



Health  
Sydney  
Local Health District

2019-  
2024

# Public Health Unit Strategic Plan



Sydney Local Health District  
Head Office information

**Street address:**

Level 11, KGV Building  
Missenden Road  
Camperdown NSW 2050

**Postal address:**

Post Office Box M30  
Missenden Road NSW 2050

**Phone:** (02) 9515 9600

**Fax:** (02) 9515 9610

**Sydney Local Health District contact email:**

SLHD-ESU@health.nsw.gov.au

**Sydney Local Health District Board contact email:**

SLHD-Board@health.nsw.gov.au

[www.slhd.nsw.gov.au](http://www.slhd.nsw.gov.au)

# Public Health Unit Strategic Plan

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# Acknowledgement of Country

Sydney Local Health District acknowledges that we are living and working on Aboriginal land. We recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of Aboriginal people on this land. We would like to acknowledge all of the traditional owners of the land and pay respect to Aboriginal Elders past and present.

Our District acknowledges **Gadigal**, **Wangal** and **Bediagal** as the three clans within the boundaries of the Sydney Local Health District. There are about 29 clan groups within the Sydney metropolitan area, referred to collectively as the great **Eora Nation**. *Always was and always will be Aboriginal Land.*

**We want to build strong systems to have the healthiest Aboriginal community in Australia.**

Together under the Sydney Metropolitan Partnership Agreement, including the Aboriginal Medical Service Redfern and in collaboration with the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Lands Council, Sydney Local Health District is committed to achieving equality to improve self-determination and lifestyle choices for our Aboriginal community.

## **Ngurang Dali Mana Burudi** – A Place to Get Better

*Ngurang Dali Mana Burudi* — a place to get better, is a view of our whole community including health services, Aboriginal communities, families, individuals, and organisations working in partnership.

### **Our story**

Sydney Local Health District's Aboriginal Health story was created by the District's Aboriginal Health staff.

The map in the centre represents the boundaries of Sydney Local Health District. The blue lines on the map are the Parramatta River to the north and the Cooks River to the south which are two of the traditional boundaries.

The **Gadigal**, **Wangal** and **Bediagal** are the three clans within the boundaries of Sydney Local Health District. They are three of the twenty-nine clans of the great **Eora Nation**. The centre circle represents a pathway from the meeting place for Aboriginal people to gain better access to healthcare.

### **The Goanna or Wirriga**

One of Australia's largest lizards, the goanna is found in the bush surrounding Sydney.

### **The Whale or Gawura**

From June to October pods of humpback whales migrate along the eastern coastline of Australia to warmer northern waters, stopping off at Watsons Bay the traditional home of the Gadigal people.

### **The Eel or Burra**

Short-finned freshwater eels and grey Moray eels were once plentiful in the Parramatta River inland fresh water lagoons.

*Source: Sydney Language Dictionary*



### **Artwork**

*Ngurang Dali Mana Burudi* — a place to get better

The map was created by our Aboriginal Health staff telling the story of a cultural pathway for our community to gain better access to healthcare.

Artwork by Aboriginal artist Lee Hampton utilising our story.

# Foreword



The *Public Health Unit Strategic Plan 2019–2024* outlines our Vision – Excellence in health and healthcare for all – and our Mission – To ensure that the community has equitable access to high quality, patient centred care. Our CORE values are embedded within our processes.

