



HEALTHY NORTH COAST

ANNUAL REPORT

2023 - 2024





Acknowledgement of Country

Healthy North Coast acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands across our region, and pays respect to Elders past, present and on their journey. We recognise these lands were never ceded and acknowledge the continuation of culture and connection to the land, sky and sea. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Land's First Peoples and honour the rich diversity of the oldest living cultures.



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OUR VISION

Healthy people in North Coast communities

OUR MISSION

To build a person-centred health system in which each member of the North Coast community, especially those with the greatest need, receives care that is integrated, high quality and easy to access. Our commitment to closing the gap and reducing health inequity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities is paramount to each of our objectives and outcomes.

OUR GOALS

- Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of health services, particularly for those at risk of poor health outcomes.
- Improving the coordination of health services and increasing access and quality support.

OUR VALUES

The Healthy North Coast **CAN-DO** Effect

Community first and always

We are committed to serving our communities. We listen actively, and every voice is heard, respected and valued. We measure success by the wellbeing of our communities.

Achieving more together

We believe in the power of collaboration and teamwork. We value different strengths and perspectives. We know we can achieve more and create a lasting impact by working as one.

Nurturing innovation

We thrive on challenges and explore new ideas and approaches to problem-solving. We are always learning and open to change so we can drive advancements and growth that make a difference.

Message from the Chair

As I reflect on 2023/24, I am proud of what Healthy North Coast has achieved to enhance health outcomes across our region. Our work this year has been guided by three pillars: coordination, commissioning and capacity building.

A key coordination highlight was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Northern NSW and Mid North Coast Local Health Districts. This partnership led to the creation of a joint North Coast Mental Health Plan – a significant achievement that positions us among the few PHNs to have delivered such a comprehensive plan on time. This collaboration marks a shift toward a unified health system, bridging the gap between hospital and community care in our region.

Our commissioning initiatives have continued to meet the diverse needs of our region. North Coast Health Connect, a major project that emerged from over a year of co-design, has successfully connected local patients with urgent care through a central triage line, ensuring they receive the appropriate care from their trusted local clinicians. Our commissioning efforts have also supported vital programs like Resilient Kids and our ongoing suicide prevention and aftercare services.

Our capacity building this year has focused on empowering our local clinicians. The Immediate Care in Primary Health Conference, attended by over 170 health professionals, not only provided valuable education on urgent care issues but also fostered vital networking opportunities for those who often work in isolation. Our local Clinical Societies have also continued to grow, offering multidisciplinary education and collaboration that strengthens the bonds within our health community.

As we look to the future, I am pleased to welcome Prof Myfanwy Maple and Dr Rashmi Sharma to our Board. I would also like to extend my deepest thanks to Graeme Innes, who retired from our Board, for his invaluable contributions.

I would also like to thank our Healthy North Coast staff, our local GPs, Primary Care, Aged Care and Community nurses, our many and varied Allied Health Professionals, our Mental Health and Aboriginal Health clinicians and workers and our Primary Care, Aged Care, Disability and Community carers and support staff, for all of the work that you do every day for the health and wellbeing of our communities.

Together, we have made significant strides this year on our journey, and I am confident that our continued focus on coordination, commissioning, and capacity building will drive even greater achievements into the future.



Dr Adrian Gilliland
Chair

Message from the CEO

I am proud and grateful of the work that our Healthy North Coast team have been doing to develop strong and lasting partnerships that form the cornerstone of our work at Healthy North Coast. Our commitment to strengthening health outcomes for the communities we serve is only possible through our commitment to meaningful collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders, healthcare providers, community organisations, community members, and local healthcare professionals.

These relationships are genuinely the lifeblood of our mission to create a healthier, more connected region.

We believe that the only way to drive real and ongoing change is through authentic partnerships with a common goal in improving health outcomes for everyone that chooses to call the North Coast home. Each partner brings unique insights and expertise that inform our approach to care and service delivery, and by listening and learning from these partners, we can better understand the diverse needs of our community and develop programs that are more responsive, inclusive, and effective.

Over the past year, we've reached some incredible milestones including the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Mid North Coast and Northern NSW Local Health Districts and establishing the North Coast Aboriginal Partnership Agreement, whereby we are partnering with 6 Aboriginal Medical Services to sharpen our health outcomes focus for Aboriginal communities.

Together, we have co-designed initiatives that address pressing local health challenges, enhanced access to care, and built stronger networks that support our most vulnerable populations. Our collaborative efforts have led to innovative solutions that are making a real difference on the ground, ensuring that our services are not only accessible but also truly centered around the people we serve.

As we move forward, I am excited by the opportunities ahead of us. I acknowledge the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care for their ongoing support and commitment to better health outcomes on the North Coast through the Primary Health Network program, without which much of this work would not be possible.

Thank you for your continued support and shared commitment to making a positive impact.



