



Artist's impression

# Finley Health Service Redevelopment

## Connecting with Country Consultation Report

February 2024



# Table of Contents

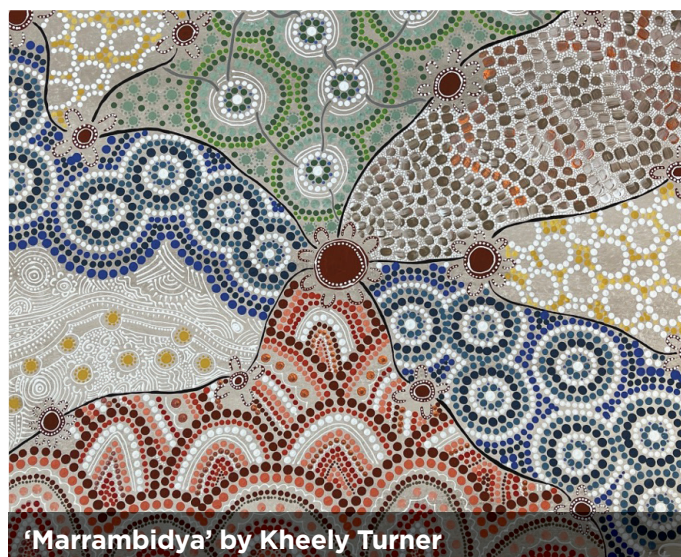
- Acknowledgement of Country .....3
- Executive Summary ..... 4
- 1. Introduction..... 4
  - 1.1 Project Overview ..... 4
  - 1.2 Learning from Country ..... 4
- 2. Finley.....5
  - 2.1 Finley Health Service .....5
  - 2.2 Environmental Context .....5
- 3. Engagement process .....6
  - 3.1 Walking Yorta Yorta Country .....7
  - 3.2 Project design principles .....8
- 4. Aboriginal focus groups..... 11
- What we are doing next .....14



**Kheely Turner, artist from  
West Wyalong, a Wiradjuri/  
Ngiyampaa woman**

### **“Marrambidya” (Murrumbidgee river)**

This piece exhibits the spiritual connection that Aboriginal people have to the cleansing and healing nature of the river, an integral part of the Murrumbidgee Local Health District. It is the river that connects us all, man, woman, child, flora and fauna. A sense of place and connection to country, culture and spirituality. The river cleanses and brings health and vigour to the people, plants and animals. We all take nourishment, both physically and mentally, from this source. This is a common element that we all rely on and which brings us together. The circles that surround the centre circle piece represent the towns/nations within the MLHD.



### **Acknowledgement of Country**

In the spirit of reconciliation NSW Health acknowledges the Yorta Yorta people, the Traditional Custodians of country where this project is sited, and their connection to its land, waters and communities.

We honour their Elders past, present and emerging. We pay our respects to the cultural knowledge holders who have guided us in the development of this project. We are grateful for and inspired by their leadership and guidance. We recognise and acknowledge the privilege and responsibility to Connect with Country.

## Executive summary

We engaged with Finley's Aboriginal communities to help shape and inform Finley Health Service Redevelopment to create a place of healing and well-being for all. The following report outlines the engagement approach and activities to support the submission of the Review of Environmental Factors.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Project overview

The NSW Government has invested \$25 million in the Finley Health Service redevelopment. The Health Service Plan was endorsed by Ministry of Health in July 2023. The Project Team was formed in October 2022 and an architect and project manager were appointed.

The Redevelopment will enhance the current health facility and ensure health care services are carefully planned to meet community needs now and into the future. The current ageing infrastructure will be improved to meet current healthcare standards.

The project delivers a mix of new and refurbished areas at the Finley Health Service campus and includes:

- an expanded and reconfigured reception area;
- new inpatient rooms;
- relocation of the medical imaging unit and new ultrasound service;
- improvements to the Emergency Department and triage room;
- improvements to staff facilities; and
- essential service upgrades including IT for a better-connected health service.

New staff accommodation units will be built on the existing Hospital site to replace the aging staff accommodation block as part of the Key Worker Accommodation project. This is a separate project to the Health Service Redevelopment but will run concurrently.