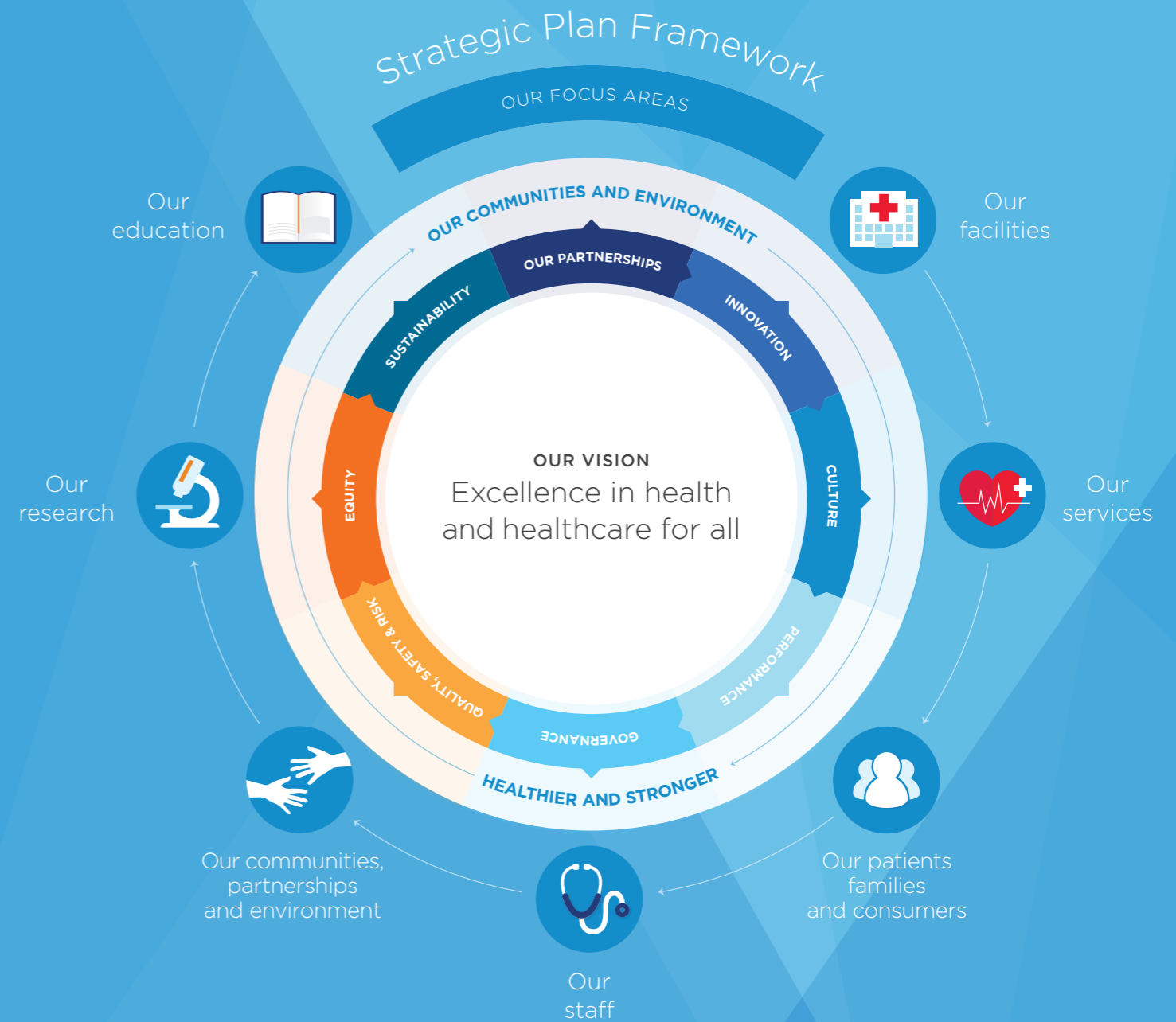
The Public Health Unit reports to the Chief Executive of Sydney Local Health District and has a direct link to the Director, Health Protection NSW. The Public Health Unit provides health protection programs for the population of Sydney Local Health District, including Communicable Diseases, Immunisation, Environmental Health and Emergency Management. Working with our partners, the Public Health Unit fulfils statutory health protection requirements, responds to emerging threats and champions innovative research and policy to improve the health of the community. Our key recent achievements include expanding the number of equity-focused projects, including our Aboriginal Immunisations program, and strengthening our role in healthy urban planning processes for the region covered by Sydney Local Health District.

The key priorities reflect our ethos, ensuring that that all of our strategic goals are approached through a lens of equity and collaboration. Our strategic priorities will also anticipate the future health needs of our diverse communities, by ensuring that we harness population health data and build technological capacity to advance public health practice and research. The Public Health Unit will continue to work with our partners, both within the District and externally, to ensure that these priorities are intrinsic to our work over the next five years.

**Dr Leena Gupta**  
Clinical Director, Public Health

The *Public Health Unit Strategic Plan 2019–2024* aims to establish the key strategic priorities for the Unit for the next five years. An inclusive consultation process has identified key priorities in the areas below.

## Strategic Focus Areas



# Our vision, mission and principles

Our vision
Excellence in health and healthcare for all
Our mission
To work with our communities to promote:
Co-designed and co-produced health policy, plans, new service models and research studies
Improvements in the social and environmental factors that sustain health
A healthcare system that is responsive to equity concerns
Best practice prevention, health promotion and health protection programs and strategies
Care in the community delivered close to where people live
To ensure that the community has equitable access to the highest quality patient/client and family/carer-centred care that is:
Integrated, timely, culturally safe and competent, evidence-based and efficient
Provided by a highly-skilled compassionate workforce who are committed, accountable, supported and valued
Supported by leading-edge research, education and medical and information technologies
Supportive of the healthcare of populations in other local health districts, states and territories across Australia and in other countries

## The planning process

The *Public Health Unit Strategic Plan 2019–2024* has been developed through an inclusive employee consultation process. The business plan and other Sydney Local Health District enabling plans were reviewed, and current population demographics and Public Health Unit activity were examined. All Public Health Unit employees were consulted during the drafting process, to determine their views on our priorities and strategic direction. An Aboriginal Impact Statement was completed in consultation with Aboriginal members of the Public Health Unit workforce and the Sydney Local Health District Aboriginal Health Unit.

