

CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY REPORT WENTWORTH HEALTH SERVICE REDEVELOPMENT



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We acknowledge the First Peoples of Australia. We acknowledge their many Countries, knowledges and cultures. We pay our respects to the cultural knowledge-holders who have guided us in the development of this project. We acknowledge and pay our respects to the traditional owners of the lands of the Barkandji, Mulyangaba, Wadigali, Wangkumurra, Ngayaampa, Muthi Muthi where this project is been conducted. From the lands and waters where we live and work, we acknowledge the; Wurundjeri (Melbourne), Gamaragal (Sydney) and Turrbal (Brisbane) peoples. Through our projects, we commit to helping support the health and wellbeing of Country by valuing, respecting, and being guided by Aboriginal people.

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Connection on Country Walks conducted with Barkindji community, Health Infrastructure and Design Teams - July 2022

CREATING A PLACE OF HEALING AND WELLBEING

This draft framework has been informed by engagement through interviews and workshop discussions with selected stakeholders including a series of focus groups consisting of Traditional Custodians, representatives from community organisations, and government. This document has been compiled by NBRS and we express our deep gratitude to the individuals and communities who have contributed to the development of this report.

PROJECT DETAILS

PROJECT TYPE:
Health Infrastructure

LOCATION:
Barkindji Country
Wentworth NSW

CLIENT
Barkindji Country
Wentworth NSW

PROJECT SCALE
2.1 Hectares

YEAR:
Design Phase:
2022

Construction Phase:
2023-2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

THE WENTWORTH HEALTH SERVICE REDEVELOPMENT

The \$30 million Wentworth Health Service Redevelopment (WHSR) is being funded by the NSW Government. Wentworth Health Service (WHS) will be a small integrated health redevelopment facilitating care to the local catchment in partnership with Mildura Base Hospital, NSW Ambulance, Far West Local Health District (FWLHD) Community Health, Primary Care services, and private third-party providers. The facility, which will be built on Barkindji land, will bring a range of health services closer to communities in the Wentworth Shire region to meet the growing healthcare needs, now and into the future.

With this project being conducted on Barkindji land, NBRS and Health Infrastructure (HI) have ensured to engage Barkindji knowledge holders within the community. This report explores the Wentworth Health Service Redevelopment's (WHSR) vision and design principles through its engagement across several Aboriginal focus groups (AFG). This report outlines the Barkindji knowledge learned from in our engagements to date.

LEARNING FROM COUNTRY

From the outset of the project, it was identified that Indigenous guidance and local knowledge is integral to the projects design, longevity and future use. To assist the design teams in providing a best practice engagement, principles and protocols from the Connecting with Country Framework (GANSW 2020) and the Australian Indigenous Design Charter (2017) have been adopted. By utilising these guidelines, the WHSR development meets the challenges outlined in the Greenstar Innovation Challenge which promotes and showcases the importance of reconciliation.

Guiding the engagement are the principles outlined in the Australian Indigenous Design Charter and in the Greenstar Innovation Challenge. The following points have been adopted to ensure cultural safety for participants and the design team for the life of the engagement.

- Indigenous Led: Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the creation of the design.
- Community Specific: Ensure respect for the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture by following community specific cultural protocols.

- Impact of Design: Always consider the reception and implications of all designs so that they are respectful to Indigenous culture.
- Shared Knowledge (collaboration, co-creation, procurement): Develop and implement respectful methods for all levels of engagement and sharing of Indigenous knowledge (collaboration, co-creation, procurement).
- Legal and moral: Demonstrate respect and honour cultural ownership and intellectual property rights, including moral rights, and obtain appropriate permissions where required.

The design and engagement process to date has resulted in NBRS establishing broader connections with the Barkindji community. The engagement has received supportive feedback from the Indigenous community and more community members are wishing to participate in future focus groups and engagements.



Connection on Country Walks conducted with Barkindji community, Health Infrastructure and Design Teams - July 2022
Pictured Left-Right: Discussions at existing Wentworth Hospital | Tour of recent upgrades to Junction Island | Canoe Scar Tree

2. CONTEXT

SITE MAP



The WHSR site is located at the confluence of the Murray and the Baaka (Darling) rivers, and is intrinsically connected to its floods, flows and droughts. For Barkindji people the rivers are the life givers. The waterways are seen as a living entity and are not separate from ones own wellbeing (DPIE 2019)¹. Lack of water in the Darling means that traditional culture can no longer be practiced often resulting in poorer health and social problems within the community.

