Western Desert Kidney Health Project

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The Western Desert Kidney Health Project – launched recently in Kalgoorlie—will involve a multidisciplinary team of Aboriginal health, medical and community development workers and artists aiming to reduce disease and diabetes by 20 per cent over three years in 10 Aboriginal communities representing six language groups. A mix of ancient sand-drawing techniques using fencing wire and modern projection technology will be used to educate Aboriginal people about preventing kidney disease. The project will cover an area about the size of Victoria and populated by almost 8,000 people whose expected life-span is 17 years less than that of non-Aboriginal people. Contributing factors in this reduced life expectancy are kidney disease and diabetes.

“One of the communities the project workers will visit is 700 km out in the desert and is one of the Australia’s most isolated communities,” Ms Stokes said. “More than anything people want to understand what is happening to their bodies so they can make real choices. As hunters, they understand anatomy and physiology – they just have to hear the message. Two three-tonne ‘healthy lifestyle’ trucks will be used in the project. One will be a mobile clinic for early detection of disease and chronic disease management, health promotion and evaluation. The other will transport artists and healthy lifestyle workers who will educate the communities about kidney health.

This session will demonstrate how the arts will be used to educate Aboriginal communities about kidney disease and diabetes with the opportunity for participants to have a go at sand-drawing. Several of the key people from the project will talk about the successes and challenges that occurred to get the project off the ground and what is next.