



## PRESS STATEMENT

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### **Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research announces major new research award in maternal health**

To coincide with the 51<sup>st</sup> Annual Symposium of the PNG Medical Society on “*Advancing women’s health through innovation*”, the PNG Institute of Medical Research today released a press statement announcing a major new research award.

“This prestigious international award will place PNG researchers at the forefront of global research on infectious diseases and maternal health”, said the Director of the PNGIMR, Professor Peter Siba.

The Institute has been awarded funding under the UK-based Joint Global Health Trials initiative to investigate point-of-care testing and treatment of sexually transmitted infections to improve pregnancy outcomes in high-burden, low-income settings. The Joint Global Health Trials initiative was established by the UK Department for International Development, Medical Research Council UK and the Wellcome Trust to support cutting edge research on the most important health priorities facing low- and middle-income countries.

The trial will be led by Dr Andrew Vallely (Professorial Research Fellow) and Dr William Pomat (Deputy Director, Science) at the PNGIMR, and involves over 20 senior researchers and reproductive health experts based in PNG, Australia and in Europe, including Dr Grace Kariwiga (Alotau Provincial Hospital), Prof Glen Mola (University of PNG / Port Moresby General Hospital), and Prof Peter Siba (PNGIMR).

“This study addresses a critical knowledge gap – we know that curable sexually transmitted and genital infections such as chlamydia and gonorrhoea are very common among pregnant women in PNG and in other low-income countries, but we also know that these are very difficult to diagnose and treat because the majority of infections are asymptomatic. Earlier research has shown that chlamydia, gonorrhoea and other genital infections during pregnancy can lead to serious problems if not treated, including preterm birth and low birth weight. New, highly-accurate and easy-to-use technologies for STI testing have recently become available, which can be used by health staff in routine clinical settings. These technologies will for the first time allow us to provide antenatal women with same-day, clinic-based testing and

treatment for curable genital infections. This approach has the potential to dramatically improve pregnancy outcomes in countries such as PNG. This is what our trial is designed to find out”, said Dr Vallely, the Principal Investigator of the study.

The trial will take place at 12 antenatal clinic sites in three provinces in PNG and will be carried out over a duration of 4 years.

Chairman of the PNGIMR Council, Professor Sir Isi Kevau congratulated the IMR team for successfully been awarded this huge research grant.

### Background Information

1. The Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research is the lead institute and principal recipient of this award.
2. Collaborating international institutes include: the Kirby Institute, UNSW Australia (Prof John Kaldor, A/Prof Rebecca Guy; A/Prof Handan Wand; Lisa Vallely); University of Technology, Sydney (Prof Caroline Homer); the Burnet Institute (A/Prof Stanley Luchters, Dr Chris Morgan); Royal Women’s Hospital, Melbourne (Prof Suzanne Garland, A/Prof Sepehr Tabrizi); University of Queensland (A/Prof David Whiley); University of Melbourne (Prof Stephen Rogerson); London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (Prof Rosanna Peeling, A/Prof Virginia Wiseman); and University of Bern (Prof Nicola Low).

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