The site boundary consists of a levee bank constructed in 1957 to protect the hospital grounds from flooding. In doing so the hospital grounds have their view-shed cut to the Baaka (Darling River). The levee is still required to protect the grounds due to an likely increase in high flow flooding events.



1. Reference: Culturally Appropriate First Nations Consultation Report. RMIT. Gilbert and Pearce. 2019- <https://researchrepository.rmit.edu.au/esploro/outputs/report/Culturally-Appropriate-First-Nations-Consultation-Report>

1. THE MURRAY & DARLING RIVERS

The WHSR site is situated at the confluence of the Murray and Darling Rivers. It is an area of cultural importance to First Nations people spanning an area that includes parts of New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory. These rivers sustain cultures, histories and livelihoods. The design intends to leverage this location to showcase and connect with the stories of these waterways.



2. WENTWORTH HOSPITAL

Wentworth district hospital staff and nurses have been caring for the community for more than a century. The Wentworth District Hospital began operating in 1887. The hospital is thought to have been built away from the townships as a means of protection from infectious disease. This distance from the town provides the hospital with a quiet place of respite surrounded by endemic vegetation. The majority of stakeholders engaged, express they have a personal connection to the hospital site.



3. JUNCTION ISLAND

Junction Island is the shoal of land between the Darling and Murray Rivers. Standing upright at the entrance of Junction Island, is a tree, bearing the scar of where a canoe was cut from its bark, a sign of ongoing Indigenous cultural practice and connection. Recently upgraded interpretative information boards, fire pit, boat ramp and landscaping aid in showcasing the cultural heritage in the area.



4. THE LEVEE | 1956 FLOOD

In 1956 a major historic flood event occurred in Wentworth. People worked for weeks with tractors building the levee banks to prevent the hospital being flooded. The levee bank still exists today and while it protects the hospital from flood it currently impedes physical and visual connection to the river.



3. WALKING ON COUNTRY

CONNECTING TO BARKINDJI COUNTRY

NBRS in collaboration with Health Infrastructure, Mostyn Copper and Far West LHD, conducted a series of walks on Country led by Traditional owner groups.

The walks on Country promoted relationships between the project team and local knowledge holders. The needs of Country and its people take time to deeply understand. With the guidance of Barkindji

knowledge holders who have long-founded landed affiliations with the area, the engagement was able to capture aspects of their livelihoods, histories and decisions that affect Barkindji Country.

Tabled below is a summary of what was learned and what opportunities are afforded to the concept designs development.

LESSONS LEARNT	DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES
The river represents life and healing for the community and is central to Aboriginal culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designs should seek to reflect the spiritual significance of the Murray and Darling rivers meeting. • Include medicinal planting in a cultural space (yarning circle) close to the river and connected to the hospital. A place to potentially hold smoking ceremonies, local dance groups, history talks. • Pathway linking the hospital to the river. • Reflect women's business and culturally important sites (ie. scar trees).
Acknowledge historical trauma. That is located nearby the WHSR site. There has been reference to Aboriginal people being killed in this vicinity ¹ .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open EOI for artworks that showcase historical stories/healing. Allow for Indigenous and non-Indigenous • Plaques acknowledging past histories (massacre sites, stolen generations).
Plants now don't grow like they used to; there are two seasons now, there used to be six. Too much water is also a problem. Many plants along the river which can be used for weaving.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain existing endemic species (ie salt-bush, bluebush and weaving grasses) that have a cultural and medicinal use. • Retain existing trees. • Existing plants on site have the highest likelihood to being adapted to current climate variability.
Colonialists created a separation between land and water. Used to be no borders between people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-instate visual, cultural and physical connections to the river from the WHSR site.

1. Reference: Colonial Frontier Massacres in Australia, 1788-1930 - <https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/detail.php?r=580>



Walks on Country conducted with Barkindji community, Health Infrastructure and Design Teams - July 2022

4. ABORIGINAL FOCUS GROUPS

DEVELOPING THE CONCEPT

During the development of the Concept Designs for the WHSR, several Barkindji community members and knowledge holders were invited to participate in informal round table discussions. Conversations were held on the Wentworth Hospital grounds and Coomealla Health Aboriginal Corp (CHAC), Dareton. Three focus groups were formed and run over two days for 90 minutes each.

The focus groups were guided through plans, 3D representations, diagrams and architectural visualizations (pictured below) and discussed how the site is intended to function, its opportunities and constraints. Conversations were held in an informal manner to enable rich discussions about the site's history, stories of personal connections to the hospital and Barkindji cultural knowledge. The intent of the engagement was to learn of what plants species and artistic representations could be explored in the design process.