### 1.2 Learning from Country

Through our projects, we commit to helping support the health and wellbeing of Country by valuing, respecting, and being guided by Aboriginal people, who know that if we care for Country – it will care for us. We will work to understand and appreciate Aboriginal cultural values and practices in relation to cultural safety, hospital design, health and well-being, and we will ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel welcome, safe and connected when they visit, either as a patient, carer, visitor or staff member.



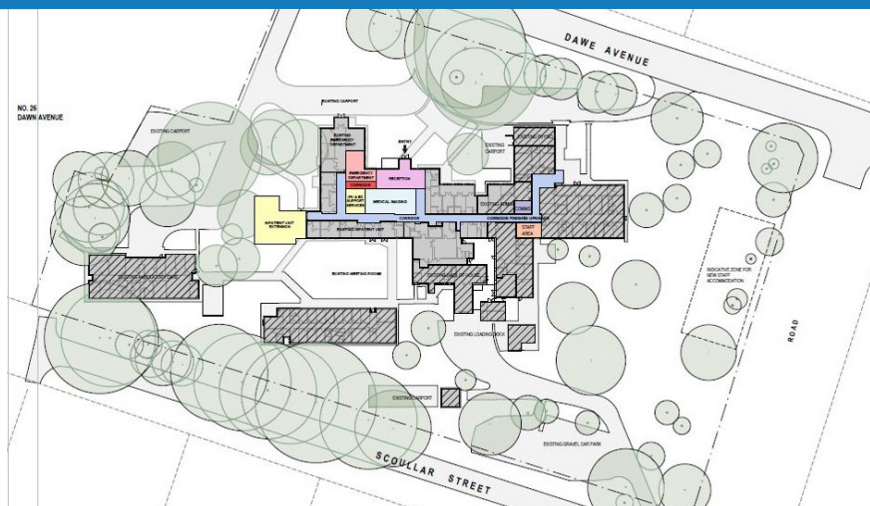
The project will also strengthen education, employment and business opportunities in both health and construction for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and enterprises.

From the beginning of the project, it was identified Indigenous guidance and local knowledge would be critical to the success of providing an appropriate design response, emphasising design longevity and future use. The design team used engagement principles and protocols from the Connecting with Country framework (GANSW 2023) and the Australian Indigenous Design Charter (2017). The following points were 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 team has learned from representatives of the local Aboriginal communities resulting in a collaborative approach to the development of Finley Health Service Redevelopment.





## 2. Finley

It is claimed that the local Wiradjuri First Nations people called the area “Carawatha” meaning “place of pines” but when a settlement was established it was named Finley after Surveyor F.G. Finley who surveyed 1.2 million hectares of the area in the 1870s.

The town on Finley NSW lies in the traditional lands of the Yorta Yorta people. The Yorta Yorta are the traditional owners of the Murray Goulburn region of northern Victoria and southern NSW. For 60,000 years, Dhungala, the mighty river known today as the Murray, sustained them. Since the beginning of the Dreamtime, the Yorta Yorta people’s cultural practices, stories and presence have provided a continuity and obligation to care for Country (Woka) and Waters (Walla).

Today, the presence of the scarred trees that were used to make canoes, shields and coolamons, shell middens, cooking mounds and marker trees are all evidence of Yorta Yorta connection and occupation.

According to local elders, the current Finley Aboriginal community was originally three or four families who moved there during settlement and came for job opportunities and lived in an area near the river.

Today, there are no registered Aboriginal parties in Finley. The nearest parties are Deniliquin Local Aboriginal Land Council, Cummeragunja Local Aboriginal Land Council and Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation.

The estimated resident population of Finley is 2,455 and the median age is 51. (2021 ABS Census)

4.4% percent of Finley residents (120 people) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, 83% as non-Indigenous and 12.1% did not respond. (2021 ABS Census)

80% of Finley residents were born in Australia, and 4.4 % spoke a language other than English at home the majority of these were Tamil, Nepali, Spanish and Malay. Employment industries include dairy cattle farming, aged care services, education and farming. (2021 ABS Census)

### 2.1 Finley Health Service

Finley Health Service operates within Murrumbidgee Local Health District (MLHD) in a hub and spoke model, linking with three other small rural health facilities and to a hub surgical site at Deniliquin. The other three facilities are Multipurpose Services with residential aged care at Jerilderie, Berrigan and Tocomwal. Finley Health Service does not provide residential aged care.

