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NEW Privately-Funded Aboriginal Medical Service Launched in Caboolture, Queensland

A new privately-funded bulk-billing Aboriginal Medical Service was launched in Caboolture on Wednesday 29 June 2011.

Founding Directors of the Murri Teilah Medical Centre, Jennie Anderson of Wiradjuri descent and Anita Kemp from the Cook Islands, had a vision of developing a self-sustainable medical centre that was not dependent on government funding.

They now expect to have 1500 financial members comprising Indigenous community groups, corporate donors and personal donors with ongoing cashflow provided by Medicare rebates, and plan to extend the concept to ten additional sites under the Murri Health Group umbrella.

The launch commenced with an 'Acknowledgement of Country' given by Uncle Peter Bird followed by speakers including the Federal MP for Longman Wyatt Roy. Federal MP for Bowman and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health Services and Indigenous Health Andrew Laming was also in attendance.

Over 300 community members attended the launch including Elders Uncle David Allie, Uncle Frank Brown, Aunty Barb Hubbard, Aunty Fay Gundy, Aunty Minnie Mace, Aunty Marj Grant, and Aunty Laurelle Bird. A 'Cleansing Ceremony' was conducted and guests enjoyed a Kup-Murri (traditional Aboriginal lunch) following the formalities.

Managing Director Ms Anderson said, "The Murri Teilah Medical Centre will close a long-awaited health service gap in Queensland for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Until now there have been no Aboriginal healthcare centres operating in the Moreton Bay region which has 5,000 Aboriginal people who visit a doctor around 17,500 times per year."

The all-Indigenous board of management are excited by the opportunity to finally be able to provide culturally sensitive health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Moreton Bay and South Burnett regions.

Murri Teilah Medical will initially focus its services towards those who are patient fatigued and those who are physically and mentally unable to attend health service providers. The services to be provided include health checks; mums and bubs clinic; chronic disease management; family planning, pap smears and pregnancy care; immunisation clinic, travel medicine vaccinations; minor surgery; and allied health service referrals including oral health care; general practice medicine; mental health; aged health care; and prisoner release healthcare. Central to the health service delivery model is an innovative patient-transport service.

Ms Anderson and Ms Kemp are partners of a successful Oral Healthcare Practice in Stafford, Queensland. Their decision to invest knowledge and financial capital into making a contribution to

closing the gap in health service delivery has now become a reality through the establishment of Murri Health Group Ltd.

The idea for the core innovative patient-transport service delivery method developed from anecdotal accounts from their Indigenous patients, many of whom suffered patient-fatigue due to their inability to access transport to existing health facilities.

Ms Anderson and Ms Kemp made a substantial time and financial commitment to develop the best model and partnerships to achieve an underlying difference in the lives of Indigenous Australians. They were determined to ensure this difference was achieved even if they had to fund and 'go it alone'.

Overwhelmingly, when Indigenous community groups in the Moreton Bay and South Burnett Regions became aware of the service, they contributed through volunteering, funding, moral support, and community-awareness in an unprecedented manner to ensure the concept materialised.

Since then, GP Super Clinic operators in Strathpine and Caboolture along with nearby medical centres have sought partnerships with the Murri Health Group. Two collaborative bids for funding were lodged for the Caboolture GP Super Clinic and the 'Mums and Bubs' healthcare centre.

Dr Evan Jones, proprietor of the GP Super Clinic in Strathpine and Director of the Gladstone GP Super Clinic and Golden Beach Medical Centre, said "the Murri Health Group is an exciting venture and it's terrific to see a community controlled self-sustainable model of health care come to Caboolture which will certainly be welcomed by the community." Dr Jones assisted with the set-up of the Murri Health Group and looks forward to working in collaboration in the future.

Further support has come from the Queensland University of Technology, which has partnered with the Murri Health Group to deliver its Indigenous Aged Care submission to the Federal Government. The university has also been invited by the Federal Government to apply for funding under the 'Nurse Practitioner Aged Care Models of Practice Program'.

Queensland Health has also expressed interest in sub-leasing space within the Murri Health Group 'Mums and Bubs' unit to simultaneously deliver their mother and child programs.

Already Murri Health Group is expanding with government funding being sought to extend the network to ten sites including remote areas across Australia within ten years. Discussions have progressed with a NSW country town community as being the next site.

If government funding is not forthcoming for the expansion, then the capital recruitment strategy applied in Caboolture will be replicated in the new locations.

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