Media release

New app to help Tasmanians breathe easier

Thousands of Tasmanians who suffer from conditions such as asthma and hay fever will be helped to breathe a little easier by a new smartphone app released in Hobart today.

The AirRater app, which can be downloaded from the Apple App Store and Google Play for Android devices, will alert vulnerable Tasmanians when they are at risk from air-borne pollutants such as pollen and smoke.

At the same time, AirRater will collect valuable information from allergy and asthma sufferers across the state. Asthma affects almost 12% of Tasmanians, which is higher than the national average.

While research has consistently shown the link between air quality, hay fever and asthma, AirRater will allow researchers to better understand and respond to both the health and economic impacts of air pollution in Tasmania.

Importantly, the app will also provide information on the potential impact of native vegetation on allergies and asthma, an area of minimal research to date.

The app was developed by Tasmanian researchers as part of Sense-T's $1 million AirRater project and launched by the President of the Senate, Senator Stephen Parry, and Tasmanian Health Minister Michael Ferguson.

The AirRater app combines data from new air-quality sensors installed across Tasmania with real-time weather data and forecasts to give users information about the current levels of potential triggers in their immediate area.

Over time, AirRater will provide individualised reports showing each user how environmental conditions impacted their symptoms and alerting them when those conditions exist or are forecast.

Sense-T Director of Research, Prof Jugdutt (Jack) Singh, said the AirRater project demonstrated how sensor and data research could solve problems across the community and economy.

"By working collaboratively with researchers, government and industry, Sense-T is solving real-world problems and creating solutions in Tasmania that can be applied across Australia and the world."

The AirRater project is led by Dr Fay Johnston from the Menzies Institute for Medical Research and funded by the Australian Government, with in-kind contributions from the University of Tasmania and its research partners.

"The AirRater app will provide personal feedback on what it is that particularly sets off users' asthma or hayfever, whether that be smoke, grass pollen or cold weather.

"This will help Tasmanians to better understand and manage their triggers," Dr Johnston said.

The AirRater project team includes leading environmental health researchers and experts from Menzies, UTAS School of Biological Sciences, the Tasmanian Environmental Protection Authority, CSIRO, ANU and the Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services.

The project is one of 14 Industry Research Projects currently being undertaken by Sense-T with total funding of $11 million, including $6 million from the Australian Government along with contributions from research and industry partners.

Sense-T's other sensor and data research projects, which are due for completion in December 2016, focus on tourism, agriculture, aquaculture and new financial services.

More information about the AirRater project is available at: http://www.sense-t.org.au/projects-and-research/health

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About Sense-T
sense-t.org.au

Sense-T is a data research project which collects and analyses data from a range of different public and private sources, particularly from sensors. Information can then be given back to industry, governments, researchers and communities to help them to make better decisions and find practical solutions to real-world problems. Sense-T is a partnership between the University of Tasmania, the Tasmanian Government and CSIRO, and is also funded by the Australian Government.