# Our values

Collaboration	Openness
We work in collaboration with our patients/clients, communities, our colleagues, employees and with other agencies and services.	We have transparent, clear, honest processes which feature strong community consultation processes.
Respect	Empowerment
We value our diverse communities and respect cultural differences. We respect and celebrate the rights and culture of Aboriginal communities, the traditional owners of the land. We treat patients/clients, carers, colleagues and employees compassionately, fairly and positively. We uphold privacy, dignity and social justice. We are committed to employment, human and health rights.	Our communities are empowered to contribute to the health system, to be self-reliant, resilient and to assume greater control over their health and social circumstances. Our patients, carers and families are empowered in decision-making about care. Our staff are supported to participate in the workplace and their views and opinions are valued and influential.



# Our key priorities



## Our facility

Promote equity in public health service delivery for our communities

Develop our role as key partners in major urban planning and infrastructure projects

Expand our capacity for innovative research and public health practice



## Our community, partnerships, and environment

Reduce health inequities within our communities

Provide services that meet the needs of a culturally diverse population

Strengthen relationships with our partners within the District and across related sectors



## Our patients, families, carers, and consumers

Exceed local and state benchmarks for follow up of patients with notifiable diseases and their contacts

Exceed national benchmarks for immunisation rates for school programs and vulnerable groups



## Our services

Strengthen actions to address the determinants of environmental health, including housing and urban planning

Improve immunisation rates among Aboriginal children and other vulnerable groups

Improve outbreak management in facilities and institutions

Reduce rates of sexually transmitted infection



## Our staff

Champion equity in our employee recruitment strategy

Recruit and ensure retention of environmental health officers

Support staff in research and other professional development activities



## Our research

Continue to build research capacity in the public health workforce

Harness our use of technology and population health data, both for research purposes and to solve operational public health challenges

Engage with Sydney Research, Sydney Health Partners and other academic and corporate institutions on research projects



## Our education

Develop the expertise of our workforce to deliver patient and community-centred care

Develop high-quality, accessible education for medical, nursing, environmental health and population health trainees

Build the capacity of local partners to deliver health protection services

Embed equity and CORE values within any new training and development activities

# Our facility



Sydney Local Health District's Public Health Unit is responsible for providing health protection programs for the population of our District, working together with other local health districts, local government, state and national agencies.

The Public Health Unit reports directly to the Chief Executive of Sydney Local Health District, and to the Chief Health Officer through Health Protection NSW. Our purpose is to protect and enhance the health of Sydney Local Health District residents and the wider community through infectious disease response, environmental health and immunisation, as well as emergency preparedness for public health issues.

The Public Health Unit has a core set of priorities for the period 2019–2024 that will meet both business and statutory public health requirements, including Health Protection NSW's *NSW Health Protection Network Plan 2013–18*<sup>1</sup>. Our work supports the *Sydney Local Health District LHD Strategic Plan 2018–2022*<sup>2</sup> in its mission to promote:

- Best practice prevention, health promotion and health protection programs and strategies
- Improvements in the social and environmental factors that sustain health
- A healthcare system that is responsive to equity concerns

In addition to working towards statutory health protection requirements, the Public Health Unit is tasked with anticipating future health needs for our community and responding to environmental health and communicable disease emergencies. The Public Health Unit serves a geographic area that is undergoing a process of rapid urban renewal, with several ongoing state-significant projects located within our boundaries. Together with the importance of reducing our carbon footprint and the need to ensure environmentally sustainable urban centres, there are many emerging public health challenges that we must meet.

In addition to health protection work, the Public Health Unit is increasing its profile within the District through cross-departmental research projects and initiatives such as the Building Better Health guide<sup>3</sup>, which aims to guide stakeholders to place health centrally within the urban planning process. This plan provides important information about all of the key activities for our service, as well as our vision

and priorities for our patients and communities. The next five years will see the Public Health Unit continue to build strategic partnerships both inside the District and externally, while working toward excellence and equity in service delivery and outcomes.





