# A prospective study of substance misuse and of a community-driven preventive measures in remote Aboriginal communities

## Researchers

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## Summary

This project looks at substance misuse in three Aboriginal Arnhem Land communities and includes a prospective evaluation of a community-driven preventive youth initiative, and an examination of patterns of substance use and related mental health problems.

The involvement of the Menzies School of Health Research allowed for this project to link seamlessly with their study of cannabis use in two remote Indigenous communities.

The Groote Eylandt and Milyakburra Youth Development Unit (GEMYDU) provides a range of preventive activities (training, recreational and cultural), within a community development framework, to young people in the community as well as case management for young offenders referred for juvenile diversion.

This study evaluated methods of operation, community acceptance, perceived impact, and likely ability to meet goals; and included community, staff and stakeholder interviews and observation. School attendance, youth apprehension rates, and information on levels of substance use were compared two years before and two years after the initiative was implemented.

## Outcomes

Interviews from the five year follow-up showed cannabis users reporting reduced cannabis use compared with the three year follow up (2004); that reduction seems largely due to successful supply control by the local police. In addition to this, 70% of users reported an intention to quit or cut down, but said that they did not know how, and 30% of users had quit in the last 12 months.

Users also reported less drug substitution with petrol (used as an inhalant). They also reported fewer incidents of violence by cannabis users to people or property when cannabis supplies ran out, with many engaging instead in alternative productive activities, such as hunting, fishing, tidying up around the house, and taking kids to the river. Feedback from interviewees and key stakeholders suggests that further influxes of cannabis into these communities would likely result in a rise in cannabis use and related harms.

One of the significant benefits of the study was the development of methods to communicate the results of research to members of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As a result of this project the study communities can meaningfully access the results of health research translated using local Indigenous concepts and language for the first time.

The skill base of community researchers has been greatly enhanced with nine Indigenous researchers employed on the five-year follow up of substance misuse in these communities.

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