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New Waitematā DHB development gives vulnerable babies ‘best-possible’ start to life

The opening of a new Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU) at Waitakere Hospital today is the latest milestone in an ongoing upgrade of the site that is designed to meet growing demand for expanded health services in West Auckland.

The unit was officially opened by Minister of Health Hon Andrew Little and Associate Minister of Health Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall. It features a dedicated mothers’ lounge, a separate parent kitchen and dining area, six cot bays with sleeping spaces for parents and three dedicated rooms for overnight stays.

The SCBU provides a supportive and caring environment for up to 18 babies born post-32 weeks gestation who require specialised care. Its predecessor catered for up to 12 babies and had no dedicated sleeping areas for parents or caregivers. Instead, one family room was available elsewhere in the hospital and a marae on the campus was sometimes used to accommodate parents and caregivers.

The new design means at least one parent is able to stay overnight with their baby at all times while sleeping quarters provided in separate parts of the unit allow for others to be accommodated as well.

“Being able to provide these kinds of options is incredibly important during the first few days of a baby’s life,” Waitematā DHB CEO Dr Dale Bramley says.

Dr Bramley says the state-of-the art facility is the latest in a line of developments at Waitakere Hospital that will help future-proof the health needs of this region for a long time to come.

“In recent years, we have built a vastly expanded Emergency Department (ED) as well as a bigger and better radiology unit. Plans are now being developed to start building a new \$65.1 million Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and a 30-bed inpatient ward from the end of 2022 and we are delighted to know that this work will continue once the transition to the interim Health NZ takes place.”

The new SCBU was partly funded by \$5 million of community donations through Well Foundation – the DHB’s official charity.

“Our community has taken a deep and personal interest in this project from the outset and there is no doubt this facility will give some of our most-vulnerable babies the best-possible start to life,” Dr Bramley says. “Our sincere thanks to all those have supported this development so generously.”

Waitakere hospital paediatrician Dr Meia Schmidt-Uili says the expanded SCBU will play an integral role in the delivery of paediatric services as the population continues to grow.

“Additional overnight sleeping arrangements for mothers and their primary support people are incredibly important in this kind of scenario – as is the provision of a caring and supportive environment for those patients and whānau who are preparing to transition home with their infants.

“We are very pleased to be able to offer both to people as they navigate their way through these first few crucial days of their babies’ lives.”

The opening was the last major event of its kind to be held under the auspices of Waitematā DHB, which will cease to exist on July 1 when the interim Health NZ becomes the new single entity overseeing the national public health sector.

Caption: Left to right: Associate Minister of Health Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall, Waitematā DHB CEO Dr Dale Bramley and Minister of Health Hon Andrew Little at the opening of the new Waitakere Hospital Special Care Baby Unit.

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