

**MEDIA RELEASE: 3 May 2013**

## **Greater support needed to save mothers' and babies' lives in PNG**

**Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea** – One of Australia's leading medical research and global health organisations, the Burnet Institute, has called for increased commitment from the philanthropic and corporate sectors to support much-needed research and work into women's and children's health in Papua New Guinea.

At a high-level private dinner in Port Moresby, attended by dignitaries including Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Senator the Hon. Bob Carr and Papua New Guinea's Minister for Foreign Affairs the Hon. Rimbink Pato, Burnet's Director and CEO Professor Brendan Crabb announced women's and children's health as a priority research focus for the Institute in PNG.

He called on corporations and philanthropists to support the Institute's *Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies* research program.

"The rate of maternal and child death in PNG is staggeringly high, with more than 500 mothers losing their lives each year. Sadly, more than 5,000 babies will die in the first 24 hours of life and another 10,000 perish before their fifth birthday. We need to address this urgently," Professor Crabb said.

"High quality, innovative research is crucial to ensuring that the most effective interventions reach those most in need in PNG in a highly cost efficient way.

"Governments and aid agencies can only do so much, so creative solutions like we propose need substantial support from the philanthropic and business communities."

Among the attending guests were representatives of Burnet's in-country partners, the government of PNG, the PNG Institute of Medical Research, and the University of PNG; other key Burnet partners AusAID, Abt JTA and the OilSearch Foundation; and the PNG Secretary for Health Mr Pascoe Kase, the Australian High Commissioner to PNG Her Excellency Ms Deborah Stokes, and Deputy Director General of AusAID Mr James Batley.

"Burnet needs increased support for long-term, in-country research programs if we are to join with our partners to dramatically reduce maternal mortality and improve newborn and infant health," Professor Crabb said.

Senator the Hon. Bob Carr urges further support to build on the \$900,000 already raised for Burnet's *Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies* research program.

"Given that a woman in PNG is 80 times more likely to die in childbirth than a woman in Australia, there is every reason why this campaign ought to be stepped up," Mr Carr said.

Burnet's *Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies* program is a five-year effort aimed at providing life-saving health care for women and children in Papua New Guinea through translational and community research. The two major needs to be addressed are: testing better ways to provide interventions of proven effectiveness to communities that currently lack access; and defining the major disease burdens that contribute to maternal and infant mortality, such as anaemia, malaria, malnutrition, and postpartum haemorrhage.

Currently, communicable diseases (pneumonia, malaria, TB, syphilis, diarrhoeal diseases, meningitis and HIV) account for 50 per cent of deaths each year in PNG.

“The most effective and lowest cost interventions are those linking development assistance programs with high quality research, and we look forward to working closely with our partners to achieve better outcomes for mothers and children in PNG,” Professor Crabb said.

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