Monika Wheeler
CEO

Our year in numbers

2023/24



\$84 million

total spent in funding for local programs and services



\$65 million

million awarded to 262 organisations to provide commissioned services to address health needs across our region



59,304

occasions of service delivered to 7,426 active clients under mental health, suicide prevention and psychosocial support programs (an increase of 16% on the previous year)



10,094

calls made to the Head to Health mental health phone service



1,729

health professionals participated in 89 professional education events



15,171

users accessed the Mid and North Coast HealthPathways website (an increase of 8.8% on the previous year)



90%

of General Practices across our region are actively engaging with us



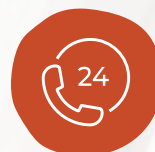
779

face-to-face visits to support general practice



18,000

total occasions of support (face to face, email and phone) for general practice



15,078

occasions of service provided through the GP Telehealth service



11,107

community members received health advice through the North Coast Health Connect service

Our region

We are lucky to live and work in a thriving region that is vibrant, diverse and full of opportunity. We understand our responsibility to continue contributing to better health outcomes for our growing region – and for everyone who chooses to call the North Coast home.

As our regions' health needs change, so must we. We are committed to working in partnership with our communities, particularly those with a higher risk of poor health outcomes.

32,767 square kilometres

6 Aboriginal nations

541,520 people

2 local health districts

12 local government areas

17% population aged under 15 years

7% need assistance with self-care, mobility and communication (NSW 5.4%)

6% identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (NSW 3.4%)

20% born overseas (NSW 35%)

26% population aged 65 years and over (NSW 18%)

1,187 General Practitioners

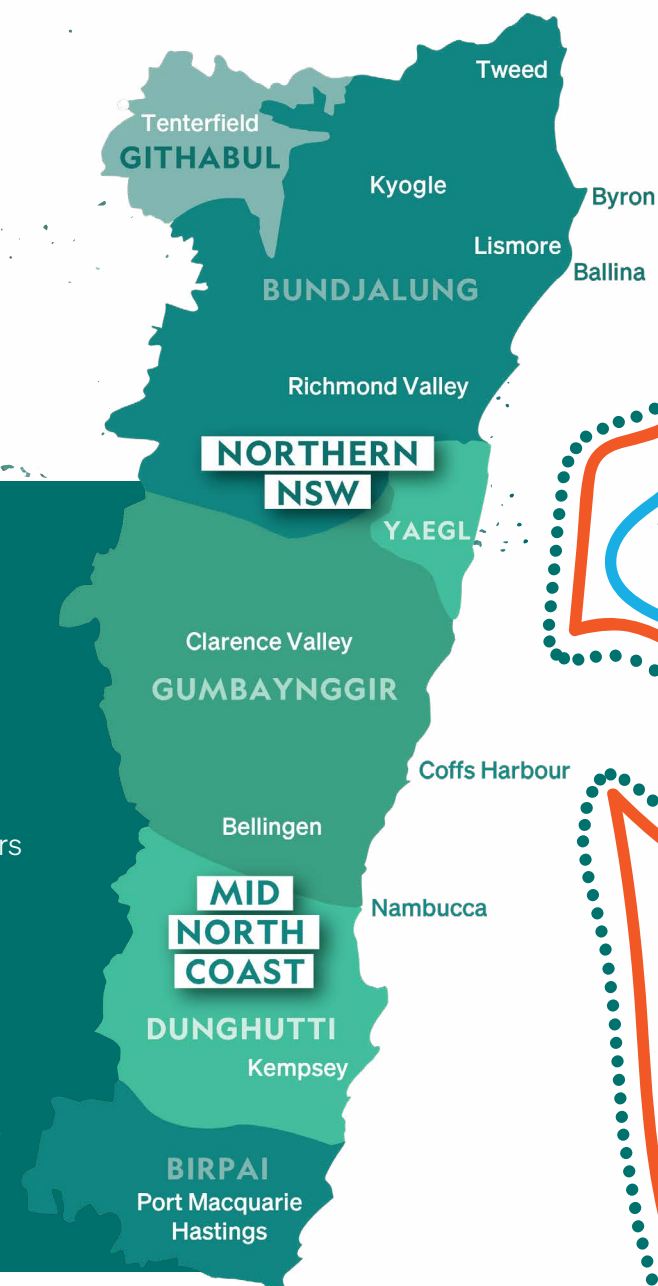
667 full-time equivalent General Practitioners

