

# MENZIES CENTRE FOR HEALTH POLICY

## Media Release

Chronic Illness Grant – March 06

The quality of life of patients with common long-term illnesses like heart disease, diabetes and smoking-related lung disease could be dramatically improved as the result of a research about to get underway in a joint project between two of Australia's leading universities.

The University of Sydney and The Australian National University have received a joint grant of \$3.5 million as part of the National Health and Medical Research Council's latest grant round.

The Menzies Centre for Health Policy, a collaborative research centre between the University of Sydney and The Australian National University, will facilitate the grant and allow the combination of expert resources to investigate how health system change could slash the number of hospital admissions for manageable diseases.

Professor Stephen Leeder, co-director of the Menzies Centre for Health Policy and Director of the Australian Health Policy Institute at the University of Sydney, said "changes in the way patients with chronic illness are cared for could also result in millions of dollars in savings to the health system."

"Studies have shown that low-cost care management for patients with congestive heart failure could save about \$1000 per patient annually. And World Health Organisation research shows chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which is directly related to smoking, is the third leading cause of human and economic burden of disease."

"But we can be doing more to help patients with these illnesses stay well, and stay out of hospital. Some of what might be done could be quite simple if we build solid relationships of care with these people."

Mr Robert Wells, co-director of the Menzies Centre for Health Policy at The Australian National University, said "the study would concentrate on chronic, non-communicable diseases because they account for 70 per cent of disease burden in Australia."

"This study will look at ways of managing those diseases so they do not get to the expensive acute care stage. We believe hospitals should not have to be dealing with patients whose illnesses can be managed," Mr Wells said.

Professor Nicholas Glasgow, a Chief investigator at ANU and Director of the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute based at ANU said the research would cover about 700 patients in both Sydney and the ACT.

It will aim to find effective organisational and financial arrangements to improve health outcomes for Australians, he said.

"From a patient's perspective there are a number of barriers to accessing care, which may just be system faults – physios and medical services not being closely located making it hard to see one then the other. This research aims to identify what those impediments are and find practical solutions to tackling them."

**Media contacts: The University of Sydney, Diana Freeman (02) 93512818; The Australian National University, Frith Rayner, 0400 459 988**



The University of Sydney

