Unit to herald new era in health care

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Commissioner of the NSW Mental Health Commission John Feneley met carers yesterday to watch a screening of the award-winning film Intangible. Mr Feneley is pictured with Karrie Lannstrom, Margot White, Pat Williams and Freda Gilby. **PICTURE:** Darrin Manuel

Unit to herald new era in health care

By Erica Visser

The head of the NSW Mental Health Commission met with local carers yesterday ahead of the opening of a 10-bed facility at the Broken Hill Hospital.

The $6.6 million sub-acute unit will be officially opened this morning by the Commissioner, John Feneley, and Mental Health Minister Kevin Humphries.

Mr Feneley yesterday met those involved with the local Family and Carer Mental Health Program to discuss issues including access to resources in remote areas.

The commission was established mid last year in a bid to recognise and prevent mental illness, which cost the State's economy millions of dollars every year.

Mr Feneley said the commission would present a plan on mental health reforms to the State Government by March 2014.

He said the plan would recognise the differences between mental health needs in metropolitan areas, compared to those in rural and isolated regions.

"There's a real issue, I suppose, for Broken Hill with the need to send people away because there isn't the right care," Mr Feneley said.

"Now we've got these 10 sub-acute beds hopefully that might reduce the need."

Mr Feneley said that the beds would prove helpful for patients who did not need to be admitted to a hospital with constant care, but still needed assistance.

"The six-bed ward in the hospital is much more extreme," he said.

"This is a more open and welcoming environment with more opportunity for rehabilitation."

While patients may stay in the new ward for up to six weeks, Mr Feneley said that many would not need that long.

"You might need some respite but be out within seven days," he said.

"If there is constant two-week cycles with the 10 beds that's great because it is getting treatment to a lot of people within the community.

"It also allows people with a mental illness to rehabilitate in the community, or in the small community of the unit, rather than in hospital."

Mr Feneley said that this week's visit to the city was an "introduction" to the issues facing mental health in Far West NSW.