

## **Museum building history**

Over the last 50 years this building – erected as a baby health clinic – was used by a number of other community groups, mainly involving children and families. In 1976, for example St. John's Church of England was allowed to operate Sunday School there. Playgroups also used the building, and until 2019 this was the venue for a grandparents' playgroup.

Baby health centres or clinics have a long history in NSW, with the state's first opening at Alexandria in 1914. This was one of the innovative health measures introduced by the state's first Labor government in the wake of appalling infant mortality in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These centres monitored the health of new born and young babies and were a boon, especially for first time mothers.

When Sutherland Shire's first clinic opened in 1934 the nation was struggling through the hard depression years. As few young mothers owned a car, they were given free bus travel to visit the clinic in Sutherland. In 1939 another clinic was established at fast-growing Cronulla, not far from the newly opened railway station.

As the population increased in the 1950s and 1960s other clinics were established. In 1966, perceiving an urgent need, Sutherland Shire Council asked the Department of Health to establish a centre at Sylvania Heights and the following year the Venetia Street building was approved. After the NSW government confirmed in February 1969 that it would subsidise 75 per cent of the building cost, construction began and the building – the tenth baby health centre in Sutherland Shire – was opened in November 1969 by Councillor Arthur Gietzelt.

In 1985 a Karitane Baby Clinic transferred to this building from its former location on land resumed for the second Tom Uglys Bridge. This Karitane clinic had opened in 1955 as the Truby King Clinic, named after the New Zealand psychiatrist who had pioneered community-based infant and mother care. It began as a voluntary organisation supported by community fund raising, but in the post-war years gradually became part of the NSW health system.

## **References**

- <https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/karitane>
- <https://www.sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au/Community/Library/Local-Studies/Discover-Local-History>