The existing Finley Health Service was built in the 1960s and has been extended and modified over time to meet changing community needs. The Finley Health Service currently has 16 inpatient beds, an emergency department, a collocated GP Practice, community health services, clinical/ non-clinical support services and staff accommodation.

### 2.2 Environmental context

Finley is located approximately 200 km south-west of Wagga Wagga and 30 minutes’ drive from the Victorian border; approximately three to four hours’ drive from Melbourne, and eight hours to Sydney.

The project is located in the Berrigan local government area (LGA), Murray state electorate, MLHD and includes the townships of Finley, Berrigan and Tocomwal. The LGA is in the southern part of the Riverina, with a flat landscape and is part of the Murray Irrigation Scheme. The Murray River is located approximately 20km south of Finley.

The Hospital is on a large site in a residential area with neighbours including a private residential aged care service and GP Medical Clinic.



**Tumut Health Service, official opening, October 2021**

### 3. Engagement process

Working within the principals set out in the Connecting with Country Framework, June 2023, through the design process, the project team engaged with the local indigenous community. The design program incorporated the dynamic relationships of culture, community and identity that characterise the Aboriginal concept of country.

Country includes both living and non-living elements, holding everything within the landscape including Earth, Water and Sky Country, as well as people, animals, plants and the stories that connect them.

A key focus of the engagement process was to create an environment of cultural safety awareness, respect and sensitivity. We sought guidance from the Aboriginal community at key points along the design process to integrate cultural connections and considerations in the design response.

#### The team committed to the following outcomes of a Country-centred approach:



- Healthy Country, the design response will encourage a healthy, interconnected natural ecosystem supported by regenerative practices based on Aboriginal knowledge
- Healthy Community, as a design collective, the project considers the Aboriginal experience for both staff and community, supporting connection to cultural identity, creating positive health and well being
- Protecting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage, through the engagement process, Aboriginal cultural guidance was sought and will continue to be provided as the project progresses.
- Cultural competency, the design team approach the Connection with Country framework with a commitment to developing deeper cultural awareness.
- Better Places, within our approach, we work with a Country-centred focus to create better places, inform sustainable designs and integrate with the broader landscape to form place-based design responses, creating welcoming and accessible places.



### 3.1 Walking Yorta Yorta Country

In November 2022, the Finley Hospital Project Team met with representatives of the local Aboriginal Community to walk Country and listen to stories of the history, flora and fauna of Finley. This was an opportunity to meet the stakeholders in the area and listen to stories of growing up in Finley, history, personal connection to the Hospital and local places.



**Aunty Trish handed a eucalyptus to all on arrival as a welcome. We were invited to return the leaf when leaving country.**

*Walking Country is an Aboriginal cultural practice of moving through, sensing, and listening to what Country is telling us. Walking Country is a visceral practice that activates feeling and engages all senses – seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. Often performed in a group, walking Country facilitates knowledge sharing and strengthens interpersonal relationships.*

**20 November 2022 at Finley Health Service**

#### What we heard from the Walk on Country:

- Yorta Yorta totem is long neck turtle.
- Family and local history is important. The Finley Aboriginal community was originally three or four families who moved to Finley during settlement phase and came for job opportunities, they lived in an area near the river.
- The local families have happy childhood memories swimming in the channels.
- There is a strong historical connection with the hospital including some negative experiences.
- Interest in gardens with locally indigenous plants such as lomandra, banksias, lemon scented gum, reeds and rushes, kangaroo paw and plants with medicinal qualities.
- Local Fauna includes white cockatoo, corella, green grass parrot, blue wren, willy wagtail.
- There are two distinct seasons, hot and dry in summer and cold and frosty in winter. Recommended to create shelter from wind and sun.
- Inclusion of the Yorta Yorta language in the design.
- Participants talked about Albury Aboriginal Medical Service.

What we heard from the Walk on Country and how it has been addressed in the design is highlighted in section 3.2.

#### Other areas of feedback:

- It was suggested to contact Deniliquin LALC and Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation, as well as art galleries and artists including Yorta Yorta Gallery in Shepparton.
- The Project Team agreed to another meeting once the building design was developed. We explained one of the outcomes was for the facility to be culturally safe and provide a warm welcome to all who visit or require care. There are opportunities for future discussion about how landscaping, art strategy, colour and language may be considered.

