

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

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Mercy Health to operate new early parenting service

The Victorian Government's selection of Mercy Health to operate a new early parenting centre in the City of Whittlesea has been described as an acknowledgment of Mercy Health's experience and expertise in the field of parenting services.

Mercy Health Group CEO Adjunct Professor Stephen Cornelissen said for more than 70 years, Mercy Health's early parenting facility, the O'Connell Family Centre, originally established by the Catholic Order of Grey Sisters, had forged a reputation as a respected provider of a highly valued service – a reputation that has contributed to Mercy Health being chosen as the provider of this new service in Whittlesea.

"Based on a capacity to assist young families in need, we are delighted that Mercy Health has been identified to extend its expertise to other parts of Victoria as part of this expansion," Adj. Prof Cornelissen said.

"The O'Connell Family Centre provides care and support for more than 1000 families a year at its current Canterbury site.

"We are thrilled to be now poised to continue providing care for families in the City of Whittlesea, which is one of Greater Melbourne's fastest growing areas.

"We also congratulate the Victorian Government for its commitment and acknowledgment of the importance of this type of service."

Adj. Prof Cornelissen said the announcement also reinforced Mercy Health's reputation for provision of outstanding health services to women and babies (and their families) at Mercy Hospital for Women (Heidelberg), Werribee Mercy Hospital and the significance of our world renowned Mercy Perinatal education and research team.

While the Whittlesea site has yet to be identified and developed, it will include 10 residential family units and four day-stay beds.

The Victorian Government's Minister for Health, Martin Foley, has announced that the Whittlesea project will operate as part of a broader state-wide network.

The Government has committed more than \$135 million to expand the Early Parenting Centre (EPC) network from three centres to 10 as part of the 2019-20 State Budget.

Adj. Prof Cornelissen said there also needed to be an acknowledgment of the founders of the O'Connell Family Centre, the Family Care Sisters or Grey Sisters, as they were affectionately known.

“While the Sisters of Mercy saw the need to protect vulnerable young women, the Grey Sisters stepped up to provide support for families who were facing challenges,” he said.

The Mercy Health O’Connell Family Centre runs residential, day and community programs working with families with children from birth to four years of age.

Families are referred to the centre by health professionals or community providers. Partners are encouraged to attend the programs.

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