

Media Release

New Health and Arts outreach program: Art Gallery of NSW transforming clinical settings



An innovative program between the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Health Infrastructure and Murrumbidgee Local Health District (MLHD) has launched to provide aged care residents living in three newly opened Multipurpose Service sites in the MLHD with access to quality arts engagement experiences.

The pilot initiative is funded as part of the NSW Government \$297 million Multipurpose Service (MPS) program, providing improved access to health and aged care services in rural and remote communities.

Minister for the Arts Don Harwin said this program points to the important links between the arts and improved health outcomes.

"The Art Gallery of NSW is providing high-quality reproductions of some of the most cherished artworks from the Art Gallery's collection in resident living rooms.

"The impact of the program extends the reach of the Art Gallery of NSW beyond its four walls and into the regions of NSW in significant ways. This program is transforming these new MPS facilities from clinical to homelike settings, with anticipated clinical and wellbeing benefits for residents," Mr Harwin said.

Modelled on similar Art Gallery of NSW programs for people with a lived experience of dementia, the program has a social and cultural approach and provides a meaningful way for aged care residents to connect with others, particularly during periods of isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jill Ludford, Chief Executive, Murrumbidgee Local Health District said the COVID-19 pandemic has proved a challenging and difficult time for the residential aged care sector with COVID-19 safety protocols resulting in periods of restricted access for visitors.

“Innovative approaches that maintain communication and relationships are vital to ensure ongoing connection with communities.

“We’re delighted that this partnership, the new arts and health program, will provide an opportunity for rural NSW aged care residents to enjoy quality art experiences, trigger memory and stimulate new conversations with their families and health professionals,” she said.

The program reduces reliance on pharmacological approaches within residential aged care settings. Research indicates engagement with the arts for those living with dementia, stimulates brain function resulting in improved speech, which is important for communication with families, staff and residents to engage with each other. This has positive impacts on some of the behavioural impacts of a diagnosis of dementia.

Art Gallery of NSW Director, Dr Michael Brand, said the Gallery is proud to be partnering with Health Infrastructure NSW and Murrumbidgee Local Health District to design and deliver the program for aged care residents for the benefit of the whole community.

“Providing aged care residents and their local communities access to the Gallery’s collection, this unique partnership sees the Gallery’s outstanding arts programs deliver health benefits in rural and remote areas of NSW,” Dr Brand said.

Rebecca Wark, Chief Executive, Health Infrastructure thanked the Art Gallery of NSW and Murrumbidgee Local Health District for working with Health Infrastructure to develop this important arts and health outreach program.

“It is a cost-effective arts integration program that delivers a complete package of works curated by expert staff at the Art Gallery of NSW, accompanied by training for health professionals by Gallery staff.

“I’m very much looking forward to seeing the positive outcomes of the program in the first three regional NSW facilities and to assess its suitability for future implementation across the state,” Ms Wark said.

Program information

- Developed in line with the NSW Health in The Arts Framework with a focus on creative ageing, the program will commence in April 2021 as a three-year pilot project in regional New South Wales delivered initially at the Culcairn and Tumbarumba Multipurpose Service facilities and the Murrumburrah-Harden Health Service facility.
- Three curated visual displays of 20 high quality, framed reproductions from the Gallery’s Australian collection, and an associated program of activities and materials will be provided at the three venues to engage aged care residents in one-on-one and group activities.

- Collection works selected for the program include Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists such as Roy Kennedy, Esme Timbery, Margaret Preston, Arthur Streeton and Thea Proctor.
- The Gallery will provide professional development for health staff and guidance for family members to equip them to facilitate the program directly in their communities.
- In-kind support for the three-year pilot program is provided by the three partnering organisations with the Multipurpose Service Program funding the production of the 60 framed prints and accompanying program resources.

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