

# Media Release

## Pioneering volunteer program to benefit Aboriginal mothers and families

**Tuesday, 7 November 2017**

The launch of Australia's first Aboriginal volunteers hospital-based program is set to provide much needed support to the Aboriginal mothers and families of Western Australia.

Launched recently at an event at King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEMH), the Aboriginal Volunteer Program aims to create a culturally supportive environment for Aboriginal patients at KEMH.

In 2015/16, there were 19,531 women attending KEMH as inpatients, of which 7.2% (1407) were Indigenous.

Aboriginal Senior Health Promotion Officer, KEMH, Janinne Gliddon said Aboriginal women who access KEMH often have unique health needs.

"Many women who are patients at KEMH come from regional and very remote areas. Some can stay for weeks or months at a time. This can be a lonely, isolating and scary time," she said.

"The goal is that Aboriginal patients at our Hospital will feel more supported in a culturally appropriate way which we hope contributes to optimum health outcomes for mum and baby."

Aboriginal women experience disproportionately high health risks including increased risk of still born babies, low birthweight babies and preterm birth.

In WA alone, nearly 3000 babies are born preterm each year – approximately 1 in 12 pregnancies ends preterm. Rates of preterm birth among Aboriginal Australians and disadvantaged communities are approximately double.

WIRF Chief Operations Director, Deb Portuges said the launch of the Program represented a major milestone for WIRF, KEMH and, most importantly, the Aboriginal mothers of WA.

"The Program will focus on developing and implementing Aboriginal volunteers at KEMH through the already established WIRF Volunteer Program which currently coordinates more than 100 volunteers across a range of departments and services including social work, physiotherapy, perinatal loss service and nurseries," she said.

"These volunteers will focus solely on Aboriginal patients at KEMH and will be an invaluable asset as they will be at the frontline of patient interaction and able to provide feedback on various aspects of health care and the volunteer program itself."

**ENDS**

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**Background:** The Women and Infants Research Foundation is one of Australia's leading independent research institution dedicated to improving the health of women, infants and reproductive health. For more than 40 years our research and programs have directly contributed to a number of improved clinical practices and health outcomes in areas of critical need.

