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MEDIA RELEASE

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Protecting senior Australians from superbugs

Protecting senior Australians in residential aged care from the threat of antibiotic resistant bacteria is the aim of two major research projects announced by the Turnbull Government today.

The rise of so-called “superbug” infections is a challenge for health care professionals, sometimes leaving them with limited or no available treatment options and is an increasing problem worldwide.

Reducing the threat and ensuring people in aged care are as safe as possible is a top priority, with a variety of factors contributing to both a high use of antibiotics and a heightened risk of infection, including from drug-resistant bacteria.

These include the close living proximity of residents, multiple medical conditions, poor immune systems, poor mobility, and frequent transfer of residents to and from hospitals.

Unfortunately, in some cases antibiotics have been over used in residential aged care facilities, compounding the risk of resistance developing.

Increasing our understanding of how antimicrobial resistance is transmitted and spread in residential aged care facilities is crucial and is a strategic priority for Australia’s Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF).

Under its Tackling Antimicrobial Resistance program, the MRFF will provide:

- \$1.4 million to the South Australian Medical Research Institute for a project led by Associate Professor Geraint Rogers which will analyse samples from 400 residents of 10 aged care facilities to determine the different modes of transmission of resistant bacteria and inform future strategies to limit the spread of antimicrobial resistance in residential aged care facilities
- \$1.1 million to a project led by Dr Henrietta Venter of the University of South Australia which will measure the spread of resistant bacteria, including in wastewater, from three residential aged care facilities. This research will inform antimicrobial resistance risk assessments and guide future policy controls to curb the spread of antimicrobial resistance to, within and from residential aged care facilities.

Recent data has highlighted the need for improved antimicrobial management in Australian aged care.

Despite some action since the release of Australia's Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy in 2015, there are still significant gaps in our understanding of antimicrobial resistant organisms in aged care facilities.

This research will help us to understand the spread of infections within aged care homes, and between these facilities, hospitals and other settings.

This will include the importance of visitors to aged care homes following management and medical advice and taking special care to avoid bringing infections into the facilities.

The MRFF is a long term source of funding for research and innovation to improve health outcomes, quality of life and health system sustainability. It is a capital-preserved fund which will reach maturity at \$20 billion beyond 2021.

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