



Companion animal impacts on Indigenous health in remote communities.

Summary: Surveillance for infectious diseases in companion animals is a challenging but necessary health care pathway for improving the health of remote Northern Australia's remote Indigenous communities (RICs). This industry, Indigenous community and science partnership will collect and, using the latest technology, analyse samples from animals to identify pathogens in those samples and share Indigenous knowledge and scientific information data to develop total system health surveillance and management strategies to reduce risks to NICs caused by identified diseases. *This project is a collaboration between the NI, NT Veterinary Services, i-Vet and CSIRO and is at the planning stage and not yet funded.*

Background: Companion animal health affects the health of Northern Australia's remote Indigenous communities (RICs). Many animals are socially and culturally significant (Robinson et al. 2005), but they often suffer from infectious diseases that can cause human health problems (e.g. due to dog bites, exposure to animal excrement). The project brings together Indigenous knowledge, western science, veterinary and community health expertise to provide a total system health (TSH) approach to models of health care in RICs, recognising the connection between health and biosecurity. Managing this connection is critical to managing risks to the economy, environment and community caused by companion animal disease (Robinson et al. 2016a).

There are 3 project activities.

- 1) Identify infectious agents in NIC companion animals.** Vets will collect samples while animals are anaesthetised for operations such as de-sexing. Samples will be analysed to identify the agents most likely to cause human disease. Tests will be developed to detect agents that pose the greatest risk, and animals will be tested for those agents to determine prevalence.
- 2) Apply a TSH approach to manage the infectious diseases that affect human health in participating NICs.** Vets, community health professionals, scientists and NICs will collaborate to develop health risk mitigation and management strategies. Cross-cultural risk assessment methods will be used to identify which companion animal health risks are most prevalent and develop strategies to manage these risks.
- 3) Facilitate peer-based learning and knowledge sharing** to build TSH approaches to companion animal management in NICs, using workshops to share project results and encourage risk mitigation across Northern Australia. **Project outcomes:** Increased capacity to apply TSH approaches to companion animal management in NICs, enabling cross-cultural management of infectious diseases as part of a health care model.

Marianne St Clair, a researcher from the Northern Institute will be visiting Broome and Derby from the 9th October – 13th October to consult with a range of stakeholders primarily regarding the Rabies Project being done for the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, but is also interested in talking to potential project partners for other animal care and telehealth projects.

Marianne can be contacted on 0427 555 484 or marianne.stclair@cdu.edu.au.