



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

Thursday 4th November 2021

# **ST JOHN OF GOD MURDOCH HOSPITAL WINS THE HESTA COMPASSION IN ACTION SOCIAL JUSTICE AWARD**

St John of God Murdoch Hospital has won the 2021 HESTA Compassion in Action Social Justice Award for a collaborative program that supports young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experiencing hearing loss.

The program is a partnership between the hospital, the Djaalinj Waakinj Aboriginal Ear Health Program, Telethon Kids Institute, Telethon Speech and Hearing, Moorditj Koort Aboriginal Corporation, Cockburn Integrated Health and Paediatric Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist Mr George Sim.

The award, run by Catholic Health Australia and sponsored by HESTA, recognises an individual or team who has shown creativity, commitment, and accomplishment in effecting positive social change.

Djaalinj Waakinj, which means "listening talking" in Noongar language, began as a research project focused on the burden of middle-ear disease and hearing loss in young urban Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

St John of God Murdoch Hospital Chief Executive Officer Ben Edwards says middle-ear disease is prolific among Aboriginal children, with up to 50% affected by eight months of age.

"At a physical level it can cause chronic pain and dizziness," Mr Edwards says.

"It affects their ability to develop language and communications skills, and this rolls through to education outcomes and their ability to integrate socially.

"Children who can't hear struggle to hear the world around them and understand it, therefore the world can become a stressful and overwhelming place."

Mr Edwards says that the collaborative response by many organisations had enabled the hospital to provide free access to services to Aboriginal children under the age of five with middle ear disease.

"The results are instant and profound," he says. "Kids go into theatre and can't hear, they come out and they can, and some are speaking.

"It's bigger than that: they can then learn, play, speak and listen – they can be children again."



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Nicole Clements, Catholic Health Australia's Acting Strategy and Mission Director, says social justice has a rich tradition in the Catholic health and aged care sectors, and this was reflected in the award.

“Through the HESTA award Catholic Health Australia is recognising and celebrating the cumulative efforts of our members in giving back to their communities, beyond the core work of providing care in hospitals and aged care,” Ms Clements says.

“Each year our members deliver almost \$70 million in services back to the community through more than 100 social outreach programs in Australia and in the region.

“All of this is made possible because we continue to operate on a not-for-profit basis, using our resources to fund projects that would not otherwise exist, such as this excellent collaboration.”