# Our community, partnerships and environment

## Key Public Health Unit achievements 2018-19

- Awarded a \$100,000 Medical Research Futures Fund grant to develop FluCARE, the web-based app to support management of influenza outbreaks in residential facilities**
- Developed and achieved funding for a NSW-first Public Health Nurse traineeship**
- Established our Graduate Environmental Health Officer Training Program**
- Responded to 15,504 cases of notifiable diseases**
- Achieved 100% immunisation coverage in Aboriginal children at age 5, reported for second quarter 2019<sup>4</sup>**
- Delivered 20,965 vaccinations through the school immunisation program<sup>5</sup>**
- Performed 198 tobacco compliance inspections, in addition to regulatory actions for Smoke-free Environment, sale and supply of tobacco products**
- Published eight journal articles**
- Managed 10 equity-focused programs, including the Aboriginal Immunisations program, the Hoarding and Squalor project and the FluCARE project**
- Responded to environmental and human health impact submissions for major projects such as the WestConnex motorway scheme**
- Ongoing work with agencies and our community on the White Bay Cruise Terminal, Sydney Park site and the Kendall Bay sediment remediation**
- Promoted our award-winning Building Better Health toolkit among local stakeholders: guidelines for health considerations in urban development**
- Delivered seminars on outbreak management in residential aged care facilities and Legionella control for councils**
- Supported training for four Public Health Medicine registrars, one Graduate Environmental Health Officer trainee and one Aboriginal Population Health Training Initiative trainee, in addition to one Master's student from Macquarie University**

## Key priorities for our facility

- 1 Promote equity in public health service delivery for our communities**
- 2 Develop our role as key partners in major urban planning and infrastructure projects**
- 3 Expand our capacity for innovative research and public health practice**

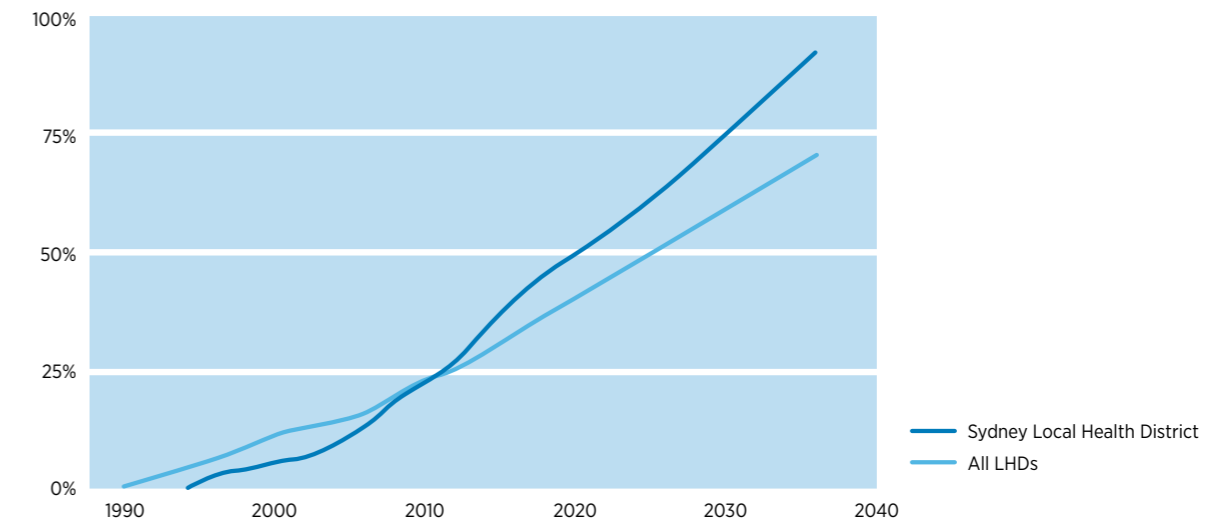
In Sydney Local Health District, our population is growing more rapidly than that of NSW as a whole, increasing by 115,000 (20%) over the last decade. It is projected to grow by a further 19% by 2028<sup>6</sup>. In keeping with national trends, the proportion of our population aged over 65 is increasing, and is projected to grow from 13% in 2018

to 15% by 2028<sup>6</sup>. This is likely to increase demands on our service, including a growing need for public health response to infectious disease outbreaks in facilities.