6 Aboriginal medical services

470 nurses in general practice

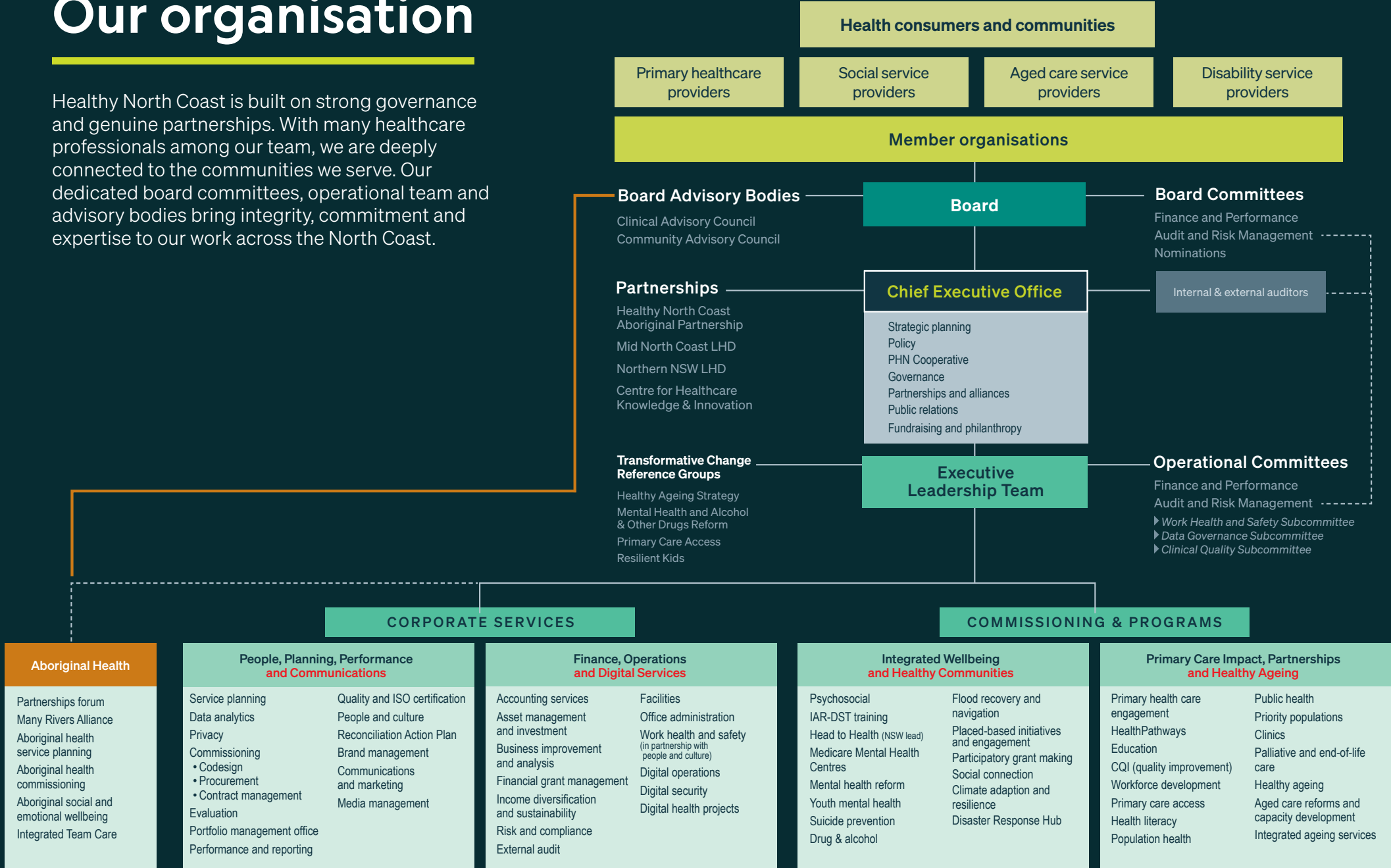
2,977 primary care nurses and midwives

3,635 allied health professionals



Our organisation

Healthy North Coast is built on strong governance and genuine partnerships. With many healthcare professionals among our team, we are deeply connected to the communities we serve. Our dedicated board committees, operational team and advisory bodies bring integrity, commitment and expertise to our work across the North Coast.



Our people

Healthy North Coast Board

Dr Adrian Gilliland
Chair

Kerry Stubbs
Deputy Chair

Dr Jenny Beange

Anne Bryce

Sam Hardjono

Graeme Innes
(to 5 December 2023)

Luke Lindsay

Prof Myfanwy Maple
(from 5 December 2023)

Dr Rashmi Sharma
(from 11 December 2023)

Dr Matthew West

Member Organisations

Mid North Coast Division of General Practice

North Coast Allied Health Association

Northern Rivers General Practice Network trading as Nordocs

University Centre for Rural Health

Southern Cross University

Executive Leadership Team

Monika Wheeler
Chief Executive Officer

Scott Bryant
Chief Financial Officer (from 13 July 2023 to 19 April 2024) and
Director Finance Operations (from 22 April 2024)

Luke Elias
Director, Primary Care Impact and Partnerships

Samara Finlayson
Director, Communications and Digital Services

Sarah Ford
Director Healthy Communities (to 19 April 2024)

Aimee McNeill
Director, Integrated Wellbeing

Susan Parker Pavlovic
Director, Aboriginal Health (from 25 March 2024)

Sigrid Patterson
Director, People Planning and Performance

Loretta Rigby
Director, Aboriginal Health Adviser (to 15 September 2023)

Delivering better health for North Coast communities

Healthy North Coast is one of 31 independent primary health networks (PHNs) across Australia. We work to improve health outcomes and provide better access to primary healthcare services for North Coast communities.

With funding support from both the Australian and NSW Governments, Healthy North Coast has made significant contributions to support recovery from recent disasters, partnering with our local health districts, primary care services, commissioned services, the education and community sectors, and our local communities.

We've continued to learn from recent emergency response experiences, strengthening our approaches to enable us all to face future challenges with confidence.

Healthy North Coast's primary objective is to keep people well, especially those with chronic conditions and mental illness, while reducing avoidable hospital visits. We achieve this through a 'place-based' approach, tailoring programs to meet the specific health needs of our local communities.

