

24 November 2016

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF CARE FOR INDIGENOUS WOMEN BY 'MALABAR MIDWIVES'

NSW Minister for Health, the Hon. Jillian Skinner MP, will be among guests celebrating the 10th anniversary of the state's first service providing continuity of care for Indigenous women during pregnancy, birth and beyond.

The Malabar Midwifery Link Service, run by the state's only women's hospital – the Royal Hospital for Women – reflects two areas of success in efforts to Close the Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes: maternal health and reduced infant mortality.

"The Royal Hospital for Women's Malabar Midwifery Link Service is an outstanding example of the success that can be achieved when health professionals work collaboratively with communities to find the best solutions for their health care challenges," Mrs Skinner said.

"I congratulate the hospital and the team on the excellent outcomes they have achieved for Indigenous mothers and babies over the past decade."

The service provides prenatal care, birth and postnatal care, along with early childhood support, to Aboriginal women, and women with an Aboriginal partner, who choose to give birth at the Royal Hospital for Women. Clients include not only women from south-east Sydney, but Indigenous women from anywhere in NSW who seek out the service.

Chief Executive of South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, Gerry Marr, said the Malabar Midwifery Link Service had pioneered a successful model of care.

"Evaluations of the Malabar service provide excellent outcome assessments: the number of Indigenous women using the service has tripled since its inception, they're supporting women to quit smoking, to avoid alcohol and nearly all of the women try to commence breastfeeding while in the hospital," Mr Marr said.

"Aboriginal women from all over NSW also choose to travel to Sydney to attend the Malabar service, which is a testament to the solid reputation which the midwives have developed amongst Indigenous communities."

Clinical midwifery consultant, Shea Caplice, who manages the service, said a great trust had been developed, because the service was not imposed by officials, instead representing "what the community wanted."

"Women now come for antenatal care much earlier – most attend the service in the first 20 weeks of their pregnancy – and they return for subsequent pregnancies, as well as referring family and friends," Ms Caplice said. "We're a bridge to the hospital and a soft entry point to the health care system."

Since 2006, the service has expanded to include one clinical midwifery consultant, four midwives plus an Aboriginal mentored midwife sponsored by the hospital's foundation, an Aboriginal health worker, an Aboriginal administration assistant, an appointed social worker and a child and family health nurse who supports families after birth.

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District
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“Malabar Midwives’ is considered the gold standard for other services seeking to establish antenatal, birthing and postnatal care for Indigenous women. The service has received two NSW Aboriginal Health Awards: the Director General’s Award and the award for excellence in program and service delivery,” Ms Caplice said.

Local community members, elders, health care professionals and families who have used the Malabar Midwifery Link Service will attend the celebrations, to be held at:

La Perouse Medical Centre, 1 Elaroo Ave La Perouse, at 11.30am, on Monday 28 November 2016.

For interviews with Malabar Midwifery Link Service staff or local community members, please contact Jennifer Connell on 9382 4583 or 0418 205 992.