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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDEPENDENCE

media release

NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

Aboriginal leader praises local doctor

22 April, 2009

Steve Gordon, the elected Councillor for the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council's North West Region today praised the dedication and commitment of Brewarrina's departing GP, Dr Deon Heyns.

"To most Australians the task is insurmountable but to the people of Brewarrina, one man is proving the health of Aboriginal people can be turned around.

"In just over 3 years, Dr Deon Heyns has significantly improved the health of patients at the Barwon River Medical Centre.

"Dr Heyns worked with elders and the local community on making the Centre more culturally appropriate when he started in 2006.

"Now patients travel from all over the north west of the State to the centre.

"What he has shown at Brewarrina is if you do make services culturally appropriate people will attend and you improve primary health care for Aboriginal people.

"The sad state of health in rural and regional Australia is an indictment of the previous Liberal Government's neglect of health.

"The key to improving health is to get people when they are young and well and keep them well through their lifespan, rather than diagnosing them with chronic disease when they are 30 and 40.

"Dr Heyns was instrumental in establishing regular clinics on diabetes and heart care as well as other health facilities to the outer lying regions. He also assisted at the Brewarrina Aboriginal Health Service.

"Rural and regional areas struggle to get the health care we need, when compared with people in cities.

“Every Australian should be able to get the health care they need when they need it.

“Dr Heyns is more than just our local doctor. He was a friend, colleague, counsellor, companion and supporter.

“He has provided a first-rate service to the Brewarrina community and his departure will be felt by many throughout the local area. We wish him and his wife Ingrid all the very best in their future plans, and thank him for his committed service.

Further information: Councillor Steve Gordon 0408 690267