We listen, learn and act to commission medical and healthcare services that address immediate, anticipated and future local needs. In 2023/24 our key focus areas, designed to achieve our vision, were:



Our core functions and activities align with the objectives of the PHN program:



Coordinate and integrate local healthcare services in collaboration with Local Hospital Networks (LHNs) to improve the quality of care, people's experience and efficient use of resources



Commission primary care and mental health services to address population health needs and service-delivery gaps in service delivery and to improve access and equity



Capacity-build and provide practice support to primary care and mental health providers to support quality care delivery

Building strong connections

Establishing strong partnerships relies on an effective communications and engagement program. In 2023/24, we achieved:



53,231

visits to the Healthy North Coast website

17,398

visits to our Head to Health website



122,000

people reached on Instagram

422,000

people reached on Facebook



492

new followers on LinkedIn

80,000+

practitioner newsletters sent with a 36% open rate



18,000+

community newsletters sent with a 44 % open rate



27,564

clinical society emails sent with a 46% open rate



500+

brand mentions in local media

9

media events held



3,324

responses to the Better Health Community Survey

Projects with high media and communications engagement:

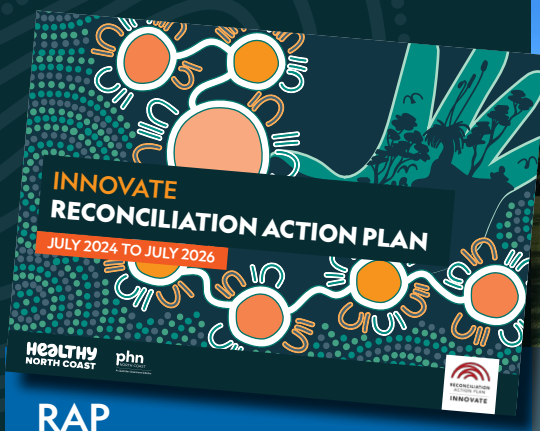
- Launch of the Healthy North Coast Aboriginal Partnership
- Ulong Mountain Health Hub Extension
- Launch of the Resilient Kids Program
- Workforce Support and Wellbeing Funding launch
- Healthy Ageing Strategy launch
- Building Nurse Capacity in Primary Care

Our continued commitment to reconciliation

Healthy North Coast acknowledges historical and ongoing injustices and recognises the distinct cultures, values and inherent rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia.

We recognise the contributions of Aboriginal peoples and communities and are committed to a continual journey of learning and understanding. We are deeply dedicated to the ongoing implementation of our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

We hold ourselves, individually and as an organisation, accountable for advancing our understanding and maturity in cultural safety. This commitment extends to our workplace, commissioning activities, health services and the broader community, ensuring that primary health services are accessible, clinically effective and culturally safe.



Aboriginal Women's Network



Aboriginal Partnership



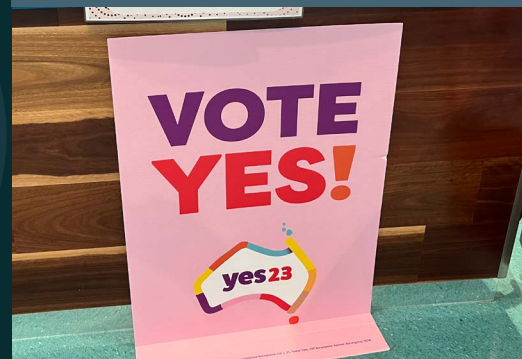
OneMob Big Brekkie



NAIDOC Week Staff Involvement



NAIDOC Week Grants



Support for Yes vote



Cultural Safety Training

Healthy partnerships

In 2023/24, Healthy North Coast continued to strengthen our commitment to fostering healthy partnerships across the region. Our landmark Healthy North Coast Aboriginal Partnership reflects our dedication to improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, while other key initiatives aimed at addressing critical health needs, enhancing service delivery and supporting our region's ageing population.

Key initiatives included:

- Healthy North Coast Aboriginal Partnership
- Local Health Districts Memorandum of Understanding
- Healthy Ageing Strategy



Healthy North Coast Aboriginal Partnership

In September 2023, Healthy North Coast and 6 North Coast Aboriginal Medical Services celebrated a landmark agreement, marking a crucial milestone in improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the North Coast. This agreement aligned with the 'National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021-2031,' focusing on ensuring that 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long, healthy lives that are centred in culture, with access to services that are prevention-focused, culturally safe and responsive, equitable and free of racism.'

The Agreement supported several key achievements:

Developing a joint North Coast Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Needs Assessment

Creating an Aboriginal-specific Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Alcohol and Other Drug service model

Establishing a collaborative Integrated Team Care service model

This partnership enhanced existing agreements with the Mid North Coast and Northern NSW Local Health Districts, contributing to a more integrated approach across primary and acute healthcare systems

'This partnership has been years in the making, and it is exciting to see it come to fruition through aligning the vision of 7 passionate and committed primary healthcare organisations.' – Scott Monaghan, CEO Bulgarr Ngaru Medical Aboriginal Corporation

'This is an important step in advancing the work we all do in delivering high-quality local health services for Aboriginal people in our region.' – Fay Adamson, CEO Werin Aboriginal Corporation

'By working in partnership, we are more effective and efficient – directing precious resources where they are most needed.' – Georgina Bruinsma, CEO Rekindling the Spirit