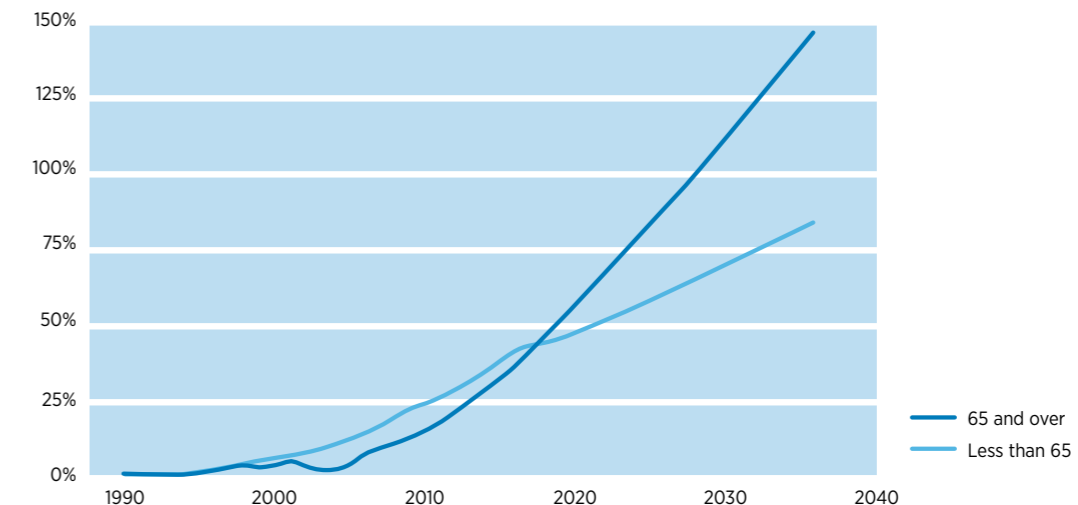
There is considerable socioeconomic variation within the District, with marked health inequalities between residents

in the least and most disadvantaged areas. The life expectancy gap between those living in the least and most disadvantaged areas is 7.7 years for men and 4.8 years for women<sup>7</sup>. At least 44% of SLHD's residents were born overseas and at least 46% spoke a language other than English at home. In addition, nine per cent do not speak English fluently<sup>8</sup>.

