



Northern Land Council



Media Release

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Healthy Country: Healthy People

Study supports links between healthy landscapes and healthy people

A groundbreaking study initiated by traditional owners in collaboration with researchers at Charles Darwin University's Institute of Advanced Studies, the Northern Land Council and the Menzies School of Health Research has demonstrated an association between Indigenous 'Caring for Country' practices and a healthier, happier life.

Collaborating with the Traditional Owners of western and central Arnhem Land, the 'Healthy Country, Healthy People' study assessed the health outcomes of Indigenous people compared to their involvement in natural and cultural resource management.

This exploratory study investigated the close connections between Indigenous people, their ancestral lands and the impacts that this may have on the health of landscapes as well as the physical health and well-being of populations.

Principal investigator for the project, CDU's Dr Stephen Garnett, said that sustained pressure to centralise populations and services has led to the depopulation of homelands and the creation of remote area townships.

"Indigenous people living in remote townships suffer from a burden of illness associated with inactivity, malnutrition, social dysfunction, and other social disadvantages.

"This has had a negative effect on the health of both the landscapes and the people," Dr Garnett said.

Key findings from this innovative study have shown for the first time that people taking part in customary and contemporary land and sea management practices, particularly those living in traditional homelands, are much healthier, including lower rates of diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

"In addition, participants in natural and cultural resource management practices report a more nutritious diet and a greater degree of physical activity," he added.

The authors of the study conclude that the expansion of natural and cultural resource management activities in remote Indigenous communities would deliver a healthier environment, sustainable economic development opportunities and also has the potential to deliver significant economic savings in health care expenditure.

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“This is a positive study in Indigenous health that is a response to Indigenous requests to investigate ‘what works’,” Dr Garnett said.

“We think these results justify investment by government in natural and cultural resource management, along with further work to ensure our initial research findings are confirmed.”

The findings of the study will be discussed at a seminar to be held on Tuesday 8th May, 3pm at the Menzies School of Health Research in Darwin. Go to www.menzies.edu.au for more information.

The Healthy People Healthy Country project is a project funded by Land and Water Australia, The Northern Territory Government, National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and Pfizer. The project was undertaken by researchers from the Institute of Advanced Studies at Charles Darwin University in collaboration with a number of partners including the traditional owners of west Arnhem Land, the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, the Northern Land Council and the Northern Territory Government.

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