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Official launch of the Centre for Child Development and Education

The launch of the first research centre in Australia to link health and education to improve the lives of children in the Northern Territory has been heralded as “historic”.

Northern Territory Chief Minister Paul Henderson launched the Centre for Child Development and Education at Parliament House in Darwin on September 22.

The Chief Minister highlighted the important work of the Centre and the partnership between Menzies School of Health Research and the Northern Territory Government to provide an evidence-based approach to help ‘close the gap’ on Indigenous disadvantage in the Territory.

“When families and children are falling through the gaps then we need to support them and give them a hand up,” Mr Henderson said. “We have to accept the evidence as it stands to inform policy and practice on the ground.”

“The Northern Territory Government will provide $1.5 million funding towards the new Centre,” Mr Henderson said.

The Centre for Child Development and Education is a joint initiative of the Northern Territory Government, Charles Darwin University and the Menzies School of Health Research. It has also received philanthropic support from the Ian Potter Foundation and the Sidney Myer Fund.

Leading Indigenous educator and head of the Stronger Smarter Institute in Queensland, Dr Chris Sarra, who is also Chair of the Centre’s advisory board, said the launch of the Centre was an “historic announcement”.

“Convergence of health and education is obvious but no one has done it, until now, with this new Centre,” Dr Sarra said. “It is an historic announcement. I really like that this Centre will do research from the ground up, rather than telling people what needs to happen.”

The Chief Minister recognised the role of the Centre for Child Development and Education as fulfilling one of the first recommendations in the Territory 2030 strategy.

“I pay tribute to the Director of Menzies Jonathan Carapetis, who has been a huge part of the committee consulting for the Territory 2030 Strategic Plan, which is a blueprint for the government’s future,” he said.

Menzies School of Health Research Professor Jonathan Carapetis said the Centre was an exciting and practical way to focus research and inform policy on child health education.

“We view that health and education research needs to be done together to tackle the most pressing problems with Indigenous health and wellbeing.”
Centre Director Professor Sven Silburn said the most important time for a child’s development is from before birth, through infancy and the pre-school years.

“We know that far too many Indigenous children are continuing to be born underweight and into circumstances of poverty,” Professor Silburn said. “This puts them at risk before they even set foot in school.

“We work closely with communities to ensure our research is relevant to real community needs, including schools, health, education and childhood services sectors,” Professor Silburn said.

More than 70 people attended the launch of the Centre at Parliament House in Darwin. A drumming band of students from Gray Primary School entertained the crowd on their ‘djembe’ drums.

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