

**MEDIA RELEASE - MAY 11, 2015**

## **Rheumatic Heart Disease in Australia - End Game funding provides pathway to protect Australian Indigenous youth**

Preventable acute rheumatic fever (ARF) and rheumatic heart disease (RHD) continue to affect Indigenous communities in Australia due largely to social disadvantage. **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people** are up to **eight times more likely** than other Australians to be hospitalised for ARF and RHD, and **nearly 20 times as likely to die from the disease**. In the Northern Territory in 2010, the prevalence rate of RHD among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was **26 times the rate for non-Indigenous people**.

Efforts to understand, prevent and manage this disease have made Australian researchers world leaders in RHD. Two decades of research have produced important new knowledge and new ideas about controlling RHD. It is time to build those research efforts into a cohesive, measurable, strategy.

In late 2014, the National Health and Medical Council of Australia awarded five years of funding for a Centre for Research Excellence in RHD. Known as the '**END RHD CRE**', the program brings together 20 investigators, 16 institutions and a broad range of collaborators to identify the steps and interim targets needed to end RHD in Australia.

Professor Jonathan Carapetis, Director of Telethon Kids Institute and Chief Investigator CRE, said; "The END RHD CRE is the first time that any country has had the opportunity to build a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy for ending RHD. This project represents a tremendous challenge and untold opportunity to tackle the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

"Funding for the END RHD CRE will make it possible to amplify world class RHD research already underway in Australia and to understand what is needed to eliminate the disease as a public health priority in this country."

The END RHD CRE will be launched on May 13<sup>th</sup> in Sydney and a first year prospectus released. The launch coincides with May 11- 15 meetings of clinicians and practitioners convened by RHD Australia to address ARF and RHD in the Australian landscape.

Investigators for END RHD CRE affiliated research projects currently underway in Australia will also meet to discuss collective translation of research outcomes. Work to understand the determinants of secondary prophylaxis, the genetic risk of RHD and the devastating impact of RHD in pregnancy will be addressed. Australian work on the coalition to advance new vaccines against group A streptococcus (CANVAS) project underway with New Zealand will also be discussed.

"We understand that ending RHD does not mean it will be eradicated, nor the substantial changes to the burden of disease will occur over the life of this CRE. Instead, we commit to identifying a set of costed, step-wise interventions which are most likely to reduce the incidence of ARF and the prevalence of RHD to the same level as non-Indigenous Australians", said Professor Carapetis.

In addition to supporting research and translation activities, the END RHD CRE has an explicit commitment to support new and emerging researchers. Seed grants, a fellowship program and mentorship pathways are being developed to facilitate Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers to join the research and translation community.

MORE

RHDAustralia are translation partners to the END RHD CRE and will be supporting the transition from new knowledge to changed practice and outcomes.

"At the events in Sydney, we will have experts from all jurisdictions bringing their own understanding of the challenges involved in preventing ARF and treating RHD," said Professor Bart Currie, Director, RHD Australia.

"New opportunities, new knowledge and new technology make us optimistic that we can make a real difference. The vision is that by working collaboratively we can eliminate what is an entirely preventable condition," said Professor Currie.

ENDS

**The following experts are available for interview**

- Professor Jonathan Carapetis, Director Telethon Kids Institute, Chief Investigator END RHD CRE
- Professor Bart Currie, Director RHD Australia
- Claire Boardman, Deputy Director RHD Australia
- Vicki Wade, Leader of Aboriginal Health Unit, Heart Foundation

For further information or to arrange an interview please contact:  
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