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For immediate release

Big Waitemata DHB win for community engagement

A community engagement project run by Waitemata DHB to test public opinion on primary birthing units has won the health category of the Australasian Core Values Awards.

The awards, announced in Melbourne on 19 October, recognise projects and organisations at the forefront of public participation.

Waitemata DHB, which is now working on plans to establish an urban primary birthing unit in west Auckland, put together a business case for the concept after running an extensive community consultation project that started in 2013.

Its efforts were especially targeted towards youth, Māori, Pacific, Asian, refugee and migrant communities.

“The Waitemata DHB Board specifically asked for ‘quieter voices’ – those least likely to engage in consultation, to be represented,” Waitemata DHB Planning, Funding & Outcomes Community Engagement Manager Carol Hayward says.

People were surveyed online and multiple community events were held so that attendees could learn more about the idea and give their feedback.

Other stakeholders groups were called in to help and a media campaign was launched to help get the word out.

Carol says 1077 people responded to the survey while another 450 attended community meetings, hui and events led by senior staff.

“Holding events demonstrated an openness to listen to the community,” she says. “The inclusion of senior DHB staff as presenters ensured questions were answered accurately and meant concerns or issues that arose were managed on the spot.

“It also helped people to understand the importance of consultation to the DHB and feel valued for their involvement.”

Waitemata General manager Child, Women & Family Stephanie Doe says community engagement is directly aligned to the DHB’s organisational goals and values.

“One of those values is that everyone matters,” she says. “This project is a good example of our DHB practising what it preaches in this respect. We turned to our partner organisations, health

professionals and the wider community to make sure their voices were heard as part of the decision-making process.”

The Waitemata District Health Board agreed in August to move ahead with plans to establish an urban primary birthing unit - a direct response to community requests to provide more choices for the district’s population and safe alternatives to traditional hospital births.

The news was welcomed by a number of external stakeholders including the Auckland Region New Zealand College of Midwives whose chairwoman, Helenmary Walker , called it a “win/win for women, babies and their families.”

The unit will be built on the Waitakere Hospital site and the Board is now doing investigative work to determine how best to complete the development in the 2019/2020 financial year.

The decision was driven by the public consultation results and projected population figures predicting more demographic growth in west Auckland than anywhere else in the Waitemata catchment over the next eight years.

The Waitemata DHB will address broader district needs in the next stages of its planning and may develop more fit-for-purpose, primary birthing units elsewhere once the Waitakere model is up and running successfully.

The proposed 500m² facility will be designed with additional input from the community, clinicians and other key stakeholders to ensure a culturally appropriate space with flexible bed capacity.

Caption: Members of the original primary birthing consultation team, left to right, Emma Farmer, Carol Hayward and Wendy Devereux are celebrating success after a big win at the Australasian Core Values Awards

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