

Friday, 5 November 2021

## Tasmanian researchers share in national funding

Three University of Tasmania medical research teams will share in more than \$2 million of funding after successfully securing grants in the highly competitive National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Ideas grant program.

Dr Carlie Cullen and Dr Barbara de Graaff from the University's Menzies Institute for Medical Research, and Dr Catherine Blizzard from the Tasmanian School of Medicine, have each been awarded funding for research projects.

The funding will support new research into symptoms of mental health disorders, motor neuron disease and assist NT Indigenous communities respond to chronic infection with hepatitis B.

"Congratulations to this year's recipients who were successful in securing a highly competitive grant," College of Health and Medicine Executive Dean Professor Denise Fassett said.

"It's wonderful to see three early/mid-career women researchers gain the recognition for their work, with this funding further supporting and enabling them to continue their vital research.

"These projects illustrate our College's expertise and commitment towards ensuring better health outcomes for not only Tasmanians, but also communities across Australia."

Menzies Institute for Medical Research Director Distinguished Professor Alison Venn said this year's success further reflected the distinctive research strengths.

"The potential impact of these research projects is enormous as they address health problems that affect many individuals and communities," Professor Venn said.

The three 2021 Ideas grants projects are:

**Dr Carlie Cullen - Myelin: wrapping up neural circuit function and behaviour.** Almost half of all Australians aged 16-85 will experience mental illness in their life, yet we do not understand the underlying biological processes that contribute to mental ill health. This project aims to show how brain insulation adapts to and regulates brain function and learn how inappropriate insulation could underpin symptoms of mental health disorders.

**Dr Catherine Blizzard - Toward tailored excitation therapy for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.** There is currently no cure or effective treatments for motor neuron disease and associated dementia. This project will investigate new targeted therapies to stop or slow down disease progression, that are tailored specifically to the brain and spinal cord.

**Dr Barbara de Graaff – Eliminating hepatitis B in remote Indigenous settings: generating health economic evidence.** Chronic infection with hepatitis B (CHB), which can cause liver disease, including liver cancer, is common across NT Indigenous communities. Many people are unaware they have CHB and few engage in care. To address this, the NHMRC funded the HEP B PAST Project in 2017 which aims to eliminate CHB from NT Indigenous communities. Results show a highly effective model of care. This new project will generate health economic evidence that is required to embed the HEP B PAST model into standard practice.

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