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Cape York safe infant sleeping program receives national nursing award

The Pēpi-pod® Program — based at the Apunipima Cape York Health Council — has taken out the Team Innovation Award at the 2014 HESTA Australia Nursing Awards held in Sydney last night.

In an Australian first, portable safe sleeping places for babies (known as Pēpi-pods), were rolled out in Cape York. Pēpi-pods aim to reduce the high rates of Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI) among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Program originated in New Zealand where they saw the first drop in SUDI among the Maori population in a decade. The name originates from Pēpi, which is Maori for baby. The term 'pod' symbolises protection of precious new life.

Infants up to six months, (of families with known risk factors for SUDI), are provided with a portable, polypropylene box, which is transformed into an appealing infant bed with a culturally suitable fabric cover, tight fitting mattress and bedding.

Apunipima Cape York Health Council partnered with the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC), Children's Health Queensland and Change for our Children New Zealand, to roll out the Program.

Program leader and Chair of the SIDS and Kids National Scientific Advisory Group, Professor Jeanine Young from USC, said the pods enable safe sleeping places for babies who aren't in cots.

Professor Young said, "The Pēpi-pod Program consists of a safe sleep space combined within a targeted safe sleeping health promotion initiative for families with known risk factors for SUDI.

"The Pēpi-pod fits between parents in bed, enabling babies to safely co-sleep with them.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies are 3.8 times more likely to die suddenly and unexpectedly, than non-Indigenous infants. And, we know that infant deaths are associated with co-sleeping in hazardous circumstances; particularly for preterm or low birth weight babies. Or where smoking, alcohol, drug use or unsafe sleep environments are present," she said.

On behalf of the team, Professor Young accepted a \$10,000 development grant from long-term HESTA awards supporter, ME Bank.

Speaking with Virginia Trioli, emcee of the awards dinner, Professor Young said, "More than 30 Pēpi-pods have been distributed to families and there are plans to extend the service to more Cape communities in 2014."

When asked what she would do with the prize money she said, "We will buy much-needed iPads which will help engage the communities we work with and assist them in providing data and feedback to us."

The HESTA Australian Nursing Awards Team Innovation Award recognises nurses, midwives, personal care attendants or assistants in nursing who have introduced innovation to the workplace that improves clinical practice and patient care.

The Nurse of the Year and Outstanding Graduate were also announced.

HESTA Chair Angela Emslie said, “The winners in the three awards categories have demonstrated high quality nursing and the real difference it can make to improving people’s lives. We are proud to acknowledge these exceptional individuals and teams.”

The awards are timely, given its International Nurses Week, when members of the community are encouraged to thank a nurse for their wonderful contribution.

Nurse of the Year – Steve Brown and Outstanding Graduate – Zoe Sabri, both from Melbourne, each received a \$5,000 ME Bank *EveryDay* Transaction Account and a \$5,000 education grant, courtesy of ME Bank.

HESTA is the leading super fund for health and community services, with more than 770,000 members and \$27 billion in assets. More people in health and community services choose HESTA for their super.

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