

Improving the hospital experience for our Aboriginal community

Sunday, 8 November 2020

As NAIDOC week sees celebrations around the country to recognise the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the Tweed Valley Hospital project recommits to improving the health experience of Aboriginal people in the Tweed region.

The Tweed Valley Hospital project team has been working with Aboriginal health workers and members of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community throughout the planning phase to ensure that the design of the new hospital meets the needs of the Aboriginal community.

“We want to create a welcoming environment in the new hospital that better meets the health needs, as well as the cultural considerations, of the local Aboriginal community,” said Health Infrastructure’s Project Director for design Jackie Hawkins.

“Our goal is to provide a range of culturally appropriate facilities that result in improved health outcomes for members of the community,” Ms Hawkins said.

The project’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Working Group was established in June 2019, with representatives from local Aboriginal organisations, individual community members and Northern NSW Local Health District Aboriginal health staff.

Sue Follent has been involved in consultation on the hospital since the very beginning. She represents the local Aboriginal community at the Aboriginal community working group, the community reference panel and on clinical Project User Groups.

“I worked as a Health Educator for Aboriginal Health for almost 30 years, and in nursing for about 20 years before that. I’m happy to get involved because I think it’s really valuable.

“People have listened to what the Aboriginal people have had to say. Overall, the respect that’s been shown to the community makes you feel that the health system does care.”

The Aboriginal Health Service will be located in a separate building on the site known as the ‘Health Hub’, which will provide easy access and a less clinical environment for service users. Direct input from working groups has played a large role in the design of the Service, as well as other Indigenous spaces at the new Tweed Valley Hospital.

“These forums have provided the opportunity for members to make suggestions and raise any concerns with the hospital designs. The feedback has offered valuable insight to cultural considerations; and we hope it will assist Aboriginal people to feel more comfortable in visiting and seeking medical care at the new hospital,” said Ms Hawkins.

“Some examples of where feedback is reflected in plans for the Tweed Valley Hospital include locating the Aboriginal Health Liaison Officer near the main hospital entrance and incorporating Aboriginal artworks at key locations so that the facility ‘speaks its welcome without words’.”

The new hospital also features both indoor and outdoor meeting places where Aboriginal community members will feel welcomed and supported during times of Sorry Business.

“With design of the hospital all but wrapped up, we are committed to continuing to work with our Aboriginal community to ensure their valuable contributions are brought to life throughout the construction and commissioning of this great new facility.”