'The partnership will see us build and leverage regional capacity to improve health services for all Aboriginal communities across the North Coast.' – Tracy Singleton, CEO Galambila Aboriginal Health Service

'As primary healthcare organisations, we have a shared responsibility to deliver better outcomes for our Aboriginal communities and address the disparities that currently exist.' – Stephen Blunden, CEO Durri Aboriginal Corporation Medical Service

'It is important that responsibility for improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is shared across the health system. That's what this partnership will help to foster.' – Payden Samuelsson, CEO Bullinah Aboriginal Health Service

'Better Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health outcomes will be achieved when Aboriginal people control them. This agreement confirms Healthy North Coast's commitment to proactively seeking, and listening to, the advice and guidance of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations when it comes to commissioning in Aboriginal health. We are excited about this collaborative model and the opportunities it presents.' – Monika Wheeler, CEO Healthy North Coast

Local Health Districts Memorandum of Understanding

In July 2024, Healthy North Coast, Northern NSW Local Health District and Mid North Coast Local Health District signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at improving health outcomes across the coastal regions. This MoU has already enabled the delivery of a Joint Regional Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Alcohol and Other Drugs Plan, which focuses on addressing mental health issues, substance use and suicide rates through a unified approach.

Minister for Mental Health Rose Jackson highlighted the importance of the partnership, stating, 'Good mental health is a priority for each and every one of us, and I, for one, am all for partnerships that work well together to tackle drug and alcohol issues and improve mental health.' She emphasised that this collaboration will improve access to integrated services and reduce barriers for communities, addressing the challenge of independently operating services.

Healthy North Coast CEO Monika Wheeler added, 'This agreement solidifies our commitment to making local healthcare as user-friendly and cohesive as possible.' She noted that the MoU complements other regional health partnerships and aims to simplify the navigation of the local health system.

MNCLHD Chief Executive Stewart Dowrick and NNSWLHD Chief Executive Tracey Maisiey also emphasised the collaborative benefits of the MoU, including improved patient outcomes and reduced duplication in services.



Healthy Ageing Strategy

In 2024, Healthy North Coast launched its Healthy Ageing Strategy to address the unique challenges and opportunities posed by the region's ageing population. With 26% of residents between Port Macquarie and the Tweed aged 65 or over and projections showing that 30% of the population will be over 65 by 2030, the need for a comprehensive approach to ageing was clear.

Healthy North Coast CEO Monika Wheeler highlighted the increased demand on the healthcare system due to an ageing population. She stressed the importance of improving health early in life to enhance later years, stating, 'Healthy ageing is a journey that begins at birth. As we live longer, we need to ensure all our living years have choice, dignity and control.'

Developed in consultation with the community, aged care stakeholders and clinicians, the strategy prioritises wellness, independence and enablement. Key initiatives include digital health integration in aged care, the North Coast Care Finders Program, disaster management planning and the Greater Choice at Home Palliative Care program.

Owen Lednor, Clinical Project Consultant at The Shoreline Luxury Retirement Living in Coffs Harbour, expressed strong support for the strategy, praising its emphasis on digital health technology, noting that it improves access to primary healthcare and reduces the need for hospital visits.





Coordination

Healthy North Coast's commitment to enhancing the health and wellbeing of our communities is driven by a coordinated approach that ensures resources and services meet the unique needs of the North Coast region. By fostering strong partnerships, leveraging community insights and integrating feedback into strategic planning, we have been able to address critical health challenges, improve access to care and build resilience across our communities.

Key initiatives included:

- Health Needs Assessment
- Urgent Care Clinics
- Head to Health
- Disaster Preparedness Training
- Mountain Health Hub
- Better Health Stories
- Participatory Grant-Making

Health Needs Assessment

In early 2024, Healthy North Coast launched our 'Better Health' community survey to collect essential insights from residents across Northern NSW and the Mid North Coast. This initiative aimed to gather feedback to inform the North Coast Health Needs Assessment 2025–2028, which evaluates and addresses gaps in local health services.

Healthy North Coast CEO Monika Wheeler highlighted the survey's significance, noting, 'A strong community voice is essential for good health planning and decision-making.' She encouraged residents to provide feedback on their experiences with local health services, whether they faced issues like long wait times, confusing mental health support systems or were generally satisfied with their care. This community input is vital for identifying both strengths and areas for improvement in the region's health services.

Participants who completed the survey were entered into a draw to win one of twenty \$100 cash cards. Local community organisations and businesses also played a vital role in promoting the survey, enhancing its reach and impact.

The survey was open from 25 March to 14 April and saw a robust response, with over 3,300 participants. This response included a diverse range of age groups and a 6% representation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants. The feedback collected will be combined with other health data to form a detailed review of regional health needs.

The survey results will be crucial in shaping future health strategies and ensuring that resources are allocated effectively. Previous community feedback led to the creation of initiatives like the North Coast Health Connect telehealth service and the Healthy Me, Healthy Community program in Port Macquarie.

Healthy North Coast extends our gratitude to all who contributed for helping to shape the future of healthcare in the North Coast region. Community forums are taking place to discuss the survey findings and guide the development of the upcoming Health Needs Assessment report, which will be presented to the Department of Health and Aged Care later in the year.



