



IN TOUCH WITH OUR COMMUNITY



The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Team: Cynthia Scott, Mark Anselmi, Carol Collie, and Toni Mason are committed to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients and their families at GV Health.

Championing Aboriginal Health

THE FIRST ABORIGINAL LIAISON OFFICERS (ALOs), BANGERANG SISTERS JUNE AND MARY ATKINSON, BEGAN WORK AT GV HEALTH IN THE 1970s, WITH ALOs WORKING OUT OF THE MINYA BARMAH ROOM AT THE GRAHAM ST CAMPUS EVER SINCE. 'MINYA BARMAH' MEANS 'SPIRITUAL MEETING PLACE' IN YORTA YORTA LANGUAGE.

Mark Anselmi has only been in his role for a short while but had his heart set on being an Aboriginal Liaison Officer at GV Health.

He explained his passion is in helping his community and providing friendly support in times of need, and has already seen the value his role has within the hospital.

"You're catching up with them and you help reassuring them that they're going to be okay here and just helping in any way that you can," Mark said.

"I've always been a part of this community, a lot of the jobs I've had in the past have been involved with community things ... so I'm finding (this role) really satisfying and I'm feeling good about helping people.

"I'm happy to be in a role, where I am now, and do what I can with the community and help whoever I'm working with."

GV Health's ALOs play an integral role in ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receive culturally appropriate healthcare and support.

The officers visit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are staying at GV Health, to provide in-person support and to help interpret with doctors and other medical staff where necessary.

They can provide multiple forms of assistance to those who need it, including attending appointments as a support person or just sitting down for a friendly chat.

GV Health also has a Mental Health Aboriginal Liaison Officer who provides cultural, emotional and social support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients and their families when they use mental health services.

Aboriginal Liaison Officer Carol Collie explained the team primarily provides support to those on the wards, including advocacy and interpreting services where needed.

"For our people, having someone there to advocate and interpret what the doctor is saying is very important ... quite often people will say 'oh, what did he mean by that?' when they're there," she said.

"Being supportive of that patient and listening to their stories at the bedside is so important. If you don't listen to Aboriginal people's stories, you can't understand some of their health issues and where the person is coming from."

Carol said they also provide cultural reference and advice for other GV Health staff.

"We advocate on patients' behalf for our doctors and nursing staff, and so we could be seen as cultural advisers in the

work that we do," she said.

Fellow Aboriginal Liaison Officer Cynthia Scott said they can offer support for non-Indigenous people at GV Health to source information for culturally appropriate practice; what they offer actually ends up benefitting the whole community.

"Us as Aboriginal people, we don't have all the answers, but we connect ourselves with community to learn more about ourselves, so we can grow individually and as a community as well," Cynthia said.

"It's a whole approach of care and looking after people and understanding communities."

Relatively new to GV Health after a move from Melbourne, Toni Mason – the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health manager – said she hopes to use her skills from her experience in similar roles in Melbourne to raise the profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

"There's a lot of good experience that this hospital already has, there's a lot here we can tap into," Toni said.

"We want to understand where we're at and where we can go as an Aboriginal liaison unit, but then also as the organisation overall."

Toni explained GV Health has made some great strides within the past few years, but she is excited to see how the ALO team and the service can progress in advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

"We're not all things to everyone, but we're here to help support other staff and patients as well to have a better experience here," she said.

"We look to the continuous improvement opportunities we can implement."

GV Health's ALOs provide emotional, social, and cultural support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients and their families.

The team is based in the Minya Barmah room, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are welcome for a cuppa, a chat, or just to sit.

ALOs are available 8.30am to 5pm weekdays; to access this service or if you have any questions, ask a nursing staff member in your unit or call 5823 8658.

The Mental Health Aboriginal Liaison Officer provides similar support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when they use GV Health's mental health services. For more information or to speak to our MHALO, please call 5832 2141.