At the end of each focus group, participants were asked for verbal feedback about the consultation process. The focus groups

felt that their voices were being heard through this consultation and that how the engagements have been conducted so far have been satisfactory. There was an appreciation for the effort that all the teams have put into the site's constraints and efforts to embed/incorporate the recognition of Barkindji values.

- "I want to acknowledge your efforts. You have all really made an effort with this process and the designs".
- "Doing this type of work [design conducted in a culturally sensitive and supportive manner] showcases Indigenous focused projects to Council and their beneficial outcomes".
- "You don't get this level of connection and care in the landscape anywhere else. This hospital is unique!"
- "You get a lot more respect and use out of the building when we are included in the process".

The following table collates the common lessons learned from each of the user groups.



One of the Aboriginal Focus Groups (AFG) conducted on site - July 2022



NBRS architectural render of hospital room and view across to the river

WHAT WE HEARD	DESIGN RESPONSE
<p>CULTURE/CONTEXT.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most families have a direct connection/experience with the hospital • Cultural heritage items may be found during excavation works • Council is setting up heritage committee and hospitals developments could contribute to cultural recognition of surrounding sites, stories with report/findings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide spaces that promote cultural histories and stories of the site • Ensure that archaeological and Indigenous consultants are engaged as required during construction. I.e. Unexpected Finds Protocol • Develop arts strategy that incorporates and showcases Indigenous livelihoods
<p>PLANTING/ENVIRONMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are various species of particular plants. Important to choose the correct ones for cultural use • Certain plants are reciprocal and it is important to plant them together. • There are plants popping up now that even community don't recognise • Important to protect existing trees • Can be up to a two hour drive from site to find specific plants. Good to have them located in the gardens for people to use. • Plants already listed are already a good start (see appendix). Make sure to include planting from previous engagements by the Western Local Land Services - Local Ecological Cultural Knowledge Resource books are available online for the area (published in 2013) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signage to draw inspiration from local cultures and include Indigenous language interpretation • Include medicinal planting in a cultural space (ie, yarning circle) close to the river and connected to the hospital. A place to hold smoking ceremonies, local dance groups, history talks. • Source plants locally where possible • Provide opportunity for community to contribute plants to the site • Design landscape to promote cultural use of plants
<p>INTERPRETATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome to Country to be displayed at front entry • Artworks could tell a story from the entry right to the foyer guiding you through the site • Artworks can be contributed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists • Provide opportunity for interactive artworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art strategy to include broad engagement with community • Signage to draw inspiration from local cultures and include Indigenous language interpretation
<p>DESIGN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell a story that comes through the front door from the outside wall into the hospital. • Emu egg season is from June to July and is when Elders go out to collect them near the hospital site. • Most families have a direct connection/experience with the hospital • Large groups will need access to the space +50 people • Be great to be able to take patients straight out in their beds to the courtyard • There is stigma around Indigenous peoples having their own cordoned off spaces. Its better for us to share 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design elements that symbolise some of the important cultural elements, such the Scarred Tree near Junction Island. • Palliative care area to include patient bed access and to have direct access to courtyard promoting connection with the landscape. • Patient day activity areas open to outdoor landscapes along the river. • All patient bedrooms to maintain a river view. • Large gathering areas (indoor and outdoor) to be designed to be shared by community

DISCUSSING THE DETAILS

On March 28th, 2023, the project team hosted an Aboriginal Focus Group at Wentworth Town Hall. Attendees included the project team and local knowledge-holders who discussed a range of topics, including:

- The project's current status
- The need to acknowledge and reflect massacres and cultural history
- Clinical aspects such as nursing facilities
- Landscape design features such as a yarning circle
- Places of refuge for habitat and
- The use and procurement of local plant species.

The focus group was guided through plans, 3D representations, diagrams, and architectural visualizations (pictured below). These were distributed to discuss how the

site is intended to function, its opportunities and constraints. The discussions were held informally to encourage rich discussions about the site and the needs of the community.

The focus group touched on ways to incorporate specific plant species and showcase Barkindji cultural representations in the design. During the previous engagement it was mentioned that there was a Cultural Knowledge handbook that was created a decade ago that would be of use to the project. NBRs tracked down this material and distributed copies of the Ecological Cultural Knowledge - Paakantyi (Barkindji) handbook to those in attendance.

The following table (page 13) summarises the key discussions held during this engagement.



