

# Trial shows promise

A new trial, watchful waiting for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with acute otitis media (WATCH), is having positive effects on both Indigenous children and health workers.

CLAUDETTE (Sissy) Tyson, a research officer with WATCH, is touched by the impact she is having on lives of young Aboriginal parents and children in the Brisbane suburb of Inala.

"One of our patients' mothers rang me recently to say her daughter's ears were sore," she said.

"She asked to see me before any doctor looked in her ears, so I could make sure all was OK. I reassured the child that her ears were fine with no ear infection and then she saw the doctor."

The WATCH trial is a research project looking at ear disease in urban Indigenous communities.

Kira Schubert is another research officer working with WATCH at Awabakal Ltd, in Newcastle.

"Ear disease is very common in our children who have higher rates of ear disease and hearing loss than non-Indigenous children," she said.

"The problem is our community is not aware of the effects that ear disease can have on your hearing long term. Some people just think that it is behaviour issues.

## Two main treatments

"A common middle-ear infection is acute otitis media (AOM). There are two main treatment options for AOM: Antibiotics or 'watchful waiting'.

Current Australian guidelines say for children over the age of two years who are not at high risk of complications, 'watchful waiting' is the best treatment.

Previous guidelines recommended antibiotic treatment for all Indigenous children.

Using too many antibiotics can cause antibiotic resistance and side effects such as diarrhoea.

Children with AOM are usually better within a week, whether they have antibiotics or not.

Ms Schubert said the WATCH trial was studying which treatment was best for urban Indigenous children.

"We hope that our community will become more aware of ear disease so we can help prevent AOM and hearing loss that may cause learning problems, social problems and problems with getting a job later in life," she said.

"We are making ear disease known in the community so our people recognise the symptoms. We provide pamphlets with information about AOM, and use posters and



WATCH research officer Sissy Tyson works with William Egert, from Inala, and his mum, Sonya Egert.

social media to encourage screening for ear problems."

In addition to Awabakal and Inala Indigenous Health Service, WATCH is working with Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation, and Sydney West Aboriginal Health Service, in Sydney, as well as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Services in Brisbane and Winnunga Nimmitiyah Aboriginal Health Service in Canberra.

Ms Tyson said part of her role was to train doctors.

"I had a patient and mother come for a day-seven follow-up and I asked a new registrar to see them," she said.

"I guided her through the forms and using the equipment and when I could see the mother was getting impatient and giving me funny looks, I politely let the registrar know that the patient needed to go soon.

"Later, the mother said to me that if I wasn't in the room with them, she would have left.

"When the registrar asked for feedback, I explained how she could do it better next time. She was happy with my feedback."

Ms Schubert said that until recently, she had no idea that ear disease was such a problem in Indigenous communities.

"This has been a big eye-opener for me. To be able to learn about such a life-changing problem in the communities and be able to help identify these issues is such a rewarding job," she said.

Ms Tyson and Ms Schubert said they had been inspired by Associate Professor Kelvin Kong, one of the research team and Australia's first Aboriginal ear, nose and throat surgeon.

"He has made me open my eyes in the bigger world in so many ways," Ms Tyson said.

"I want to better myself in my employment and am doing my Diploma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care. I want to do further studies. I don't know exactly what path I will take, but I do know I want to stay in health to help my people."

Ms Schubert said moving from her home town of Coopernook had been a big change.

"This is the first time I have worked in a clinical role. I am really enjoying it," she said.

"I never thought I would be in this industry but I am loving it.

"I am grateful to be able to be a part of such important work in our community. This has definitely been a life-changing opportunity for me that I will be forever grateful for."



Kira Schubert, WATCH research officer at Awabakal, in Newcastle.

## Heritage Act 1977

### Notice of intention to consider listing on the State Heritage Register

The Heritage Council of NSW maintains the State Heritage Register which is a list of places of particular importance to the people of NSW, including Aboriginal and other heritage.

The Heritage Council is currently considering whether or not to recommend the listing of the following places on the State Heritage Register in acknowledgment of their heritage significance.

#### The Greatest Wonder of the World and the American Tobacco Warehouse and Fancy Goods Emporium, Gulgong

Written submissions on this listing are invited from any interested person by 8 June 2016.

Enquiries to Mary Ann Hamilton on (02) 9873 8565 or  
Maryann.hamilton@environment.nsw.gov.au

#### The Rock Bolting Development Site, Cooma

Written submissions on this listing are invited from any interested person by 4 July 2016.

Enquiries to Barrina South on (02) 6229 7096 or  
barrina.south@environment.nsw.gov.au  
Alternatively, Dave Johnston on (02) 6229 7167 or  
dave.johnston@environment.nsw.gov.au

#### Old Wentworth Gaol, Wentworth

Written submissions on this listing are invited from any interested person by 4 May 2016.

Enquiries to Harvey Johnston on (03) 5021 8914 or  
Harvey.johnston@environment.nsw.gov.au

The Heritage Council is interested in receiving information in writing, by email, telephone or in person from the Aboriginal community or Aboriginal organisations on the potential Aboriginal significance of these places.

Further details on the nominated places can be viewed at  
[www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/NominationsOfStateHeritageRegister.aspx](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/NominationsOfStateHeritageRegister.aspx)

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## Have you had experience with \$500 infringement notices issued by WA Police for disorderly behaviour or stealing?

The Ombudsman is consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about the impact that these infringement notices have had on communities. You can visit our website at [www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/CCINs](http://www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/CCINs) to read our Consultation Paper and make comments by **Friday, 20 May 2016** or call the Ombudsman's Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Alison Gibson on Freecall 1800 117 000.

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