3,300+
participants

6%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander participants

Urgent Care Clinics



In November 2023, Healthy North Coast commissioned 2 Medicare Urgent Care Clinics (UCCs) on behalf of the Australian Government in Coffs Harbour and Lismore. Since their establishment, the clinics have provided over 10,000 occasions of service. Designed to alleviate pressure on hospitals and emergency departments, the UCCs operate extended hours, including weekends, and offer bulk-billed services with walk-in availability.

The clinics have delivered 168 additional face-to-face medical and nursing care hours each week, with 37% outside regular business hours. They handle a range of acute health issues, such as minor infections, sprains, back pain, UTIs and minor injuries, ensuring that patients receive timely, supportive care. One patient reported that their miscarriage was handled with greater dignity and privacy at the UCC than when they had previously miscarried at the hospital ED, highlighting the importance of these clinics.

The UCCs have seen more than 8,705 unique patients, averaging about 25 daily. The most common reasons for visits included earaches, coughs, UTIs and viral illnesses. The new UCCs have been praised for their role in reducing the strain on local emergency departments and providing another layer of primary healthcare in the region.

The Coffs Harbour and Lismore UCCs are valuable additions to the existing network of health services, complementing local general practices, Aboriginal Medical Services, North Coast Health Connect and the Head to Health service.



Total presentations:

5,374

Coffs Harbour

5,234

Lismore

10,608

Total

Total unique patients:

4,281

Coffs Harbour

4,424

Lismore

8,705

Total

Head to Health



In 2023/24, the North Coast region made a significant improvement in enhancing wayfinding and service navigation for mental health and wellbeing support. As a result of insights collected through the 2022 Mental Health Reform Project, we were able to centralise mental health and wellbeing intake, assessment and referral pathways through the Head to Health Phone service. We saw a significant increase in service access and routed calls over the year, with 7,735 calls received, a notable increase on the previous year (3,284).

The launch of a new North Coast Head to Health website introduced a secure online referral system for the Head to Health mental health intake, assessment and referral (IAR) service.

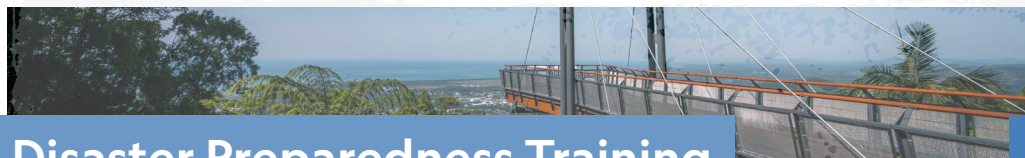
Head to Health continues to provide vital mental health support through both phone and in-person services. Its services include immediate assessments by mental health professionals, who then connect individuals to appropriate services. No referral or mental healthcare plan is required, and peer workers are available to assist with navigation and connection.

In addition to these services, the North Coast Head to Health team supports the community by providing easy access to local mental health services and support, which are available through both phone and in-person options.



7,735 calls made to the Head to Health
mental health phone service





Disaster Preparedness Training

In September 2023, Healthy North Coast partnered with the NSW SES to host disaster preparedness workshops for aged care providers. These workshops aimed to enhance emergency readiness by addressing the specific risks older people face during crises. With over 150 attendees across 5 Northern Rivers locations, including Coffs Harbour and Kempsey, the sessions focused on practical strategies for disaster response and recovery. Leveraging past experiences from bushfires, floods and COVID-19, participants worked through scenarios covering resident safety, resource management and communication, strengthening their capacity to protect vulnerable community members.

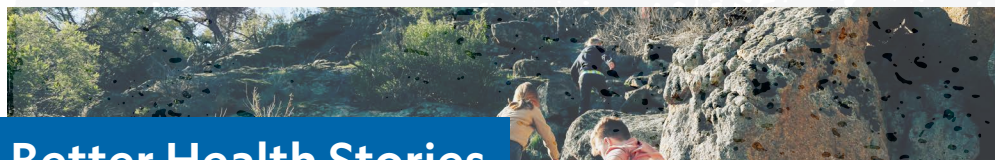
A scenario planning exercise was also conducted in Northern NSW with state disaster response agencies.



Mountain Health Hub

In February 2024, the Mountain Health Hub at Ulong proudly unveiled its new consultation room. Established in April 2021, the Hub has been a lifeline, offering essential services like GP consultations and health checks in an area often isolated due to road closures.

Healthy North Coast contributed approximately \$25,000, and additional funding was secured by Member for Coffs Harbour, Mr. Gurmeh Singh, through the NSW Department of Health. This adds to the \$10,000 contributed in 2015-2016 by Healthy North Coast through the Community Voices Program. The Eastern Dorrigo Community Hall Management Committee was pivotal in raising funds and driving the initiative forward.



Better Health Stories

In early 2024, Healthy North Coast released its first quarterly 'Better Health Stories,' a publication designed to highlight the programs and services that have led to positive health outcomes across the North Coast. Better Health Stories is shared with key industry and government stakeholders, offering a snapshot of activities that align with the PHN program's objectives of coordinating, commissioning and capacity-building to drive meaningful change.

This publication complements other communication efforts, including Healthy North Coast's monthly CEO Partner Updates, biannual ministerial report, annual reports and regular practitioner and community newsletters.



