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New approach to tackling smoking

A new research project soon to kick off in the Pilbara will take an innovative approach to tackling smoking amongst Aboriginal women.

The project, funded through the Australian Government's Tackling Indigenous Smoking program, will work with Aboriginal women living in Port Hedland and the Western Desert communities of Jigalong, Parnngurr, Punmu and Kunawarritji to understand the role smoking plays in their lives and use this knowledge to refine existing smoking cessation programs.

"Many of the current 'quit' programs for women focus on the impact of smoking on their unborn or newborn babies," said Rural Health West General Manager Vivienne Duggin.

"This can mean that the mother returns to smoking once baby is born, or can cause mothers to feel guilty if they are unable to quit during pregnancy.

"Through the Tackling Indigenous Smoking grant, we will be working in partnership with researchers from Telethon Kids Institute and local health staff from Wirraka Maya Aboriginal Health Service Corporation and Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service to develop a women's-centred approach to smoking cessation," she said.

A women's-centred, trauma-informed approach takes into consideration a range of factors that may influence a woman to take up or continue smoking.

"This may include the influence of their partner smoking, stress and post-natal depression, high caregiving pressures and difficult life circumstances. It also highlights the positive reasons for women to quit for themselves, rather than just for their babies, such as better health, increased control and a sense of empowerment," said Vivienne.

The researchers, Associate Professor Roz Walker, Dr Tracy Reibel and Dr Paula Wyndow will work with local health staff including local community care workers to engage Aboriginal women to participate in the research aspect of the project and trial the resulting culturally-relevant smoking cessation program.

"This may involve the creation of a women-only support group focused on women's health and wellbeing; taking a more holistic approach rather than focusing only on quitting smoking," said Vivienne.

"The aim is to create a positive experience of smoking cessation and provide the women with an opportunity to discuss their smoking in a supportive environment."

The project will commence in the near future and run through to June 2018.

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Rural Health West is a not-for-profit organisation responsible for recruiting and retaining a highly skilled sustainable health workforce that meets the healthcare needs of rural and remote communities in Western Australia. We are primarily funded through the WA Country Health Service and the Australian Government Department of Health.