## 3.2 Project design principles

The Design Team took the learnings away from Walk on Country, and built on that knowledge through research on the Yorta Yorta people and the unique environment of their ancestral home. The culmination of this contextual research led to the development of three overarching Design Principles.



### Healthy Country

Yorta Yorta people relied on the health of their environment to sustain them and keep them well and knew that a healthy Country meant healthy people.

Finley Hospital should be a place of health and wellbeing, harnessing the health benefits of human connections to landscapes.

Being on Country, in the open air, is a path to well-being and recovery.

#### Key opportunities identified:

- Share clearly a Yorta Yorta world view of well-being and recovery
- Use of native flora to sustain Country and attract native fauna
- Use of medicinal planting which could be labelled to explain the use and significance for the Yorta Yorta
- Provide a shaded place to gather outside on Country
- Explore the opportunity for the local community to contribute to the landscaping
- Represent the meandering of Dhungala as a place for living and gathering



### Woven Connections

Finley is a small town with many connections ranging from physical links, to service networks and shared cultural histories. By creating spaces where indigenous culture can be shared with the wider community, we can showcase narratives and invite all people to learn from the Yorta Yorta peoples living cultural history. Through the refurbishment of Finley Health Service, we seek to embrace and enhance the local cultural and environmental connections that make the town unique.

#### Key opportunities identified:

- Create a culturally safe and expressive place for all
- Weave cultural histories and stories through the interiors and landscaping
- Signage to draw inspiration from local cultures and include Yorta Yorta language
- Express the importance of Finley as a small town but part of a wider and diverse network
- Artwork used to tell narratives and make cultural connections



### Welcome, Friend

Part of the upgrade of Finley Health Service includes a new front entry, which creates a new identity. This provides the perfect canvas for embracing Country, shared histories and cultural traditions, so that the hospital becomes a place where indigenous and non-indigenous peoples can come together under a united, shared identity.

















Everyone is welcome, everyone is safe and everyone belongs.





#### Key opportunities identified:

- Culture needs to be upfront and visible when you first arrive
- Incorporate a local story through the design on the entry and interiors
- Create somewhere to perform ceremony and places for sorry business and larger gatherings
- Use the entry landscaping to promote wellness and ensure all visitors arrive relaxed

