



ENGAGE NEWSLETTER

No. 2 (August 2026)



WELCOME

Welcome to the second edition of the ENGAGE Newsletter. We look back on the NACCHO-ENGAGE Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD) Forum held in Darwin in June 2026, share updates from the four funded projects in the Asia-Pacific region, and hear from the Early- and Mid-Career Researcher (EMCR) Council about its proposed funding support.

ENGAGE website

Development of the ENGAGE website is underway, with launch expected shortly. Hosted within the [Kirby Institute website](#), the site will introduce ENGAGE, investigators and partner institutions, the EMCRC Council, and projects across the region. We will be able to share the latest news and events, with further information and resources added over time.

ENGAGE (Ending the Neglect through Greater Access and Greater Effectiveness)



A Centre of Research Excellence (CRE) is funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NH&MRC)
ENGAGE (Ending the Neglect) through Greater Access and Greater Effectiveness is a multi-institutional research

[Menu](#)

AUSTRALIA

NACCHO-ENGAGE NTD Forum | June 2026

The NACCHO-ENGAGE NTD Forum, held in Darwin on 10-11 June 2026, marked an important step in the partnership between the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) and ENGAGE.



The Forum was chaired by **Dr Lorraine Anderson** (NACCHO/Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services) and **Dr Rachel Burgess** (The Kids Research Institute Australia). It brought together 63 participants from 21 organisations, including 11 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health

organisations (ACCHOs), two NACCHO Affiliates (WA and NT), NT Health and research institutions. Over two days, participants shared knowledge, exchanged perspectives across sectors and explored opportunities for collaboration.

Three opening presentations by ENGAGE researchers outlined the current evidence and context relating to NTDs in Australia:

- ❖ *Trachoma in Australia: An update*
Ms Alison Jaworski (Kirby Institute)
- ❖ *Scabies and other ectoparasites (head lice) in Australia*
Dr Stephanie Enkel and **Dr Ingrid Amgarth-Duff** (The Kids Research Institute Australia)
- ❖ *Strongyloidiasis and soil-transmitted helminths (STH) in Australia*
Dr Suzy Ossipow and **Prof Darren Gray** (QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute), **Dr Wendy Page** (Strongyloides Australia), and **Dr Vito Colella** (The University of Melbourne)



Representatives from six ACCHOs then shared their current experiences and priorities in relation to NTDs in their areas of practice.

- ❖ **Ms Renee Grosso**, Gurriny Yealamucka Health Services Aboriginal Corporation, QLD
- ❖ **Mr Simon Cooney**, Katherine West Health Board Aboriginal Corporation, NT

- ❖ **Dr Emma Griffiths** and **Dr Carla De Angelis**, Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services, WA
- ❖ **Dr Bronwyn Rossingh** and **Mr George Gurruwiwi**, Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation, NT
- ❖ **Ms Eve Stowers**, **Ms Lola Chulung**, **Ms Marian Carpenter**, **Ms Maxine Gore**, Ord Valley Aboriginal Health Service, WA
- ❖ **Ms Jessica Gatti**, Mala'la Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, NT



Building on these contributions, subgroup discussions moved from examining current strengths and challenges to identifying priority actions, resource needs and opportunities for collaboration in seven areas: three disease-specific areas (skin health, intestinal worms and trachoma) and four cross-cutting areas (integration, workforce, housing and environmental health).

Across the Forum, participants emphasised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and community-led solutions. Key priorities included integrating NTD activities into broader health and environmental health programs, increasing investment in environmental health and housing, and strengthening the local workforce. Participants also highlighted the need for practical guidance and training, stronger data and surveillance, and closer coordination across sectors.

ENGAGE and NACCHO will continue working with ACCHOs and other partners to refine these priorities into a realistic and achievable program of collaborative research and practical action.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Project updates

The teams behind our first four funded large-scale projects shared their latest progress.

1. Geospatial Mapping of Neglected Tropical Diseases in South-east Asia

(Co-leads: **Beth Gilmour**, **Fasil Shiferaw**, **Haileab Wolde**, **John Robert Medina**)

The ENGAGE spatial mapping project has finalised the study protocol which outlines the methodology for mapping the prevalence of selected NTDs across Southeast Asia. Initial systematic database searches have been undertaken for a couple of the NTDs; however, the number of eligible published studies identified was low.

To address potential evidence gaps, communications have been distributed to project stakeholders and in-country collaborators seeking access to relevant unpublished datasets. In parallel, the team has developed a comprehensive database of subject matter experts and will commence targeted outreach to identify additional data sources.

Project governance and collaboration remain strong, with regular bimonthly team meetings continuing throughout the reporting period. Strengthening regional partnerships, members of The Kids Research Institute met in person with colleagues from the University of the Philippines in June to discuss project progress and opportunities for collaboration.

