Honouring Aboriginal Diggers during NAIDOC Week

This year Sydney Local Health District’s NAIDOC week event, held at Sydney Dental Hospital, highlighted an ongoing commitment to Aboriginal health equity and acknowledged the service of Indigenous men and women in Australian military engagements.

Guest Speaker and Chairperson of the Coloured Digger Project in Redfern, Pastor Ray Minniecon, said the 2014 NAIDOC theme *Serving Country – Centenary and Beyond* was part of a growing movement to honour the military service of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander diggers were the unknown soldiers, the unknown warriors. They had no face, and we wanted to give them a face,” Pastor Minniecon said.

“When those men went over and fought in other countries, they left a lot of their brothers behind. We have so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people buried in foreign countries that we don’t know about. We need to know who they are, we need to know where they are buried. We need to find those things out so we can let the families know, let this nation know, the sacrifices they have made.

“We cannot whitewash our history, this particular part of our story, it is just unthinkable in my mind. And so if we have to march in the streets of Redfern, of Brisbane and Melbourne and Canberra in order to get that recognition, that honour and that dignity – then we will need to do that,” said Pastor Minniecon.

Sydney Local Health District Chief Executive, Dr Teresa Anderson, said NAIDOC week was an opportunity to demonstrate ongoing commitment to Aboriginal health equity as well as celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“Sydney Local Health District is deeply committed to achieving equity in Aboriginal health,” Dr Anderson said.

“Through meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal communities and other organisations, the district maintains Aboriginal health as a top priority and our staff remain committed to leading positive change,” Dr Anderson said.
Director Aboriginal Health George Long thanked all District staff working to advance Aboriginal health and help close the gap.

“We recognise engaging Aboriginal communities is important to achieving this goal, as well as including and engaging non-Aboriginal services, communities and people,” Mr Long said.

The event featured a didgeridoo performance by Toby and Todd Reid from Tribal Warrior, and a performance by students from St Scholastica’s College who kindly donated their time during school holidays.

L-R: District Chief Executive Teresa Anderson, Sydney Dental Hospital’s Aboriginal Oral Health Program Coordinator Keira Green, Pastor Ray Minniecon, District Board Chair the Hon. Ron Phillips, Sydney Dental Hospital General Manager Lavena Ramdutt.