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Mark Colvin presents PM Monday to Friday from 5:10pm on Radio National and 6:10pm on ABC Local Radio. Join Mark for the latest current affairs, wrapping the major stories of each day.

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This is a transcript from PM. The program is broadcast around Australia at 5:10pm on Radio National and 6:10pm on ABC Local Radio.

### Hetty Perkins discusses kidney research fundraising

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PM Archive - Friday, 10 November, 2000 00:00:00

Reporter: Mark Colvin

COMPERE: To Central Australia now and think Papunya and you think dot paintings.

One of the greatest explosions of artistic creativity in Australian history came from the Western Desert in the last few decades, when people who'd previously used ephemeral materials were introduced to paint and canvass.

But while the international art market may have brought fame and money, contact with white Australia also brought its own depressing legacy.

There's an epidemic of kidney disease in the Western Desert, as there is among Aborigines generally. The late Charles Perkins, who died of kidney disease, should have been raising funds this weekend to help remedy the problem. He would have been at a dinner and art auction associated with the exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales - Papunya Tula - Genesis and Genius.

Perkins' daughter Hetty is curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the Gallery.

HETTY PERKINS: The Pintuby people really started coming into non-Aboriginal society, if you like, or making contact with missionaries, pastoralists, and government sort of officials from about the 1930s onwards and particularly from 1957 to 1966 there were desert patrols going out by the , from the Northern Territory Government, the Welfare Branch, sending people out into the desert to sort of make contact with these groups of people just to sort of see if they're okay, particularly in times of drought and so on.

And in line with that Papunya itself was established as, you know, pretty much the government's last attempt I guess to assimilate the people of the Western Desert and so as a result of those people coming in just in this very sort of recent times, of course their food changed, their whole lifestyle changes, I mean it's,

COMPERE: So it's as simple as that? It's the transition from bush tucker to white flour, white sugar, that sort of thing?

HETTY PERKINS: Well I think it is, yeah. I've, I mean the sort of exact medical nature of it I don't entirely know but I do know that that's the sort of two things, the two key things that some of the journals I've read attribute it to, generally speaking.

COMPERE: So what is the actual result? What is, is there a statistic that says these people are getting X amount more kidney disease than anybody else?

HETTY PERKINS: Yes. I think it's the incidence of the end stage renal disease in , from 1993 to 1998 was about 17 times higher for Aboriginal people than non-Aboriginal people. And that incidence is apparently doubling every two years. So it's an...

COMPERE: Already 17 times higher?

HETTY PERKINS: Mm. It's a really, I mean there's other things too that beset the community health problems wise like diabetes and so on. Things that are obviously associated with that kind of change in people's lifestyle.

COMPERE: So in practical terms what does it mean, because renal disease means dialysis, it means transplants - all that kind of thing. What access do they have?

HETTY PERKINS: Well the only available dialysis facility is in Alice Springs and that means for many of the people transferring themselves and usually their families, you know, more than 600 kilometres or so into Alice Springs and because of the nature of dialysis, you know it's required, you know, a few times every week, regularly - people end up living in Alice Springs with their families and that has huge consequences - not only for the families themselves but the communities they left behind.

COMPERE: So what are you trying to raise money for? Is it to get dialysis machines out to them?

HETTY PERKINS: Yes. They're building a new , the NT Government's building a medical clinic, a new clinic in Kintore, and what we've worked out with them, in association with the Pintuby Homelands Health Service, is the possibility of having a dialysis unit in that clinic.

So this Western Desert Dialysis Appeal is raising funds

to establish and maintain dialysis facilities out in the community.

COMPERE: On the face of it you couldn't have a better cause. Is it right that it should be up to charity? Shouldn't it be a government responsibility?

HETTY PERKINS: Well I guess, you know, it should be but in the, rather than waiting for that to happen. I think if we can sort of kick in and help it along that's an appropriate thing.

COMPERE: Hetty Perkins. And if you want to contribute to the Western Desert Dialysis Foundation by bidding for a painting in that auction tomorrow, you can still do so through Southebys in Sydney.

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