

# Closing the Gap in Primary Care:

## Co-creation of programs with community

The Western Sydney Primary Health Network (PHN) acknowledges the traditional owners of Country throughout Australia on which we gather, live, work and stand. We acknowledge all traditional custodians, their Elders past, present, and emerging, and we pay respect to all First Nation's people.

For 20 years, WentWest has been a part of the Western Sydney community, delivering support and education to primary health care professionals, and working with key partners to progress the region's health system.

In July 2015, WentWest became the Western Sydney Primary Health Network (Western Sydney PHN), expanding its work to deliver better health outcomes for the Western Sydney region. PHNs are funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care to strengthen primary

care, improve patient-centred health, and increase the efficiency of primary health care services for Australians, particularly those at risk of poor health outcomes.

### First Nations Health in Western Sydney

Western Sydney has one of the largest populations of First Nations persons in Australia, and we are proud to live and work on Darug land. At Western Sydney PHN, we work with community to co-create programs and initiatives that improve health outcomes. In 2023, we ran our first Community Panels, including one exclusively First Nations panel, to find out what matters to the people of Western Sydney.

A Community Panel is a way to directly involve community members in decision-making processes, particularly when it comes to addressing solutions to complex challenges. This is a way >





The Shed, Mount Druitt celebrating Men's Health Day 2023

to build connections, share knowledge and lived experiences, and collaborate in a culturally safe way.


Twenty citizens, chosen from a ballot, were invited to participate in the First Nations panel and collectively answer the question, 'Should we, the people of Western Sydney, continue to invest in the health system in the same way that we have in the past?'. Participants listened to evidence from a range of experts on mental health, child and family, aged care, palliative care, acute care, alcohol and other drugs, emergency services, primary care, social care and many other domains.

By the end of the panel, participants had collectively made recommendations aimed at closing the gap. These included investing more

in preventive health, creating a new approach to support early childhood development, better embedding cultural safety across health and social services, improving connections between health and social care systems, and increasing access to team-based primary care closer to home, including more service navigators and peer workers.

Community Panels have been a way to bring back the voice of the community and are a part of a greater strategy to improve First Nations health outcomes in Western Sydney. Along with commissioned primary and community health care services and organisational diversity and inclusion policies, we are working towards a First Nations Framework, which maintains cultural humility at its heart.





**“Over 40% of the Stolen Generations aged 50 and over have issues accessing health services, which leaves them in a cycle of poor health.”**

### **Community Health Services in Western Sydney**

Working with the local community and organisations around Western Sydney, we ensure equitable accessibility of services, health literacy, and management of health conditions, to provide holistic and culturally appropriate support to the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons.

One of our commissioned services, The Shed, is a safe and welcoming environment where people can share their stories in a non-judgemental setting. The service assists with mental, physical and emotional wellbeing, and connects people to wider health and social services.

The Western Sydney PHN Commissioning Team has worked with The Shed for over five years, supporting Western Sydney’s regional objective of improving First Nations health outcomes.

Compared to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the same age group, the Stolen Generations are 40% more likely to be living with a profound disability, and 40% more likely to have poor mental health. There are around 27,200 Stolen Generation survivors, and 30% live in New South Wales. Over 40% of the Stolen Generations aged 50 and over have issues accessing health services, which leaves them in a cycle of poor health.

The Shed is instrumental in changing these statistics and connecting community members to life-changing health and wellbeing services.

Luke\* is a 60-year-old Aboriginal man who has been attending The Shed for several years for health, wellbeing and legal services. He is one of the Stolen Generations who was taken from his family at a young age. The trauma still lives with him, but the Shed has given him a supportive space to share his story with a community of like-minded people.

‘After meeting and talking to people, I realised I wasn’t alone...I suffer from PTSD from being taken away, and it comes in waves. You might wake up and have a miserable morning, but coming here, life is not so bad’.

The Shed allows Luke to connect with specific health providers in a comforting environment rather than through a clinical setting. Luke said, ‘This place broke the monotony of being on a disability pension...I feel much more at home here than going to the medical centre’.

As with all of our commissioned programs, Western Sydney PHN maintains a close and productive partnership with The Shed and actively works with them through an ongoing process of co-design, collaboration and continuous improvement.

*\*Name has been changed to protect the identity of this client*