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Testing and treatment keeps our community safe from hepatitis C

Proud Worimi woman Debbie Robinson is enjoying a new lease on life after being cured of hepatitis C and is urging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in south western Sydney to get tested even if they have no symptoms.

South Western Sydney Local Health District is partnering with Gandangara Aboriginal Land Council to eliminate hepatitis C in Liverpool and surrounding areas and is encouraging people to know their hepatitis C status.

Ms Robinson completed the 8-to-12 week treatment program at Gandangara Health Service in Liverpool and said the service was easy to access and delivered in a culturally safe way.

“I had a blood test, the doctor told me I had hepatitis C and I felt numb. Then the doctor told me I had 10 years to live. I went to Gandangara and they helped me to access treatment right away,” Ms Robinson said.

“If it wasn’t for Gandangara, I wouldn’t be here. I wouldn’t have done anything about it because I felt healthy. I felt supported every step of the way at Gandangara. I’m cured and have a long life ahead of me. I’m proud of myself and my family is proud of me too.”

District Chief Executive Amanda Larkin said new hepatitis C treatments can cure more than 95 per cent of people.

“Kirby Institute modelling suggests there are approximately 40,000 people living with hepatitis C in NSW, and within south western Sydney the number is estimated to be almost 6000,” Ms Larkin said.

“Hepatitis C has very few symptoms and you can have it without knowing. It’s a virus that affects the liver and if left untreated, it can slowly damage the liver and lead to liver cancer. Hepatitis C is now curable and people can go on and live long and healthy lives after having it.”

District Aboriginal Health Director Nathan Jones said there was no shame or stigma in getting tested for hepatitis C. “We’re encouraging more members of the Aboriginal community in south western Sydney to get tested and treated. Let’s make a change and do all we can to eliminate hepatitis C,” Mr Jones said.

Gandangara Aboriginal Land Council CEO Melissa Williams said hepatitis C testing is part of routine screening at Gandangara by the service’s valued clinicians.

“People can come into Gandangara and have a confidential yarn with a GP, nurse practitioner and/ or First Peoples Health Practitioner to arrange for testing and/or to get more information about treatment,” Ms Williams said.

For more details, visit www.hep.org.au or phone 1800 803 990.