

**Date** 2 June 2010

**Subject** Major partnership to focus on teenage anti-social behaviour

Reducing teenage smoking, drinking and drug use is the focus of a major research partnership between nib foundation and HMRI.

nib foundation today announced a \$1.5 million, three-year investment to assist a research project led by Associate Professor John Wiggers that aims to prevent the uptake of behaviours that can lead to lifelong health problems and anti-social actions.

“The incidence of tobacco and alcohol use among young people here in the Hunter remains unacceptable. Up to 53 per cent of our young people report that they smoke or drink alcohol, so we have a particular need to address the issue from a local perspective,” Associate Professor Wiggers said.

The *Healthy Schools, Healthy Futures* program is based on the premise that the mental wellbeing of young people is linked to the early uptake of risk-taking behaviours.

“This intervention program will target 24 schools in the Hunter and New England region, fostering wellbeing and sound decision making, by building resilience in young people and increasing their connection to the community,” Associate Professor Wiggers said.

“The significant contribution from nib foundation will assist us to promote participation in the research and strengthen our capacity to develop a model of prevention that is relevant nationally.”

Funding provided by nib foundation will build on a grant awarded to the University of Newcastle by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) last year, strengthening the program delivery and doubling the number of participants to 14,000.

nib foundation Chairman, Terry Lawler said when the board was presented with an evidence-based approach to one of the most prevalent and highly visible issues for Australia’s youth, it was compelled to fund the program.

“We are proud to support the implementation of this holistic program that supports young people in our region by addressing their mental wellbeing and the drivers behind substance abuse,” Mr Lawler said.

HMRI Director, Professor Maree Gleeson said the nib foundation partnership to deliver this program was significant because it supported research that targeted an area of serious concern.

“*Healthy Schools, Healthy Futures* is very important for our community, because it is aimed at preventing the uptake of risk taking behaviours in a vulnerable, and in some cases socially disadvantaged population.”

“It will have an immediate health benefit to the participants and may reduce the long-term health consequences associated with smoking, substance abuse and inappropriate alcohol use,” Professor Gleeson said.

Associate Professor Wiggers is partnering with the University of Newcastle, Hunter New England Health, the Hunter Institute of Mental Health and the NSW Department of Education and Training to deliver the research project.

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**FURTHER INFORMATION**

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