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AUSTRALIA'S FIRST WOMEN'S HOSPITAL CELEBRATES 150 YEARS OF CARE

Australia's first women's hospital, the Royal Women's Hospital (the Women's) in Melbourne, today celebrated 150 years since foundation and admission of its first patients.

The Premier of Victoria, the Hon. Steve Bracks, launched the festivities at the hospital with the unveiling of the Women's 150th anniversary tram and the cutting of a giant birthday cake.

Chair of the Royal Women's Hospital, Dr Rhonda Galbally AO, said: "The Women's is a unique health service that has been shaped over time by women's voices. Throughout the past century and a half, our hospital has strived to understand and respond to the diverse needs, priorities and perspectives of Australian women."

The hospital was originally established in East Melbourne in August 1856 as a place where underprivileged women could give birth and receive proper medical and nursing attention. The original title for the hospital was the *Melbourne Lying-in Hospital and Infirmary for Diseases Peculiar to Women and Children*.

In 1858, the hospital was relocated to its present site in Grattan St, Carlton. For many years, the hospital was known popularly as *The Women's* and, in March 1884, the hospital was officially renamed *The Hospital for Women*, with the 'Royal' title being conferred by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on 6 September 1954.

The Royal Women's Hospital Chief Executive, Ms Dale Fisher, said: "For 150 years, the Women's has led the advocacy and advancement of women's health care in both Australia and throughout the world.

"Most importantly, the Women's has always cared for the most vulnerable women in our society and that commitment has differentiated our health service throughout the ages. Today, we care for more than 300,000 women each year, who come from 165 countries, speak 60 different languages and follow 42 separate faiths."

The Women's has many achievements that mark the significance of its 150 year history including:

- 1859 - the first Australian hospital to commence training of nurses and midwives;
- 1864 - Dr Richard Tracy conducts Victoria's first surgery to remove an ovarian tumour;

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- 1949 - design and construction of a humidicrib to transport premature babies;
- 1951 - Dr Kate Campbell establishes a link between retrolental fibroplasia (a blindness in premature babies) and oxygen levels in humidicribs;
- 1980 - the birth of Australia's first 'test-tube baby', Candice Reed; and
- 1995 - the first public hospital to achieve Baby Friendly Hospital accreditation by UNICEF/World Health Organisation.

Australia's best loved vocal duo and the Women's 150th Anniversary ambassadors, Vika and Linda Bull said: "We are proud to support the Royal Women's 150th anniversary celebrations. As our daughters were born at the Women's, we are fully aware of the great culture of care and commitment of all hospital staff. We wish the Royal Women's a happy 150th and all the best for the next 150 years."

A major feature of the Women's anniversary celebrations during the next year will be the *Women's Health Conference – Clinical, Scientific and Social Perspectives*. The Conference will be held at Crown Conference Centre, Melbourne, from 29th – 31st March 2007. Further details are available from www.rwh.org.au.

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