Aboriginal Focus Group (AFG) - March 2023



NBRs architectural plans of landscaped areas

LOCATION	WHAT WE HEARD	DESIGN RESPONSE
YARNING CIRCLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design space to accommodate local NAIDOC Week celebrations, ceremonies and Sorry Business • Consider providing shade trees or cover near yarning circle. • Acknowledge and reflect on massacres that may have occurred in the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate a fire pit that can be used for ceremonies • Provide cultural use plants that can be used in smoking ceremonies. • Provide shade trees near yarning circle seating areas • Continue to develop arts strategy that incorporates and showcases Indigenous livelihoods and history
ENTRY GARDEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create ground inlay with patterns representing local flora and fauna • Install a Welcome to Country stone with appropriate wording • Ensure accessibility for those using electric wheelchairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground plane can feature different types of patterns to represent different animals, plants or local stories. • Welcome to Country stone – will be seeking advice to determine wording. • Swept path analysis has been run on pathways to accommodate gopher scooters. • Entry forecourt – Welcome to Country stone/sign – will be seeking advice to determine wording
PLANT SPECIFICATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research local plant species and incorporate them back into the area • Native plants species often available from Melbourne area and Blak Markets in Broken Hill • Some local Barkindji community members often grow plants personally and could contribute some to the hospitals gardens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide notes in landscape drawings/specification to indicate local suppliers and species lists • Explore possible opportunity to collaborate with the Australian Inland Botanic Gardens
CULTURAL PROTOCOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural cleanse/smoking ceremony should be held before construction commences • Cultural artefacts could be located on site - care needs to be taken during construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold a cultural cleanse/smoking ceremony before construction commences • Ensure that archaeological and Indigenous consultants are engaged as required during construction. I.e. Unexpected Finds Protocol
GENERAL COMMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies of the Ecological Cultural Knowledge - Paakantyi (Barkindji) Handbook could be distributed at the local library for future access 	

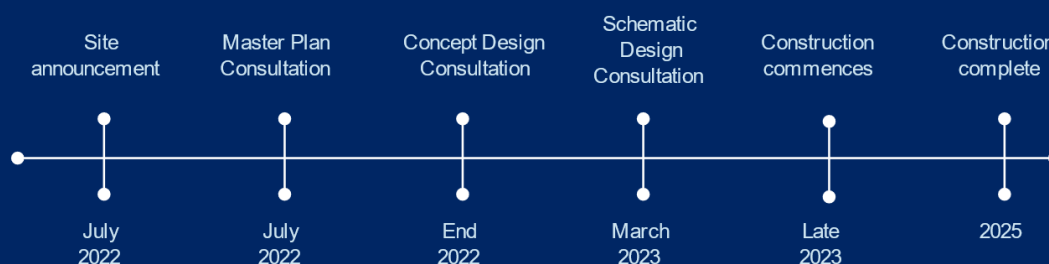
5. NEXT STEPS

Designing with Country is an important element informing the project. The Aboriginal Focus Groups have and will continue to be engaged, as well as the local Aboriginal community through the Far West Local Health District, Local Aboriginal Land Council, Barkandji PBC, Barkindji Maraura Elders Environment Team (BMEET) and other organisations as appropriate.

Participation is important in the development of the design to ensure community have input into the infrastructure. Community consultation will continue throughout planning and design, including the Schematic Design and Detail Design statutory planning approvals.

Information sessions and workshops will give staff and the community an opportunity to be consulted throughout the various stages of the redevelopment. Stakeholder feedback has been and will continue to be incorporated into the design to provide the optimal outcomes for the new hospital.

Wentworth Health Service Redevelopment project timeline





6. APPENDIX 01

ABORIGINAL FOCUS GROUP PRESENTATION MATERIAL



LANDSCAPE - APPROACH

RAISING TO THE LEVEE



LANDSCAPE - LOOK AND FEEL

RIVER WALK GARDEN AND COURTYARD



LANDSCAPE - LOOK AND FEEL

ARRIVAL LANDSCAPE



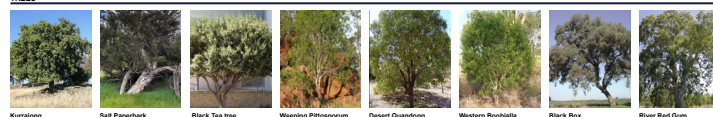
LANDSCAPE - LOOK AND FEEL

ENTRY LANDSCAPE



PLANTING PALETTE

TREES



SHRUBS



GRASSES / GROUNDCOVERS / SMALL SHRUBS