Participatory Grant-making

Healthy North Coast introduced a participatory grant-making approach to its 2024 Community Resilience and Wellbeing program, focusing on community-driven decisions. By involving local grassroots leaders directly in the funding process, \$1 million will be allocated to projects that bolster community wellbeing and resilience. Seven shortlisted organisations participated in workshops to present their proposals, receive peer feedback and vote on final funding decisions. This innovative approach aims to strengthen local capacity, foster collaboration and ensure that funding is distributed transparently and equitably, ultimately driving long-term positive change across the North Coast.

The Community Wellbeing and Resilience Program was a winner in the 2024 NSW Resilient Australia Awards.



It felt like it levelled the playing field, especially for organisations that may not have as much skill and capacity in grant writing. – workshop participant





Commissioning

In 2023/24, Healthy North Coast commissioned several key programs to enhance community health and wellbeing across the region. The initiatives focus on providing tailored support to diverse groups, addressing mental health needs, and fostering community connections. These programs aim to offer comprehensive care and improve quality of life for residents of all ages.

Key initiatives included:

- Primary Mental Health Program
- Care Finders
- Resilient Kids
- Psychosocial Support
- Social Prescribing
- North Coast Health Connect
- Suicide Prevention and Aftercare



Primary Mental Health Program



In 2023/24, Healthy North Coast's Primary Mental Health Program made significant strides in improving mental health services across the region. This year, the program focused on delivering multidisciplinary care through a hub and spoke model, ensuring that essential mental health services reached diverse communities, including underserved and hard-to-reach groups. The Primary Mental Health Program is delivered by a consortia led by EACH.

Three central hubs and 16 spoke services were established to provide a range of mental health supports. These included the Healthy Minds Program, offering psychological therapies; the Mental Health Nurse Program, assisting those with enduring mental health challenges; services tailored for young people aged 12-18 living with complex mental health challenges/or conditions; the Men's Wellbeing Matters Program for suicide prevention, which implemented evidence-based interventions to increase protective factors and provide support for those at risk; the Low Intensity Mental Health Service; and a Counselling Support Program in the Northern Rivers region.

During the financial year, the program has delivered services to 4,653 clients, 2,589 of whom were new clients and 1,297 of whom identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This represented a substantial increase in engagement, particularly within the Mental Health Nurse Program, which saw participation rise to 728 clients in the fourth quarter, up from 549 in the first quarter.

The program's impact was evident in the improvements in client outcomes with clients showing better outcome scores, rising from 24.5% in the first quarter to 53.5% by quarter four. Access to psychological therapies and clinical care coordination also improved, along with a more effective 7-day follow-up for suicide risk referrals.

One of the program's early successes was the Healthy Minds Group, piloted by a contracted practitioner. This group therapy initiative

involved 8 participants over 3 sessions, achieving a 100% attendance rate. All participants showed improved outcome scores (K10), demonstrating the effectiveness of group therapy in increasing practitioner capacity and enhancing client wellbeing.

A participant of the Healthy Minds Group shared their experience, saying, 'I had many "ah ha" moments from being able to understand myself better. The experience of setting a boundary was incredibly powerful. I realised I had never experienced setting a boundary before.'

These achievements reflect our commitment to addressing the North Coast region's mental health needs through innovative, community-centered approaches. By expanding access to care and focusing on tailored, evidence-based services, our Primary Mental Health Program is making a meaningful difference in the lives of those it serves.

32,000+
occasions of service

2,589
new clients

1,297
identified as Aboriginal and/
or Torres Strait Islander.

4,326
clients accessed
psychological therapies
(a 41% increase on
previous year)

655
active Clinical Care
Coordination clients (a 48%
increase on previous year)

Care Finders



The Care Finders Program, launched in early 2023, addresses the complexity of Australia's aged care system by providing free, essential support to vulnerable older people. The program helps those without other assistance to understand, apply for and set up aged care services. The Care Finders Program is delivered by EACH, Carexcell, Lifetime Connect and Footprints.

Four organisations on the North Coast have been funded to deliver this crucial service. In 2023-2024, the program assisted 515 people, recorded 3,500 interactions with active clients and Care Finder staff and provided 3,000 hours of assertive outreach. 148 clients were referred to health services and support and of those checked in with, 90% have remained connected to services. The services include guiding older people through finding aged care services, navigating assessment processes and managing the My Aged Care system.

The program aims to improve support coordination, understanding of aged care services, engagement with the system and continued connection to necessary services. It also seeks to enhance integration between health, aged care and other local systems.

One notable case involved an 84-year-old man with hearing impairment and limited English, living alone after being impacted by recent floods. With the support of a Care Finder, he received crucial domestic assistance, a personal alarm and social support services.

'Thank you for organising everything for Mum so quickly. Everything is looking clearer, and we understand a lot more about MAC now. You have been very caring, understanding, and efficient.'
– Care Finder consumer

'I could not have done the process without a Care Finder. I am glad to have the support as it has made a huge difference.'
– Care Finder consumer

'I honestly could not have done all this without you, and I would be lost. You have been there all the time to get me through this, and I am very grateful.'
– Care Finder consumer

3,500
interactions with
active clients

515
people assisted through
the program

Resilient Kids



The Resilient Kids Program, launched in November 2023, was created to support the health and wellbeing of young people in the Northern Rivers region who were impacted by the 2022 floods. Funded by a \$10 million Australian Government grant through the National Emergency Management Agency, the program was co-designed with children, young people, schools, families and service providers to ensure it met the needs of those it aimed to help.

