

Aboriginal Family Birthing Program: Aboriginal women caring for Aboriginal women in rural SA

In January 2004, Country Health SA in partnership with Nunyara Wellbeing Centre (Whyalla) and Pika Wiya Health Service (Port Augusta) established a planned and targeted alternative maternity service for Aboriginal women, known as the Aboriginal "Anangu Bibi" Family Birthing Program.

This service aims to ensure Aboriginal women receive clinically excellent and culturally appropriate antenatal care and give birth to babies of healthy birth weight which are breastfed.

This model of care is unique in that Aboriginal women are cared for by Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Care Workers (Aboriginal Health Workers trained in maternal and infant care) through pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period. Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Care (AMIC) Workers work in partnership with Midwives and GPs and Obstetricians to provide holistic and culturally respectful care.

The strength of the model also lies in the real partnership between the midwife and AMIC worker in the day-to-day care of women and families. AMIC workers are trained and supported in clinical skills, and the Midwives receive support and education in cultural issues and practices from the AMIC workers. Knowledge transfer between these workers, and other hospital staff, will have the effect of improving care for all Aboriginal women who birth in the hospitals as cultural awareness is heightened in this area.

Community input into the program is crucial with an Aboriginal Women's Advocacy Group established to provide cultural support and advice to the program. The group is made up of senior Aboriginal women from the community, workers from Aboriginal services, and younger female community members

Given the success and positive impact this program has made to many families, Country Health SA recently gained new funding via the Council of Australian Government's National Partnership for Indigenous Early Childhood Development and also through the Australian Government's Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, New Directions, Mothers and Babies Initiative to significantly increase the capacity for targeted Aboriginal maternal birthing programs in country South Australia. A key component of the proposal is to strengthen the AMIC workforce through increased employment opportunities, nationally accredited training and career pathways.

What this means for country families is increased caseload capacity for existing services in Port Augusta and Whyalla, new services being established and based in Murray Bridge and Ceduna and new outreach connections and services being created for the Far North and Flinders Ranges areas.

A country-wide Aboriginal Family Birthing Program Steering Committee meets regularly to oversee the implementation of the program. Membership includes representatives from Management Groups in each area, Aboriginal Women's Advocacy Groups, Aboriginal Health Council SA, CHSA, Aboriginal Health Division, Children Youth and Women's Health service, and General Practice SA.

For more information contact Anna Caponi, Senior Project Officer, Aboriginal Family Birthing Program, Country Health SA, Early Childhood Directorate, ph 08 8648 5686

or

Dr Julia Vnuk, GPSA representative on the AFBP Steering Committee, GP Advisor Aboriginal Health Program, Flinders and Far North Division of GP, ph 08 8642 3166 or julia.vnuk@flindiv.com.au