

For Immediate release:

East Arnhem Land is the worst place for preventable deaths, but not without hope.

A recent ABC news [article \(Other everyday pandemics we could be trying to stop\)](#) highlighted the research from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare revealing that Indigenous Australians are three times more likely to die from a potentially avoidable cause and these deaths are concentrated in East Arnhem Land. The leading causes of avoidable death reported were chronic health conditions often linked to poor lifestyle such as smoking, excessive alcohol use and poor diet.

Hope for Health program is an innovative grass roots program led by a group of Yolngu women on Elcho Island, that has been demonstrating success in tackling these very challenges in that region. The program uses the wisdom of traditional Yolngu diet and lifestyle as a foundation together with modern approaches to nutrition to take Arnhem Landers on a 3-month learning journey that begins with a 2-week educational retreat.

Timothy Trudgen, Executive Director and Co-founder, points out “We have three years of data including an independent evaluation of the potential of the program's direct impact. It has enabled Yolngu participants to improve their blood sugar levels, their blood pressure and most significantly their waist measurements, which indicates an improvement of chronic disease related risk”.

The outcomes have been such that the University of Melbourne and Charles Darwin University have teamed up to study Hope for Health's outcomes through a randomised control trial funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

The Yolngu people of Elcho Island have been extremely concerned about the constant turnover of early deaths in their community for many years and see Hope for Health as a big part of the solution.

Dianne Biritalawuy is a Co-founder and committee member for Hope for Health, she explains, “Before in the mission days people waited two or three years for the next funeral, not every day or every week. This is not like in the days when I was growing up. Today burying people is every week or month, we are constantly burying people, it has become normal. For young people who don't have the history, it's normal. Grieving for us is every day. How would you feel if you were going through this?... We have no wellbeing really!”

“Through Hope for Health we are trying to create that wellbeing space, to create the vitality change in our communities to get away from this space where we do not belong. We want to see our people in training and education”

“Yolngu have been asking for self-determination even from the old days, before the mission handover. We got self-management without the kind of training the old people were asking for. We have to have an opportunity to get true education from both sides, Yolngu side and the Balanda side. We need to be taught about foods and nutrition. Hope for Health has been providing that support and training so Yolngu can achieve long healthy lives. We want to live and thrive like our forefathers did.”

“The research trial is a perfect opportunity to demonstrate a part of the solution for Arnhem Land, as it will be able to show us the impact we are having against what is really going on in the health of the community and can show how the program can work at a larger scale. It's something we have been working towards. But we are not there yet” says Mr Trudgen, “While the research is funded, Hope for Health finds itself with a funding shortfall that has to be met to ensure that the program continues for the research trial. We are continuing to actively seek funds”

Timothy Trudgen and Dianne Biritjalawuy are available for an interview. Please contact us for more information and images

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