

need to be determined in line with the current review of data requirements for surveillance of vaccine preventable diseases.

Laboratory support

The Public Health Laboratory Network was seen as the most appropriate group to oversee laboratory data for pneumococcal disease. The high incidence of pneumococcal disease, the different serotype distribution and existing immunisation programs in Aboriginal compared

with other populations, necessitates special attention to serotyping of all available isolates from this group. For the non-Aboriginal population, serotyping could be restricted to a sample of isolates to monitor trends.

Reference

1. Torzillo PJ, Hanna JN, Morey F, Gratten M, Dixon J, Erlich J. Invasive pneumococcal disease in Central Australia. *Med J Aust* 1995;162:182-6.

Food policy in the National Centre for Disease Control

In response to industry and consumer concerns relating to many food issues, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care recently formed a Food Policy Section within the National Centre for Disease Control of the Population Health Division (PHD). Under the direction of Dr Ian McKay, the Food Policy Section's brief includes:

- coordinating Commonwealth policy development in relation to food, with a focus on food safety;
- strengthening the evidence base for national and Commonwealth decision-making on food policy issues;
- fostering collaborative partnerships between government, consumers and the food industry; and
- promoting nationally consistent approaches to food policy regulation and action.

Food safety projects are a major part of the Food Policy Section's activities. These are to be conducted over the next two years with a funding allocation of \$4.6 million over that period. These activities will provide reliable data to help industry introduce cost effective food safety management systems and to initiate studies to better estimate the incidence of, and reduce foodborne illness. As a starting point for this work, a meeting of key stakeholders, the Food Safety Forum, was held in mid-February. It is expected that the Forum will be convened on a regular basis, and will act as a consultative body.

The Forum was attended by representatives of Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, the Australian and New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA), scientists and representatives of consumer and industry groups. The projects comprising the two year program of work were discussed, and their scope and aims generally received support. Some of the intended projects are outlined below.

- A study examining the efficacy of food safety programs will track the introduction of food safety programs into food premises and subsequently observe food handling practices. Industry and State Government representatives have offered to collaborate on the project. Following the debate at the Forum, the terms of reference for the project have been broadened to include

costs and benefits of the introduction of food safety programs, to businesses. A consultant will be commissioned to undertake this work within the next few months.

- A project involving the establishment of sentinel sites in rural and urban locations will collect data on foodborne illness. This attracted strong support from Forum participants. The activities will include establishing a network of epidemiologists/data managers to analyse outbreak data and issues related to better information transfer. The project will build on the work of the Hunter Public Health Unit, and provide robust evidence on the incidence of foodborne illness in Australia. The Commonwealth will fund each site for two years, in interested jurisdictions. The funding would cover employing an epidemiologist/data manager, travel, laboratory tests, specimen equipment, courier charges and interviewer fees. In making this offer, interested jurisdictions would be expected to contribute resources through provision of infrastructure requirements for the site such as working space, operational facilities such as computer, telephone and facsimile as well as support services as required. The Commonwealth will employ a project manager to coordinate the activities of the sites and to act as a central liaison and coordination point. Regular quarterly meetings between the epidemiologists and State/Territory and Commonwealth agencies will take place to ensure consistency of data collection and collation. A meeting of interested State/Territories, ANZFA and PHD was held in March to discuss the scope and activities to be undertaken. Contract negotiations are currently underway with interested jurisdictions.
- A project to examine food contamination in Australia will involve collaboration with ANZFA and State and Territory health authorities to implement new food surveillance initiatives. This will contribute to State and Territory initiatives of Senior Food Officers and ANZFA to put in place a systematic and coordinated approach to food surveillance.

Advertisements will appear in the national press shortly, seeking submissions for consultancies related to some of these projects. Future editions of *CDI* will include progress reports.