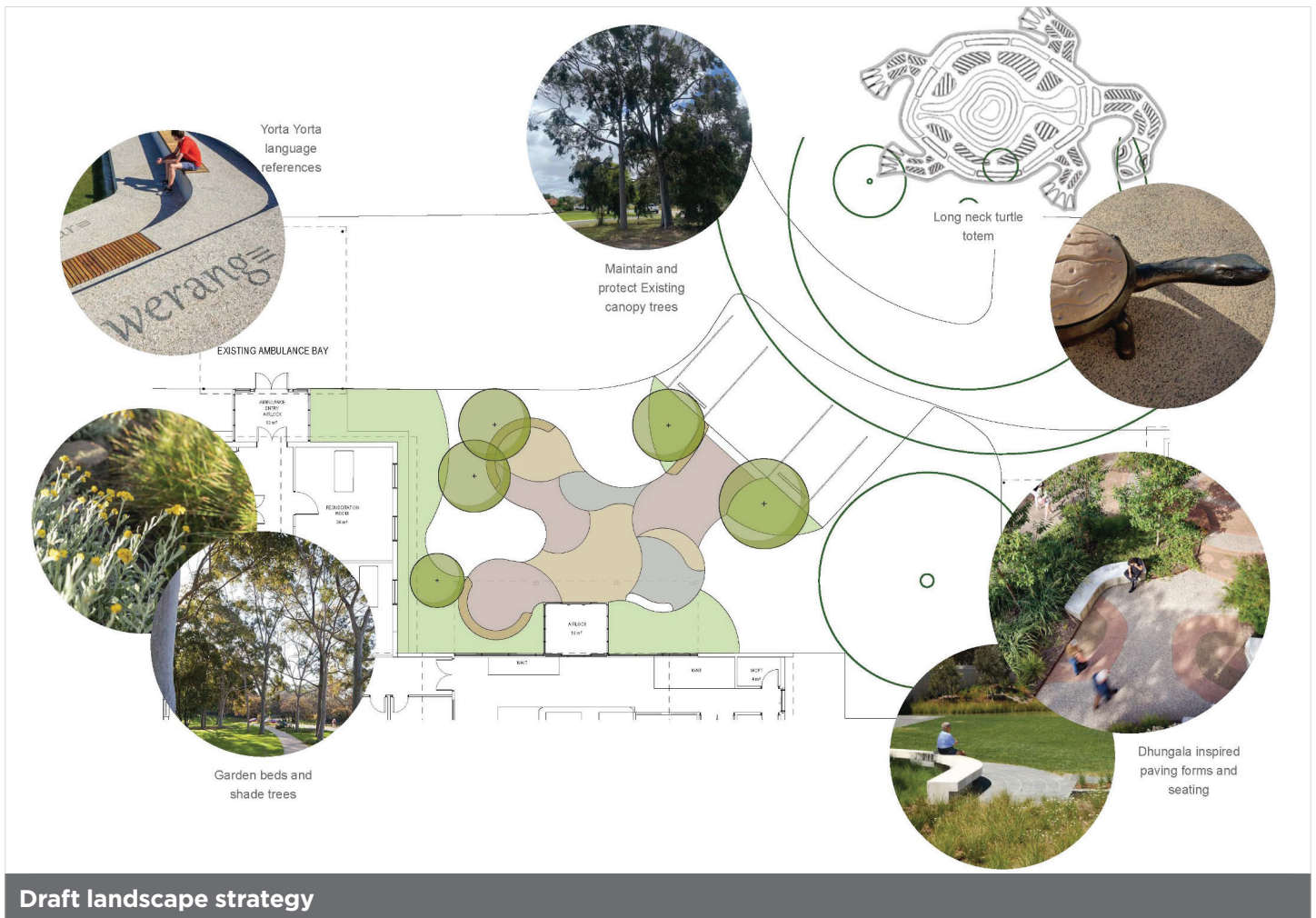


The table presented below illustrates suggested design solutions and strategies using the three themes.

Lessons Learnt	Theme	Design Opportunities
<b>Culture and Connection</b>		
Yorta Yorta totem is long neck turtle	 	<p>Statues in landscape — interactive play</p> <p>Turtle artwork on portal walls in airlock — art strategy</p>
<p>Family and local history is important.</p> <p>The Finley Aboriginal Community was originally three or four families who moved to Finley during settlement phase and came for job opportunities. The lived near the river.</p>		<p>Provide spaces that promote cultural histories and stories</p> <p>Scarred trees represent continuous occupation and travel — Canoe Tree Park</p> <p>Develop art strategy</p>
The local families have happy childhood memories swimming in the channels.	 	<p>Use of landscaping to promote wellness</p> <p>Dhungala as place for living and gathering — meandering path and variety of spaces</p>
There is a strong historical connection with the hospital including some negative experiences.	 	<p>Overcome with a welcoming entry and happy patient and visitor journey</p> <p>Art strategy to reflect on truth telling</p>
<b>Environment — Climate, Flora and Fauna</b>		
Interest in gardens with locally indigenous plants such as lomandra, banksias, lemon scented gum, reeds and rushes, kangaroo paw and plants with medical qualities.	  	<p>Use native plants in the landscaping</p> <p>Use the stories of plants to inform the interiors</p>
Local fauna includes white cockatoo, corella, green grass parrot, blue wren, willy wagtail.	  	<p>Native plants will attract birds</p>
There are 2 distinct seasons, hot and dry in summer and cold and frosty in winter. Recommended to create shelter from wind and sun.	  	<p>Shelter will be provided by building overhangs creating protection and shade</p> <p>Reflect seasons through plants and interiors</p> <p>North facing entry good in winter</p>

Lessons Learnt	Theme	Design Opportunities
<b>Language (Yorta Yorta)</b>		
<p>Inclusion of the Yorta Yorta language in the design.</p> <p>Participants talked about Albury Aboriginal Medical Service (meeting participants showed example of Albury Medical Service and the beautiful work done for the building).</p>	  	<p>Signage to draw inspiration from local cultures and include indigenous language interpretation</p> <p>Language inlays in paving in the landscape and furniture</p> <p>Screens with lazer cut artwork/stories for privacy and sun control</p>
<b>Design</b>		
<p>External courtyards (Participants liked the images shown of the Tumut Redevelopment)</p>		<p>Maximise opportunities for landscape views connecting the inside and outside of the building and opportunities to sit in the landscape.</p>
<p>Aboriginal artworks (Participants liked the images shown of the Tumut Redevelopment)</p>	 	<p>Develop art strategy that is informed by connection to Country</p>





## 4. Aboriginal focus groups

During the development of the concept designs, Yorta Yorta community members and knowledge holders were invited to a focus group on 10 January 2024. The focus group was held in-person at the Finley Health Service and the architects joined online.