**Figure 1**  
Growth in total population, Sydney Local Health District versus all LHDs

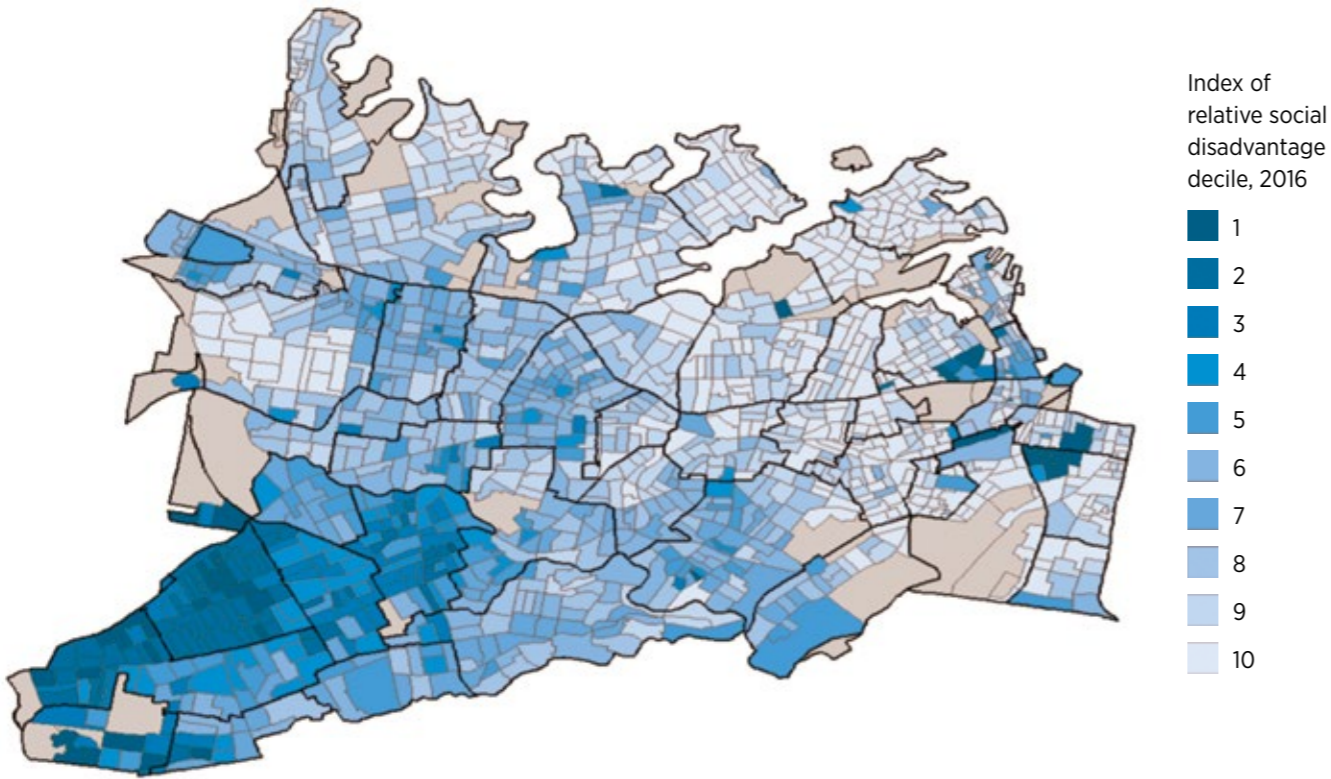


**Figure 2**  
Growth in population aged over 65, Sydney Local Health District



Prepared by the SLHD Public Health Observatory. Source: Health Stats, NSW Ministry of Health

**Figure 3**  
Map of socioeconomic disadvantage in Sydney Local Health District



Prepared by the SLHD Public Health Observatory. Source: ABS 2016 Census

**Figure 4**  
Rates of disease in Sydney Local Health District – selected indicators

Indicator	Year	SLHD number	SLHD rate	NSW rate	NSW worst	NSW best
Hepatitis B notifications	2015	359	51.3	31.7	57.3	8.7
Hepatitis C notifications	2015	312	45.5	47.6	102	16.1
Gonorrhoea notifications	2015	1,350	184	74.8	184	8.1
Alcohol-related hospital admissions	2014-15	4,530	713	673	758	563
Admissions following self-harm, 15-24	2015-16	201	274	331	620	245
Fall-related injury admissions, 65+	2014-15	2,140	2,650	2,490	3,030	1,820

- Significantly worse than NSW average
- Not significantly different than NSW average
- Significantly better than NSW average

NSW worst      NSW average      NSW best

25th percentile      75th percentile

Data prepared by the SLHD Public Health Observatory. Source: HealthStats NSW

The immigrant population in the Inner West area of Sydney is dynamic, with many residents leaving and returning to the area frequently. This presents challenges for our school immunisation programs, and can result in relatively high rates of travel-related illnesses that are managed by our Communicable Diseases team. Sydney Local Health District also has a relatively high rate of people living in unstable accommodation, with an estimated population of over 6000 homeless people<sup>9</sup>. There are other specific public health challenges arising from our unique inner city demographics, including relatively high rates of STI notifications such as hepatitis B and gonorrhoea, compared to other LHDs<sup>10</sup>. There are specific District programs in place to address all of these issues.

There are significant and historic communities of Aboriginal people within the District's boundaries, with an estimated 5000 Aboriginal residents living in our District. Aboriginal Australians have been shown to bear a greater burden of morbidity and mortality, which may be due to socio-economic factors and a higher rate of pre-existing conditions such as chronic illnesses. When planning programs and monitoring disease, the Public Health Unit considers how Aboriginal residents and other vulnerable communities in the District may be disproportionately affected. For example, we run a successful program targeting immunisation rates in Aboriginal children, with an Aboriginal Immunisation Officer in a dedicated role. We are partnering with Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Services such as Aboriginal Medical Service Redfern to advance other health protection programs, including influenza pandemic planning.

For the purposes of this Plan, a formal consultation process with the Sydney Local Health District Aboriginal Health Unit and representatives from our Aboriginal communities highlighted the following areas as key Public Health Unit priorities:

- Ongoing engagement with Aboriginal communities to identify health needs and barriers to safe and culturally competent services
- Working together with Aboriginal community organisations to ensure appropriate service provision and reduce health inequities

We cultivate strong partnerships so that we can respond optimally to the needs of our diverse communities. Our work requires collaboration with services both within the District (such as Sexual Health, Community Health, Gastroenterology, Women and Babies) and externally (Health Protection NSW, local councils, NSW Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Environment Protection Authority, Primary Health Networks, universities and research institutes). Enhancing these partnerships will continue to be fundamental to the work of the Public Health Unit, both for our day-to-day activities and to guide research and clinical innovation. An example of our leadership on an inter-sectoral collaboration is our Hoarding and Squalor project, which will establish a coordinated and patient-centred response to complex cases of hoarding and squalor.

**Key priorities for our community, partnerships and environment**

- 1 Reduce health inequities within our communities**
- 2 Provide services that meet the needs of a culturally diverse population**
- 3 Strengthen relationships with our partners within the District and across related sectors**





# Our patients, families, carers and consumers

Accountability mechanisms are embedded in our approach to our statutory responsibilities.

