

Dr Chris Bourke
Member for Ginninderra
Adjournment Debate
Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service

Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service is no ordinary health centre - it is an important community hub offering a range of services in a culturally safe environment.

Over its 23 years Winnunga has had some great staff and one of the most loved and respected has been Dr Peter Sharp. Sadly Dr Pete passed away last Sunday.

Dr Pete worked at Winnunga for 22 years. At first he travelled from Sydney every weekend to run clinics for the ACT Aboriginal community. For the last twenty years he worked full-time at Winnunga.

Dr Pete ran clinics at regional correctional facilities treating Aboriginal inmates. He trained local doctors in Indigenous health and worked on alcohol and substance abuse programs.

The recent establishment of the Dr Peter Sharp Trust by the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT has provided further recognition of the great work done by Dr Pete. This Trust was launched and celebrated at the recent Open Day at Winnunga.

I know that Indigenous people in the ACT and surrounding regions are now in deep mourning at Dr Pete's untimely death and I send my condolences to his family, friends, colleagues and patients.

On Wednesday 7 September I visited Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service on its Open Day. The Open Day was an opportunity to inspect the new facilities and say hello to Julie Tongs, the CEO, Judy Harris, the Board Chair, and some of the other staff and clients.

Over the last 23 years Winnunga has grown and responded to the needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Its services are now accessed by thousands of clients across the Canberra region.

The key to this success is that it has been managed and governed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Long before the big medical centres arrived in Canberra, Winnunga led the way in providing comprehensive primary health care – medical, child and baby health, drug and alcohol, mental health and dental.

The ACT Government is working in partnership with the Commonwealth Government on a range of initiatives to ‘Close the Gap’ on Indigenous disadvantage; to tackle the social determinants of health. Better health outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT are a key commitment of this work.

Last month the 2011 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report was released. It shows that there is still a long way to go to overcome Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage.

The report includes very little data on the ACT’s progress in Indigenous health because of the relatively small Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

However, the report did find that the rate of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander daily smokers aged 18 or over was the lowest of all jurisdictions – approximately 30%. This is lower than the national Indigenous average of 50%.

Winnunga can take pride in the progress made to reduce smoking. The ACT Government is pleased to have an agreement in place to provide funding support for Winnunga's tackling smoking program until 2013.

I also want to acknowledge the generous funding support for the recent renovations at Winnunga that has been provided by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.

The improved facilities will benefit the thousands of clients who access health services and support programs through Winnunga as well as the dedicated staff who deliver them.

I want to congratulate Winnunga for the great work it has done and is continuing to do since it opened its doors at the Griffin Centre back in 1988 and to send my condolences again to everyone there on the loss of their friend and mentor, Dr Peter Sharp.