

Thursday, 12 December, 2019

Aboriginal children in central Sydney set to benefit from new healthy lifestyle programs

Three new projects in Redfern, Darlington and Woolloomooloo will create more opportunities for Aboriginal children, youth and families to live healthy and active lives after receiving funding from the *Aboriginal Healthy Lifestyle Grants* initiative.

The projects were among seven recipients from across south eastern Sydney who came together at an official grant awards ceremony at Georges River Sailing Club on Tuesday 10 December.

Launched for the first time by South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD), the initiative aims to collaborate with local Aboriginal organisations and groups, supporting them to utilise existing strengths and assets to meet the health and wellbeing needs of their community.

The Aboriginal Children's Service in Redfern will use their grant to fund cooking classes, nutrition workshops and a vegetable garden for children and mothers who attend Biddy's Joy Playgroup. The Playgroup is for newborns and children aged up to six years, and the project will provide a cultural safe space to support mothers to make healthier food choices.

Families in Darlington will also benefit from the grants program, with the Settlement Neighbourhood Centre receiving funding for a program to provide swimming lessons for five to 12 year-olds.

The Weave Community Hub, based in Woolloomooloo, will launch *Fun and Food*, an educational initiative for young people about the importance of healthy eating and creative ways to enjoy physical activity.

Myna Hua, Manager, Health Promotion Service SESLHD, said grants of up to \$5,000 were awarded to projects that address healthy eating, physical activity and reducing screen time.

"The Aboriginal population in south eastern Sydney is continuing to grow at a greater rate compared to the general population – and we know this community experiences a higher prevalence of many long-term health conditions, as well as a higher rate of hospitalisation," Ms Hua said.

"Likewise, healthy lifestyle programs initiated and managed within communities are more likely to be effective.

"The projects funded will enable family and carers to become actively involved in the future health of Aboriginal children and youth, with a strategic objective to empower the community to work together and take ownership of their own health," Ms Hua said.

In 2016, there were 8,281 people living in the Local Health District who identified as Aboriginal. In this same period, the rate of hospitalisation among Aboriginal people in SESLHD was 34 per cent higher than non-Aboriginal people.

The *Aboriginal Healthy Lifestyle Grants* initiative supports the *Childhood Obesity Prevention Framework* developed by SESLHD, which guides local action to reduce and prevent childhood overweight and obesity. The Framework outlines priorities for action across the health sector, local community and children's everyday settings.

Almost one quarter (24 per cent) of children aged five to 16 years across NSW are overweight or obese. In addition, these children have an increased likelihood of being above a healthy weight in adulthood, a risk factor for developing chronic diseases including diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Data shows that nearly half (43 per cent) of adult residents (aged 16 years and over) who live in south eastern Sydney are overweight or obese.

"Being above a healthy weight can impact a child's physical, emotional and social wellbeing," Ms Hua said.

"Preventative action across sectors and through community led change are key to reducing overweight and obesity in children – which has become a serious public health issue.

"By acting now, alongside health professionals, the community can help reverse increasing rates of obesity in childhood, and enhance the future health of the next generation."

For more information about the Aboriginal Children's Service, please contact: contact@acsredfern.org; for the Settlement Neighbourhood Centre: cfp@settlement.net.au and for the Weave Community Hub: regina@weave.org.au.