2. Spatial epidemiology for action: dengue, chikungunya and lymphatic filariasis in the Pacific

(Co-leads: **Eloise Skinner**, **Adam Bartlett**, **Anaseini Ratu**, **Adam Craig**, **Luzia Freitas**)

VBD ENGAGE is a project strengthening spatial epidemiology for three vector-borne diseases (dengue, chikungunya and lymphatic filariasis) across four countries: Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu and Timor-Leste.

Early consultations with country partners have confirmed capacity building as a shared priority, with each country leading its own approach to how the work is scoped and delivered.

Preliminary analysis has used climate data to map dengue transmission suitability across project countries. Fiji, Samoa and Timor-Leste all peak in the wet season, with suitability falling close to zero outside the wet season, except in Samoa where it dips but still has some suitability. In Fiji, the 2024 wet season was the warmest on record and coincided with the largest dengue outbreak in over a decade.

A group abstract has been submitted for a poster at the Pacific Islands Health Research Symposium.

3. Validating, Strengthening, and Enhancing the Utility of Multiplex Bead Assays for Surveillance of Neglected Tropical Diseases

(Co-leads: **Harriet Lawford**, **Fiona Angrisano**, **Mohamad Assoum**, **Maria Ome-Kaius**)

This project is strengthening integrated serosurveillance for NTDs and other infectious diseases across the Pacific by improving how countries monitor and respond to lymphatic filariasis, trachoma, yaws and other conditions. Using multiplex bead assays, a single dried blood spot sample can measure antibodies to multiple

pathogens simultaneously, providing an efficient and cost-effective alternative to traditional disease-specific surveillance.

Initial project meetings have established priorities and workplans across participating institutions, with analyses planned using longitudinal samples from Samoa, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu to evaluate changes in disease exposure, immune responses and the impact of interventions such as mass drug administration. The project will also strengthen laboratory standardisation to ensure comparable serological data across countries.

An in-person workshop is being planned with the grant co-investigators and Ministry of Health representatives from Samoa, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu to align analytical approaches and support translation of findings into national surveillance programmes. The workshop will explore country preferences for communicating results and co-develop decision-support tools, including dashboards, stratified summaries and reporting templates, that translate serological findings into actionable information for community- and policy-level decision-making.

4. Harnessing a novel genetic epidemiology platform for the control of zoonotic soil-transmitted helminths in the Asia Pacific

(Co-leads: **Patsy Zendejas**, **Elma Nate**, **Sze Fui Hii**, **Lucas Huggins**, **Adam Bartlett**)

This ENGAGE project is investigating the zoonotic transmission of soil-transmitted helminths (STHs) among humans, dogs, and pigs in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Vanuatu.

In PNG, preliminary field visits conducted in March identified communities with substantial dog populations and strong

interest from local health workers. Sample collection is now being planned, building on established community engagement and PNGIMR's expertise in pig sampling. Discussions with NAQIA are also underway to clarify the requirements for animal sample collection, including relevant ethics approvals and sampling protocols. In parallel, fieldwork costs are being determined and local partnerships are being established.



Samples collected in Vanuatu have now been received in Melbourne. These samples are currently being assessed to identify those most suitable for mitochondrial and nuclear genome sequencing, which will help investigate potential transmission between human and animal hosts.

EMCR CORNER

Proposed funding support for EMCRs

The EMCR Council has developed a proposal comprising three funding streams:

- \$250,000 for small project grants
- \$100,000 to support higher degree research (HDR) students
- \$50,000 for travel and dissemination

The proposal is being refined following feedback from ENGAGE investigators and remains subject to approval. Further details will be shared once it is finalised.

THANK YOU

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to ENGAGE's work since our last newsletter. We are particularly grateful to our NACCHO colleagues **Dr Dawn Casey**, **Dr Megan Campbell**, **Ms Claire O'Neill**, and to the Forum chairs, **Dr Lorraine Anderson** and **Dr Rachel Burgess**, as well as everyone else who shared their knowledge and experience at the Darwin Forum. We also thank the project teams for the progress they have made across the region, and the EMCR Council for developing the funding proposal. These efforts continue to shape ENGAGE's work and strengthen collaboration across the network.

We welcome contributions to future editions – please send through any news or updates you would like to share with the network.

CONTACTS

Jun Aoki (Kirby Institute, UNSW Sydney)
ENGAGE Coordinator
jaoki@kirby.unsw.edu.au

John Kaldor (Kirby Institute, UNSW Sydney)
Chief Investigator
jkaldor@kirby.unsw.edu.au



The Kirby Institute at UNSW Sydney is located on the Traditional Lands of the Bidjigal Peoples. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's continuing connection to culture, land, sea, waters, and community. We pay our respects to Elders both past and present.

Funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) through its Centres of Research Excellence (CRE) scheme, ENGAGE is a multi-institutional research consortium dedicated to advancing the control and elimination of neglected tropical diseases in Australia and the Asia-Pacific Region.