

Friday, 22 September 2017

Aboriginal Health is Everyone's Business

Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) today joined local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, the Primary Health Network and the University of Wollongong in committing to work together to bring about positive changes to Close the Gap on health inequalities for our Aboriginal communities.

A Partnership Agreement was formally signed on Friday by leaders of the South Coast Aboriginal Medical Service; Oolong House - Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Centre; Illawarra Aboriginal Medical Service; Waminda South Coast Women's Health and Welfare Aboriginal Corporation; University of Wollongong; COORDINARE - South Eastern NSW Primary Health Network; and Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District.

ISLHD Chief Executive Margot Mains said the agreement aims to support, promote and strengthen the existing local relationships and strong ties that have been developed over many years.

"The signing of the Partnership Agreement marks a new beginning for our journey in working collaboratively to close the health and life expectancy gap between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal Australians," Ms Mains said.

"We commit to work collectively to create pathways for clients between different service providers, to empower Aboriginal people to make healthy lifestyle choices, and to feel culturally safe when they do need to access our range of services," she said.

The Partnership Agreement was signed following the Inaugural meeting of the Aboriginal Health Partnership Committee. The committee brings together each of the participating organisations, as equal partners, in order to determine key priorities for future Aboriginal health planning across the District.

"The Aboriginal Health Partnership Committee will enable stronger collaboration in service delivery and improved health outcomes for our Aboriginal communities as well as incorporating Aboriginal leadership and participation in decision making and governance," Ms Mains said.

"The Committee and Partnership Agreement signed today will provide us all with a renewed focus on leading and driving a culture that embraces that Aboriginal health is everybody's business." she said.

Dianne Kitcher, CEO of COORDINARE – South Eastern NSW PHN, said she was delighted to enter into this Partnership Agreement and work together towards a long-term plan of action that is targeted to need, is evidence-based and capable of addressing the existing inequalities.

“Developing strong partnerships with both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and key service providers is critical to supporting better health outcomes for Aboriginal families and communities within our region,” said Ms Kitcher.

ISLHD Director Aboriginal Health Strategy Pauline Brown said that 2017 represents a significant year for all Australians.

“This year, we celebrate 50 years since the 1967 Referendum and the 20th anniversary of the *Bringing Them Home* Report. It is a time for us to take stock of where we’ve been, where we are at, and where we are heading,” Ms Brown said.

Friday’s event, which was held in the gardens of Shoalhaven Hospital, included a Corroboree and smoking ceremony performed by Uncle Paul McLeod and members of DOONOOCH Dancers, as a gesture to recognise traditional and ancient practices into the present day by acknowledging the significance of the Partnership Agreement and celebrating its formal signing by Health leaders.

Partnership Agreement - Principles of Partnership and Trust

Ultimately, we agree to work together in promoting the rights of Aboriginal consumers and their carers, and ensuring that health services are culturally inclusive, available, appropriate, accessible, affordable and of good quality. This Partnership Agreement draws, from good practices and the core principles that underpin genuine and successful partnerships between ACCHS and mainstream service providers¹. These are:

1. Commitment to developing long-term sustainable relationships based on trust.
2. Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge, history, lived experience and connection to community and country.
3. Commitment to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognition of the important role played by Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS).
4. Aim to improve long-term well-being outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities.
5. Improving the physical, cultural, spiritual and family wellbeing of Aboriginal people to reach their full potential to flourish.
6. Shared responsibility and accountability for shared objectives and activities.
7. A commitment to redressing structures, relationships and outcomes that are unequal and/or discriminatory.
8. Working towards ensuring Aboriginal people have access to health services that are equal in standard to those enjoyed by other Australians, and enjoy the living conditions that support their social, emotional and cultural well-being.

¹ Adapted from: SNAICC (accessed at <http://www.ntcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/SNAICC-Opening-Doors-Through-Partnerships.pdf>)