

Unit is easing the burden

By Michael Maskell

Patience bore fruit when a new \$650 000 renal dialysis unit was officially opened at Kyabram Hospital on Thursday — almost two years after funding was announced.

Government funding was announced in February last year for the unit which has a capacity to offer ongoing dialysis treatment for up to six patients per week.

It was expected to open last December, however heavy rain, the discovery of pipes beneath the site and flood proofing meant the building was completed in May. It took its first patient in June.

The unit features three individual dialysis stations, all with fully adjustable electronic chairs and flat-screen televisions overlooking a garden aspect.

The location will mean patients with renal (kidney) disease will be able to save time and receive care closer to home, not having to travel out of town for treatment.

The service will also be available to visitors to Kyabram needing dialysis on a casual basis.

Kyabram and District Health Services board members Judy Greer and Ray Tuhan, in official capacity opening the unit, paid credit to a willing and generous community which had supported the dialysis unit.

"This is a facility that will provide comfort and convenience and most of all well-being for many Kyabram and district people well into the future," Ms Greer said.



Main picture, Local donors who contributed to the unit were recognised at the opening; Top right, Irene Pankhurst with daughter Karen Wells and Marie Dillon; Below right, Health services' board members Ray Tuhan and Judy Greer officially open the dialysis unit.

She said the unit had been on the board's extensive wish list of services for many years.

Mr Tuhan thanked the community and Member for Rodney Paul Weller for their consultation over a period of five years to bring the project to fruition.

He said the unit had taken the strain off volunteer drivers who ferried patients to appointments.

"The hospital board was given a few days to consider funding this facility and some of us were aware of the trauma and the inconvenience suffered by patients having to travel to dialysis centres three times

a week," Mr Tuhan said.

"We knew that the project came at a bad time as we were in the middle of a severe drought and funding for the upgrade of Sheridan Nursing Home had stalled and in the opinion of some we would be overstretching our financial resources to build the unit.

"The decision to build was the subject of some forthright discussions in the boardroom but it was the right decision."

He said the Victorian Government committed \$37 000 to train staff to operate the dialysis service, and provides ongoing annual funding.

The health services' board committed \$550 000 to the capital works, and was appreciative of continued support received from district residents.

The government contributed \$100 000.

The unit's first patient, Irene Pankhurst said the opening of the unit had changed her life.

The Kyabram retiree travelled the 76 km round trip to Shepparton for dialysis three times each week for two years.

"This fantastic facility has made such a difference in terms of convenience, and has generally enabled me to enjoy life just that bit



more," she said.

Kyabram Hospital deputy director of nursing Vicki Ough said: "Patients who require dialysis need lengthy sessions, three times per week. Sadly, we are seeing an increasing number of people with kidney problems, but units like this will mean they get the best care possible."

Local donors who contributed to the dialysis unit were Kyabram Hospital Ladies Auxiliary, Heart Support Group, Kyabram Bicycle Users Group, Kyabram Lions Club, Kyabram Ambulance Auxiliary and Kyabram Cross Pistons Saloon Club.

The health services' chief executive Neil Cowen said Kidney Health Australia would partner with KDHS to provide free kidney health checks in Kyabram from next year.

"This is very exciting as it will be the first time the health checks are offered in Victoria, and it is possibly the only time that comprehensive kidney health checks are done in Victoria," he said.

The unit, which presently operates three days a week and caters for six patients, will increase to six days when a seventh patient begins treatment in January.