

Media Release

The Hon Natalie Hutchins MP
Minister for Education
Minister for Women



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TRAILBLAZING WOMAN WAR SURGEON HONOURED

A pioneering medical professional and Australian war surgeon who was never given official enlistment status has been recognised with a statue in the Avenue of Honour in her hometown in Victoria's central west.

Minister for Women Natalie Hutchins today joined Golden Plains Shire Council Mayor Brett Cunningham and the Member for Ripon, Martha Haylett in Linton to unveil a statue celebrating the life and achievements of Dr Vera Scantlebury Brown OBE.

The statue is the first public artwork in Linton recognising or representing a woman, one of six artworks commissioned and funded by the Andrews Labor Government's Victorian Women's Public Art program. The program aims to increase the number of permanent public artworks in the state celebrating women and their achievements.

Born in 1889, Vera was among the first women to study medicine at the University of Melbourne and, shortly after completing her medical residency at the Children's Hospital in 1917, tried to join Australia's war efforts.

At the time, the Australian Army would not allow women doctors, so Vera paid her way to London to work in the Endell St Military Hospital - known as 'the suffragette hospital' because it was almost entirely operated by women - to help treat wounded, injured and sick soldiers transported from France.

Vera would later go on to become the first woman to lead a Victorian government department as the inaugural Director of the Victorian Infant Welfare Scheme. In this role she transformed the voluntary system of the day into the professional, universal maternal and child health system Victoria now has.

The 1.75m statue of Vera was created by bronze sculpture artist and Golden Plains Shire local Lucy McEachern and depicts Vera in the insignia of a military surgeon, which women were prohibited from wearing at the time.

Quote attributable to Minister for Women, Natalie Hutchins

"Dr Vera Scantlebury Brown's ongoing legacy to the field of child and maternal health in Victoria, coupled with her largely unsung achievements as a war surgeon, make her a standout candidate of the Victorian Women's Public Art program."

Quote attributable to Golden Plains Shire Council Mayor, Brett Cunningham

"Driven by the local community, and sculpted by local artist Lucy McEachern, the sculpture will be a valuable addition to Golden Plains, and an important step towards recognising more women in public artwork across the Shire. The council is pleased to have supported this project to highlight Vera's incredible story."

Quote attributable to Member for Ripon, Martha Haylett

"I am so excited to see this vision come to life with the help of a fantastic regional artist, the Linton Historical Society and other hard-working locals, I congratulate and thank them all for creating this very fitting tribute to a local trailblazer."

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