

Friday, 14 July, 2017

Spirit of collaboration sparks a fresh start at Blacktown

A traditional Aboriginal smoking ceremony at Blacktown Hospital has marked the start of a new collaboration between the community and the facility.

The smoking ceremony, run by Aboriginal Elder Uncle Steve Williams, was held on the site of the new hospital building, which is now under construction. Due for completion in 2019, this new building will provide state-of-the-art facilities and a major tertiary hospital for western Sydney.

“The Blacktown LGA has the greatest urban population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia,” said Blacktown Hospital general manager Sue-Anne Redmond.

“The ceremony marks a coming together of Aboriginal tradition and healthcare, and symbolises the way we have planned our health facilities in collaboration with our diverse communities.”

Contemporary Aboriginal culture will be reflected in artworks and facilities in the new hospital, including a new birthing unit with an outdoor courtyard to provide respite for labouring mothers, which was planned in consultation with the local Aboriginal community.

Wiradjuri elder and Blacktown Hospital Aboriginal liaison officer Yvonne To’a said it was important for Aboriginal people to see their culture reflected in health facilities.

“Large institutions can be intimidating and may discourage people from seeking care,” she said.

“Incorporating Aboriginal traditions and cultural elements into the construction, planning and design makes everyone feel more welcome.”

The BMDH project is also participating in an innovative pilot program, aimed at increasing the skills of construction workers, providing opportunities for young people and under-represented groups, and offering local employment and training. All contractors working at Blacktown and Mount Druitt hospitals are participating in Aboriginal employment programs, with more than 1500 construction program work days contributed by Aboriginal workers to date.

Blacktown Hospital major contractor AW Edwards is also targeting Aboriginal employment and skills enhancement as part of the construction of the new main hospital building.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training, employment and skills escalation is a key component of this program; AW Edwards is keen to build strong and beneficial partnerships with the local community,” said AW Edwards associate director & senior project manager Michael Musarra.

AW Edwards has already appointed local Aboriginal enterprise Bara Barang to run the site staff canteen, which will cater for thousands of workers during construction. The contractor also recently donated \$25,000 to the Indigenous Literacy Foundation as a contribution to its Aboriginal Participation contract commitment.

For more information, visit bmdhproject.health.nsw.gov.au

****Photos from the ceremony attached. Media enquiries: Contact WSLHD media team on 0408 893 804****