



## NHMRC Funding for Queensland Tropical Health Alliance researchers at James Cook University and the National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre

**Queensland Tropical Health Alliance researchers from James Cook University have been awarded over \$500,000 in funding by the National Health and Medical Research Centre (NHMRC).**

Prof Alan Clough, School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine at JCU in Cairns, with his colleagues at JCU and Prof Jan Copeland, Director of the National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre (NCPIC) at the University of New South Wales, has been awarded \$279,375 over 18 months to investigate cannabis withdrawal symptoms in new Indigenous male inmates at Lotus Glen Correctional Centre in far north Queensland.

“This simple study has potential for significant benefits for Indigenous people in Queensland’s prisons and remote communities – we hope it will address an unmet need for support to help manage withdrawal symptoms in Indigenous individuals, as well as provide much-needed data on mental health impacts of heavy cannabis use in this population,” Prof Clough said.

The research will also develop a culturally-validated measure to assess cannabis withdrawal, which is critical to enhanced prison screening and to developing targeted community-based interventions.

“The clinical importance of cannabis withdrawal is only now being recognised by the international scientific community and little is known about effective treatment. This even more marked amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where they are expressing concern and we have no evidence-based prevention and intervention approaches available. This study is of national importance as it addresses a seriously neglected issue that concerns communities across Australia,” Prof Copeland said.

Dr India Bohanna, QTHA researcher at James Cook University, has been awarded \$290,000 for a 4 year Early Career Fellowship by the NHMRC. Dr Bohanna’s research focuses on developing better ways of measuring Indigenous mental health and documenting the impacts of cannabis use on mental health in Cape York communities.

“One in four Aboriginal users in remote communities may be suffering mental ill health due to their cannabis use. We need to better understand how mental health is being affected by cannabis in Aboriginal communities, in order to develop interventions to prevent cannabis-related mental illness,” Dr Bohanna said.

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**To arrange an interview please contact Lisa Jones 0405620747 or email [lisa.jones1@jcu.edu.au](mailto:lisa.jones1@jcu.edu.au)**



*Associate Professor  
Alan Clough, JCU*



*Professor Jan  
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*Dr India Bohanna, JCU*



*Information for Editors:*

In north Queensland Indigenous communities there are high rate of cannabis use and dependence. Preliminary data from Cape York show that 53% of males and 23% of females aged 16-40 years are using cannabis, considerably higher than the general Australian population. Cannabis use is associated with criminal offending and incarceration, and evidence suggests that 'stressing out' occurs when cannabis is not available or upon entry to prison, and can lead to violence and intimidation. Preliminary data suggests that the 'stressing out' experience represents symptoms of cannabis withdrawal, a recognised consequence of cannabis dependence. Withdrawal-related suffering is of social and clinical significance, particularly as it may represent a barrier to reducing cannabis use.

National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre (NCPIC), is a consortium led by NDARC with seven key partners nationally managing a large and diverse set of programs. The National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre's mission is to prevent and reduce the use of, and problems related to, cannabis in Australia.

About Queensland Tropical Health Alliance

The QTHA is a unique collaboration between Queensland universities and research institutes, creating a wealth of tropical health and medical research expertise in the tropics. QTHA brings together, within one network, world-class researchers focused on the common goal of reducing the burden of tropical diseases in tropical regions. Research is conducted within three broad programs discovery, new product development and trialling of drugs, diagnostics and vaccines; Indigenous health; disease surveillance and control.

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