In our contributions to the health protection network, working with and reporting against guidelines, and ensuring appropriate governance, we rigorously uphold best practice in complying with all relevant regulations (including the NSW *Public Health Act 2010*, the NSW *Anatomy Act 1977*, and the *Smoke-Free Environment Act 2000*).

Public Health Unit employees are encouraged to ensure that all work prioritises the Sydney Local Health District strategic goal of an 'engaged, empowered and healthy community'<sup>2</sup>. For example, we ensure that where necessary, family and contacts of patients with a notifiable disease are given appropriate advice, interpreters are used for the follow-up of notifiable diseases, parents are counselled appropriately regarding immunisation, and home visits are conducted. Communicable diseases staff also visit facilities, institutions and community centres to conduct clinics and provide advice during outbreaks.

## Key priorities for our community, partnerships and environment

- 1 Exceed local and state benchmarks for follow up of patients with notifiable diseases and their contacts
- 2 Exceed national benchmarks for immunisation rates for school programs and vulnerable groups

Existing local, national and international research and guidelines underpin all of our core work and decision-making, and the Public Health Unit actively participates in the revision of state and national public health unit guidelines. Our activities are guided by the NSW Health Protection Network's 12 priorities<sup>1</sup>, which include improving the timeliness of vaccinations and establishing electronic notification of diseases by laboratories.



# Our services

The Public Health Unit provides a range of services across health protection and public health policy, with key workstream.

## Communicable disease control

- Conducting routine surveillance and management of notifiable disease cases and outbreaks
- Responding to institutional influenza outbreaks by networking with other state and federal agencies
- Developing leading-edge strategies to improve outbreak management
- Refining response to Legionella control in light of recent outbreaks
- Collaborating with other agencies and the public health network to protect the health of our community

## Environmental health

- Contributing to the safe and sustainable development of the region covered by Sydney Local Health District, by liaising with government agencies and our community to identify and mitigate potential health impacts
- Working with a range of partners including schools, residential facilities, early childhood services and workplaces to create environments that support health
- Responding to environmental hazards and public health emergencies
- Addressing the determinants of environmental health for local Aboriginal communities, in keeping with Strategic Direction 7 of the *Sydney Local Health District Aboriginal Health Strategic Plan 2018-2022*<sup>11</sup>
- Leading on Sydney Local Health District response to hoarding and squalor
- Legionella control, including conducting cross-boundary investigations
- Continuing our core business of tobacco control

## Immunisation programs

- Delivering the NSW School Vaccination Program and supporting immunisation throughout the District
- Accelerating uptake of childhood vaccines for children aged under 5 years
- Promoting state-based campaigns for changes in the immunisation schedule or programs
- Continuing to ensure work with Aboriginal communities and other vulnerable groups is prioritised, and working towards national benchmarks on immunisation in Aboriginal children<sup>12</sup>
- Optimising uptake of antenatal influenza and pertussis vaccination
- Improving vaccine coverage of specific vaccines such as influenza and pneumococcal in the at-risk adult population



### Emergency management and preparedness

- Assisting other agencies and Sydney Local Health District partners in refining general emergency management response, in keeping with the actions identified in Sydney Local Health District Public Health Supporting Plan to Sydney Local Health District HEALTHPLAN<sup>13</sup>
- Refining the Sydney Local Health District Pandemic Plan in line with the NSW Health Influenza Pandemic Plan<sup>14</sup>
- Preparing for public health emergencies with Aboriginal communities
- Continuing to support the development and implementation of district-wide exercises that test out our emergency preparedness for key hazards across metropolitan Sydney

### The future for our services

The urban catchment of Sydney Local Health District includes a dynamic migrant population and a significant Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ+) population. The nature of our uniquely diverse population brings challenges for the delivery of particular services. This includes our immunisation program, for which continuity during a child's early years is key, and our communicable disease program, which includes the public health management of STIs, blood borne viruses and travel-related illnesses. We will continue to develop specific programs targeting identified health needs and access gaps, and as with all our services, we will partner with our communities to ensure all of our work is approached through a lens of equity, cultural sensitivity and accountability.

Responding to our evolving challenges requires innovative thinking, and the Public Health Unit continues to work with our partners to develop leading-edge programs and pathways. For example, Sydney Local Health District is the first LHD to trial transfer of notifications for Hepatitis B and C to the Gastroenterology directorate in order to ensure better coordination of care.

On a broader scale, given the District's geographical context and the presence of major state-significant projects within our boundaries, it is essential for the health of District residents and the wider community that we continue to develop our influence in healthy urban planning and development.

