

Summary of key points:

- I have learned, over many years now, the importance of the role of people who support us in community health navigation.
- During the COVID pandemic, we focused a lot on the availability of treatment for severely ill patients in ICU but not enough on what was going on in the community. When the Delta strain hit, we had sufficient ICU bed capacity, but the community response was far from ideal. 95% of people managed COVID at home and we had to quickly pivot and work out how on earth we were going to communicate with people out in the community. For example, in Aboriginal communities, we could just have non-Aboriginal people turning up saying, “Hi, we're here to give you your vaccine” – that just wasn't going to work. Similarly in other cultural communities, we needed to rely on faith leaders, cultural leaders, to assist us to get that work done.
- Last night, I had the opportunity to be present with some peer support workers being recognised at the South-Eastern Sydney staff excellence awards. This was an excellent reminder of the broad workforce delivering care, aside from nurses and doctors and allied health practitioners.
- What we know about health systems as well is often the people who need them the most find them the hardest to access. And we know that depending on where you are and what you do and where you live, and all of those things do impact how people access health care.
- People who support this work as community health navigators are critical to the ongoing growth of the New South Wales public health system, and indeed, public health systems across the world. Trusted faces in the community, helping people to understand their diagnosis and treatment options, helping them get to appointments, helping them navigate through the system.
- Unfortunately, a couple of years ago, my husband had prostate cancer, which was what anyone wants at 55 years of age. Navigating that journey with him was not an easy thing: the paperwork, the follow-up, the translation, the jargon that health professionals absolutely love. It was a firsthand reminder of the complexity of our health systems.
- One of the things that we have very strongly focused on since I've been Secretary of Health for the three and a bit years now is Aboriginal Health. The gap is not closing. The work that's gone on is making tiny, incremental steps in the right direction, but it's far too slow. So there has to be a different way. And I think working with community and helping our Aboriginal brothers and sisters to navigate their way and see trusted faces within the health system at all levels is so important.
- In about 2013 I was the Chief Nursing Midwifery officer for New South Wales Health, and we made a film called Small Acts of Kindness https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEvJ_CLZJEA I'm proud to say it has stood the test of time. The objective of that film was to remind our health staff that it is kindness and compassion at the heart of everything we do, and I know that the work you do delivers that in spades. And I'd like to thank you sincerely for the work that you contribute to and the work that you do on behalf of many people across New South Wales, because without you their journey through what is a very complex and challenging health system would be much, much

harder. The other side of the kindness agenda indeed is that there is evidence, statistical evidence, that it does improve health outcomes. And wouldn't you know that being kind to other people actually makes you feel better about yourself as well?

- My message to you is that we are a human health system. From my perspective, it really is about people supporting people, people walking with each other through the most difficult and challenging times of their lives, the fact that we hold a unique position in the lives of people who tell us things and share things with us that they would never tell anyone else being able to help make a difference, have purpose in life, is all part of what we all do.
- It's not lost on me that we can do a lot better by embracing people who work in the community to support the system, which, despite its challenges, is a very, very, very good health system. But it could be a lot better, I think, if it extended itself beyond the acute care system.