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## **New reconciliation garden helps close the gap**

Campbelltown Hospital will mark the 10 year anniversary of Close the Gap Day with a community celebration including the opening of a new Aboriginal reconciliation garden, smoking ceremony and indigenous bush tucker morning tea this Friday 18 March.

Campbelltown Hospital Aboriginal Liaison Officer Raylene Blackburn said the garden was a place for both patients and the community, one that supports healing and provides a quiet, outdoor sanctuary.

“With the guidance of Aunty Fran Bodkin, native plants with various uses including some that can be made into tea and berries that can be eaten straight off the bush, were used in the garden,” said Ms Blackburn.

“The garden features murals that were designed by Robert Bell and Ally Rutherford and support the theme of reconciliation, represent the strength of Aboriginal culture and symbolise growing collectively in the spirit of reconciliation,” she said.

As well as the opening of the garden, SWSLHD will launch its Close the Gap Report Card, a health snapshot that identifies physical and lifestyle health risks within south western Sydney’s Aboriginal population, helping the District target programs to address these areas.

SWSLHD Aboriginal Health Director Nathan Jones said after 10 years, positive change is happening.

“Today the rate of Aboriginal children fully immunised at 12 months is almost on par with that of non-Aboriginal children,” Mr Jones said.

“The rate of Aboriginal children fully immunised at age five is actually higher than non-Aboriginal children and sits at over 95 per cent.

“To ensure that these children remain on a healthy path, we are also launching the 2 to School program which is being funded by Commonwealth Department of Health.

“The program will include a multidisciplinary team of an Aboriginal Health Worker, Child and Family Nurse, Speech Pathologist and Social Worker to work with families to support their children’s transition to kindergarten.

“This follows on from the Aboriginal sustained home visiting programs that engage with families up until baby turns two and will help ensure key developmental milestones are reached and the child successfully transitions to school,” he said.

Campbelltown and Camden Hospitals General Manager Alison Derrett said she was pleased the garden was opening.

“Campbelltown Hospital is committed to providing culturally appropriate spaces at the hospital,” said Ms Derrett.

“We have two lovely spaces including the Uncle Ivan Wellington Lounge inside the hospital and now the reconciliation garden outside,” she said.