at the positive impact it can have on the health of all Australians.

2 out of 5 Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over are DAILY SMOKERS

69% of Indigenous adults are OVERWEIGHT OR OBESE

OVER 30% OF ADULTS IN REMOTE AREAS ARE OBESE, compared to around 20% in the major cities
WE ARE SEEKING $1 MILLION ANNUALLY TO ENSURE THAT:

• Through HealthLAB we can reach up to 73 communities with personalised, health based education

• HealthLAB can be taken on the road to many different communities depending on the level of support that we are able to attract. We are seeking funding for a school-based program targeting Year 10-12s, a visiting program to remote communities and an urban adult program to be delivered in public spaces and workplaces

• Through utilising a large pool of volunteers in remote communities and Darwin schools, and working with Indigenous services and other health professionals, we are able to do much more than would otherwise be the case

• With funding, HealthLAB can continue to implement one of our core values of capacity building in community, by employing Indigenous trainee nurses, medical students and dieticians. HealthLAB has an impressive record in this regard, with seven trainees who have previously volunteered for HealthLAB continuing on science career pathways