### Key priorities for our services

- 1 Strengthen actions to address the determinants of environmental health, including housing and urban planning
- 2 Improve immunisation rates among Aboriginal children and other vulnerable groups
- 3 Improve outbreak management in facilities and institutions
- 4 Reduce rates of sexually transmitted infections

## Our staff



Our workforce strategy has been designed to align with the *Sydney Local Health District Workforce Strategic Plan 2016-2020* and *Sydney Local Health District Aboriginal Workforce Action Plan 2016-2018*, 'to enable excellence in healthcare delivery through a workforce culture of innovation and performance.'

The Public Health Unit maintains equity as a key tenet in employment policy. We have recently had as high as 17% Aboriginal representation in our workforce, and currently provide employment opportunities via the Aboriginal Population Health Training Initiative and the dedicated Aboriginal Immunisations Officer role. The newly-established role of Public Health Unit Equity Programs Manager will address gaps in health protection services for Aboriginal communities and other vulnerable groups.

The Public Health Unit supports all staff in their career development activities and aims to foster a sense of professional satisfaction. We maintain a high level of staff retention and recruitment through encouraging involvement in areas of interest such as public health research projects, and employees are regularly supported to attend conferences and training opportunities.

Environmental health is integral to our work and to the community's wellbeing, yet we are facing significant workforce challenges in this area. Addressing this gap will need to be central to our future workforce strategy. We continue to try to address critical workforce shortages by creating and recruiting to innovative roles such as the Environmental Health Officer Traineeship, developed and being piloted by the Public Health Unit.

### Key priorities for our staff

- 1 Champion equity in our employee recruitment strategy
- 2 Recruit and ensure retention of environmental health officers
- 3 Support staff in research and other professional development activities



# Our research



We maintain a culture of research to drive innovative practice. Our Communicable Diseases, Immunisations and Environmental Health teams routinely collect and analyse a wide range of local, state-wide, national and international public health data in order to improve health protection.

In addition, employees are encouraged to lead and participate in quality improvement to ensure that Public Health Unit activities are conducted in a 'best practice' manner, and to contribute to the local and national evidence base. To this end, we support our staff in conducting applied research projects, which often includes presenting at major conferences. Examples of recent research conducted by Unit staff include a review of barriers to management of influenza outbreaks in facilities, and several projects aimed at improving understanding of Legionella control.

There are a number of current projects that will enhance our ability as a District to deliver high quality research, including our new FluCARE web-based application that has been developed in collaboration with community partners. FluCARE will streamline our response to influenza outbreaks in facilities and, as with several other Public Health Unit initiatives, has potential to use population health datasets to advance our research and policy outcomes.

## Key priorities for our research

- 1 Continue to build research capacity in the public health workforce
- 2 Harness our use of technology and population health data, both for research purposes and to solve operational challenges
- 3 Engage with Sydney Research, Sydney Health Partners and other academic and corporate institutions on research projects

# Our education



The Public Health Unit maintains a strong emphasis on training for public health professionals, including medical, nursing and environmental health staff, epidemiologists, Aboriginal health staff and university students.

Our broad strategic goals are to optimise workforce skills and supply to meet health service needs, and to consolidate our position as a training centre of excellence in these areas.

Key to this approach is our recruitment of trainees from the Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine, and the Ministry of Health's Public Health Officer and Biostatistics Training Programs and Aboriginal Population Health Training Initiative. The Public Health Unit also supports Aboriginal Environmental Health Officer trainees in public health units and local government to complete Aboriginal Environmental Health training. Building on the principles of the newly-established Environmental Health Officer training program, one of our key strategic training goals is the development of our Public Health Nurse Training Program, a leading-edge scheme that will equip nurses with essential skills for public health practice.

Staff members regularly participate in professional development activities to build and maintain skills for patient-facing, research and policy work. As well as health protection training, this includes online and face-to-face training in areas such as emergency management and cultural competency. By ensuring a high level of quality and participation in training activities, and embedding equity within our educational processes, we aim to optimise service delivery and health outcomes.

Another important facet of our education strategy is building the capacity of our community partners to manage disease outbreaks and pandemics. This is advanced through the work of the Communicable Diseases and Emergency Management teams, and includes workshops such as our Residential Aged Care Facilities Influenza Outbreaks forum, and environmental health seminars, such as our Water Recycling seminars.

## Key priorities for our education

- 1 Provide education and training to strengthen the expertise of our workforce to deliver patient and community-centred care
- 2 Develop high-quality, accessible education for medical, nursing, environmental health and population health trainees
- 3 Build the capacity of local partners to deliver health protection services
- 4 Embed equity and CORE values within any new training and development activities



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Sydney,  
it's *your* local  
health district



Planning for your future

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