The goal of the session was to validate what we heard at the Walk on Country and ensure it was accurate, present the design ideas, and work with the participants' cultural knowledge to guide the landscaping, design, art, colour scheme, and language used around the project.

The participants confirmed that all relevant Aboriginal parties had been contacted. The participants had been at the Walk on Country in November 2022 so could provide comment on whether the information had been captured and interpreted appropriately.

The group were guided through a presentation by the architect and landscape architect from HDR and Site Image. This included plans, 3D representations, diagrams and architectural visualisations and discussion about how the site is intended to function, its opportunities and constraints.



The tables below lists the initial lessons learnt at the Walk on Country and the comments recorded at the Focus group session.

Lessons learnt from Walk on Country	Comments from attendees of focus group
Yorta Yorta totem is long neck turtle.	Magpies are also important
Family and local history is important.  The Finley Aboriginal community was originally three or four families who moved to Finley during settlement phase and came for job opportunities, they lived in an area near the river.	Agreed
The local families have happy childhood memories swimming in the channels.	Agreed
There is a strong historical connection with the hospital including some negative experiences.	Agreed
	<p>The area is Yorta Yorta however it should be noted, the traditional custodians group, Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation, is currently in special administration.</p> <p>The language is Yorta Yorta and consultation through the Aboriginal Language Group (BALG) is recommended for any authentic Yorta Yorta translation (Meyrl Miller, Shepparton)</p> <p>There are currently no endorsed family groups who can claim traditional ownership</p> <p>Kevin Atkins Jr. is from the area and he speaks Panga language. We acknowledge the country is Yorta Yorta but there is a wide diversity of mobs who now live in the area (like other parts of Australia)</p>
Design	Comment
Healthy country	Supports the ideas
	This is a resettlement area and people moved here from many places around Australia, as such there is diversity of aboriginal people and cultural practices. Look for variety in the medicinal plants selected for landscaping to reflect this diversity.
	Suggestions look good – pretty well covered



Design	Comment
Landscaping	<p><b>Suggestions on landscaping</b></p> <p><b>Medicinal:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yam daisy (starch)</li> <li>• chocolate lily (its sugar, you eat the flower)</li> <li>• bush orchard (used to thin blood, it is a pretty flower and helps with mood)</li> <li>• Lomandra and spear grass are good for native birds</li> <li>• Old Man Weed (used a tea, can be broken off and dried and used for tea and sleep)</li> </ul> <p><b>Good for cultural burning:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All the gums – lemon gums</li> <li>• Apple Eucalyptus</li> <li>• Dried grass</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggested planting:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bush plum</li> <li>• Lemon myrtle</li> <li>• Maroon kangaroo paw</li> <li>• Quandong tree</li> </ul> <p><b>Textures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dirt and rubble</li> <li>• Earthy brown tones</li> <li>• Red dirt country</li> </ul> <p><b>Native nurseries:</b></p> <p>Howlong Nursery, Burrumbuttock Nursery grow it themselves, have local species</p> <p>Talking points and creates conversation.</p>
Landscaping signage	<p>Suggest to incorporate signage for the plants which says what it is and what it was used for. Saw a good example of this at a museum with an aboriginal garden. The signs had a QR code and you can read the medicinal purposes, it was popular</p>
	<p>Liked the artist impressions</p>
	<p>Well done, looking really good. Comfortable with progression of the designs and happy for it to proceed. Team to contact them again when any language translation is needed.</p>



Artist impression of new entrance to Finley Health Service

## What we are doing next

Designing with Country is important to inform the project.

The Aboriginal Focus Group will continue to be engaged, as well as the local Aboriginal community through MLHD 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 redevelopment.

For more information about the development:

**W:** [mlhd.health.nsw.gov.au/about-us/our-building-projects/finley-hospital-redevelopment](https://mlhd.health.nsw.gov.au/about-us/our-building-projects/finley-hospital-redevelopment)  
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