

# CONNECT

Issue 1

# with RESPECT

## WELCOME

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the first edition of Eastern Health's *Connect with Respect* newsletter.

Closing the Health Gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians continues to be a key priority for Eastern Health.

Our "Asking the Question" initiative focuses on identifying patients of Aboriginal background to provide them with the best care possible, while our Aboriginal Health Team offers a range of specialised services.

Our Closing the Gap Family Sports Day and NAIDOC Week celebrations highlight Eastern Health's aim to connect with our own staff, as well as the local community to put Aboriginal health on the agenda. Furthermore, Eastern Health has a dedicated Closing the Gap Advisory Committee.

While Eastern Health has made good ground with initiatives to improve services provided to Aboriginal people, we know there is more to do and we are committed to Closing the Health Gap.

We look forward to working with our partners in Aboriginal health and the local community across these initiatives.

### MATT SHARP

Executive Director  
Acute Health (Acting)  
Eastern Health

## CLOSING THE HEALTH GAP ON ADDICTION

Enhancing support for people with addiction issues is a key plank of Eastern Health's commitment to closing the health gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

*Debbie Becker and Gaby Bruning are forming strong health links with Aboriginal people in Melbourne's east.*

Recent appointments have included a dedicated Aboriginal alcohol and other drug (AOD) liaison worker and a senior clinician dedicated to providing Aboriginal people with advice regarding ice. The roles are part of the Eastern Health Aboriginal Employment Plan and aims to improve Aboriginal healthcare access.

After completing a traineeship in 2015, Gaby Bruning continues to work at residential addiction support service Wellington House as an Aboriginal AOD liaison worker while also training to be an enrolled nurse.

Gaby, who is an Aboriginal woman, also won the Closing the Health Gap Award at Eastern Health's 2016 Apsire to Inspire Awards.

Turning Point Eastern Treatment Services Manager Gavin Foster said Gaby had made a positive impact during her time at Eastern Health, with an increase in the number of Aboriginal people seeking treatment through Wellington House.

Mr Foster said that with the number of indigenous people with AOD issues over-represented compared to the

general population in Melbourne's east, Gaby's role was essential.

In addition, Debbie Becker is now senior clinician for the Aboriginal Metropolitan Ice Pilot Project, a program run in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.

She will work directly with Aboriginal people and their families affected by ice, providing support and advice on how to access treatment.

"There is more work to be done but we are encouraged by what we have achieved so far," Mr Foster said.

Following the success of Eastern Health's 2012-2015 Aboriginal Employment Plan, a renewed plan has been developed with community consultation for the next three years.

The Plan recognises increasing the Aboriginal workforce across will help improve health outcomes in the region and strengthening cultural awareness across the health service. There are currently 26 Aboriginal employees across Eastern Health.



Eastern Health is committed to achieving equality in health status between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.

  
easternhealth  
GREAT HEALTH AND WELLBEING



# ASKING THE QUESTION

**Work is continuing on “Asking the Question”, an Eastern Health initiative that aims to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients and consumers are identified and referred to the most appropriate services for their healthcare needs.**

Eastern Health Executive Director of Acute Health (Acting) Matt Sharp said a standardised process for all staff to ask the question upon patient admission was now in action.

“We have guidelines to ensure staff not only ask the question but also understand why we ask the question so they are

able to explain this to the patient if they have any queries,” Mr Sharp said.

Asking the Question was introduced after a 2013 audit discovered many patients were not being asked if they were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin at the point of admission. This led to inaccurate data regarding this patient group, making referrals to the Aboriginal hospital liaison officer and Aboriginal health services difficult.

Since then, Eastern Health has worked to find out why staff were not asking the question and creating a better understanding of how this information is used.

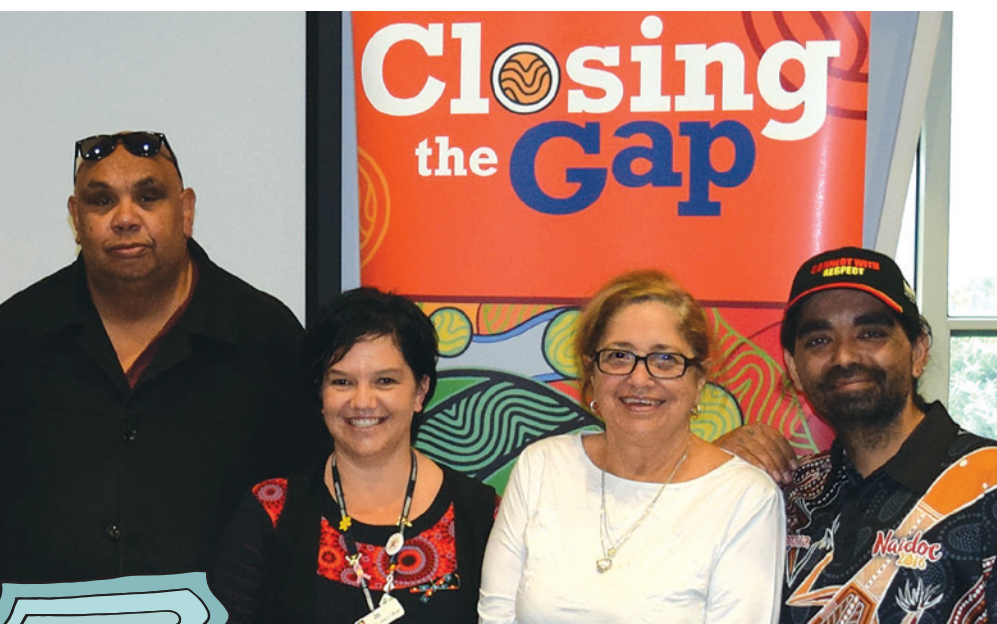
Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officer Jo Voce has been one of the driving forces behind the initiative.

**“In the long term, we hope asking the question plays an important role in Closing the Health Gap.”**

– Matt Sharp

“It is important that patients can identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; so we can refer them to the relevant services that offer them the support they need.” Jo said.

“We have already seen some encouraging signs. In the long term, we hope asking the question plays an important role in Closing the Health Gap.”



*Pictured are singer-songwriter Kutcha Edwards, Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officer Jo Voce, Wurundjeri Elder Aunty Joy Murphy and didgeridoo player Kelvin Smith.*

## NAIDOC WEEK CELEBRATIONS

**Indigenous music and culture has been celebrated as part of NAIDOC Week across Eastern Health.**

Each July, NAIDOC (National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee) Week celebrations are held across Australia, acknowledging the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This year, Eastern Health held its major event at Wantirna Health.

## ABORIGINAL HEALTH TEAM

**Eastern Health’s Aboriginal Health Team is a community-based service based in Healesville that is accessible by Aboriginal people and their families living anywhere in Eastern Health’s catchment.**

It provides a broad range of services that are available on-site in Healesville and through home visits and outreach support. These include:

- ☉ **Primary health care:** health checks, nursing support and general health information and education.
- ☉ **Case management and advocacy:** care planning, case management, referral and advocacy for other services.
- ☉ **Social and emotional wellbeing:** counselling services, school-based programs and education support.
- ☉ **Home and community care:** domestic assistance, property maintenance and social events.

**i** The Aboriginal Health Team is located at 305-307 Maroondah Highway, Healesville and is open Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm. Phone **5957 1100** or email **AHTIntake@easternhealth.org.au**