



Aboriginal Ambassadors, Denika and Bianca promoting the importance of HPV vaccination and participation in cervical screening in Broome

## Working towards eliminating cervical cancer for all WA women

**A WIRF research program is taking aim at the inequitable and unacceptable cervical cancer health outcomes currently experienced by Aboriginal women.**

The program, led by Early Career Researcher, Dr Aime Powell is investigating new strategies to reach Aboriginal women that are under screened or never screened in some of the most rural and remote locations in WA.

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Recipient of a post-doctoral Australian Gynaecological Cancer Foundation research fellowship, Dr Powell said the aim of the study was to investigate the impact of the WA Cervical Screening Program and National HPV Vaccination Program on Aboriginal women's health outcomes.

“If we are to improve outcomes for all women and truly work towards the elimination of cervical cancer, we must find new strategies to improve women's participation in cervical screening that break down existing barriers,” she said.

Research findings are still to be confirmed, but what we know is:

- Only 50% of women in WA screened at the recommended 2-yearly interval for 2016-17.
- WA had up to a 65% 3-dose HPV vaccination completion rate for girls turning 15 in 2007 – 2011.
- Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable and treatable cancers as long as it is caught and treated early. Unfortunately, there has been no reduction in cervical cancer incidence and mortality for Aboriginal women.

Dr Aime Powell, who is based in the Institute for Health Research at

University of Notre Dame and clinically supported by supported by WIRF's Associate Professor Paul Cohen and Professor Yee Leung, said one future strategy that is soon to be piloted will be the ability to take HPV self-testing, colposcopy and hopefully treatment to women in their communities.

“Having a portable device that can rapidly detect the presence of high-risk HPV resulting in same day assessment/treatment for high-risk women could prevent future cases of cervical cancer,” she said.

Professor, Gynaecologic Oncology, Yee Leung said, “This research project has remarkable significance for the prevention of cervical cancer and research findings will be translated into our state-based program and contribute to national policy.”

Professor Leung emphasises that this project could only be made possible through existing partnerships with Australian leading experts in the area, including Associate Professor Paul Cohen, Mrs Nerida Steel, Associate Professor Julia Brotherton, Associate Professor Marion Saville, Professor Jim Codde and Dr David Hawkes.