The program has been delivered by Social Futures in partnership with The Family Centre and Human Nature Therapy. It focuses on school-based education and skills building while also establishing local hubs to support community resilience. Since its launch, **3,431** young people have accessed the program's services, with an impressive **93%** reporting positive outcomes. For First Nations youth and those with autism or cognitive disabilities, this positive response rate reached 100% and 73% respectively.

A 2022 Resilience Survey, which gathered insights from 6,611 students across 75 Northern Rivers schools, highlighted the ongoing need for such initiatives.

One student, 'Ray', is now receiving support through the child and adolescent mental health service program with the help of a Resilient Kids counsellor. Ray describes participating in the social and emotional wellbeing group as 'a highlight of my week'.

3,431
young people
have accessed the
program's services

93%
reported positive
outcomes

100%
of First Nations
youth reported
positive outcomes

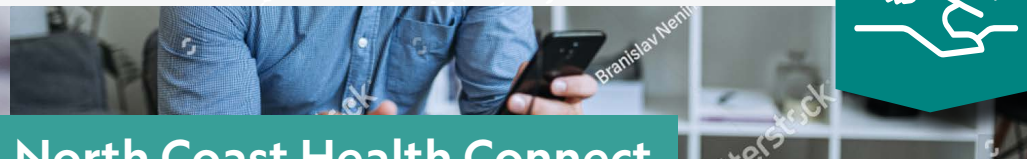
73% of
those with autism or
cognitive disabilities
reported positive
outcomes





Social Prescribing

Healthy North Coast's social prescribing initiative, launched as part of the Healthy Ageing Strategy 2023-2027, aims to improve the quality of life for older adults by fostering social connections and community engagement. Through the Healthy Me, Healthy Community program, delivered in partnership with Feros Care, participants receive tailored support to reconnect with activities that bring joy and purpose, helping to alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation. One participant, Jim, said, 'My wellbeing coach was there for me ... She really cares about who I am as a person.' In 2023/24, the program has continued to help older adults live well, age well and stay connected.



North Coast Health Connect

North Coast Health Connect, launched in 2023, provides residents with a free 1800 phone number and live web chat to speak with a registered nurse 24/7, including public holidays. Funded by Healthy North Coast and delivered by Amplar Health, this service offers quick, confidential assessments for urgent health concerns. If needed, the nurse can connect residents with a local GP, pharmacist or a virtual care appointment. Serving as a new front door to healthcare in Northern NSW, North Coast Health Connect has helped 11,107 community members access timely health advice this year.



Psychosocial Support

Healthy North Coast's Psychosocial Support Program, part of the 2022 Mental Health Reform Project, offers non-clinical, community-based support to help young people recover from mental illness. Run by Mission Australia, the program helps participants develop essential life skills, reconnect with their communities and work towards personal recovery goals. In 2023/24, 76% of participants experienced improvements in their recovery, and 70% reported notable progress in their mental health. Through personalised support, like assisting with financial management or daily activities, the program builds trust and provides a solid foundation for continued mental health and wellbeing.



Suicide Prevention and Aftercare

Aftercare programs provide psychosocial care and outreach services to assist people in recovering from a suicide attempt or crisis. In 2023/24, Healthy North Coast commissioned comprehensive aftercare services across the North Coast. Social Futures delivered the Care Connect Program in the Mid North Coast, and New Horizons provided The Way Back Service in Northern NSW. Collectively, these aftercare services supported 233 clients with wraparound care and expert safety planning, and provided critical linkages to appropriate services and supports.

Communication with Care Connect was done so well. They made me aware of the importance of opening up. They taught me to look at things differently – a new way of thinking. – Care Connect participant



Capacity-building

In 2023/24, Healthy North Coast's capacity-building focused on enhancing the skills and capabilities of our health professionals. We facilitated 84 educational events, which provided valuable learning opportunities and fostered networking among practitioners.

90% of General Practices across our region are actively engaging with us, and our resources for quality improvement or practice support have been utilised 612 times.

In addition, 46 in-practice quality improvement training sessions took place.

We also expanded digital health capabilities in aged care, supported workforce wellbeing in flood-affected areas and continued to strengthen specialist outreach and nurse capacity.

Key initiatives included:

- Education
- Digital Health in RACHs
- Workforce Support and Wellbeing
- Safe Havens
- Specialist Outreach Clinics
- Building Nurse Capacity
- Health Pathways

Education



84

events delivered in
2023 and 2024

173

health professionals
attended the Immediate Care
in Primary Health Conference

In 2023/24, Healthy North Coast delivered an extensive array of educational opportunities to enhance the knowledge and skills of health professionals across the region. This year, we proudly hosted 89 impactful events that brought together 1,729 practitioners for learning, networking and professional development.

A key highlight of the year was the Chronic Disease Forums, held in Port Macquarie and Lismore. These forums focused on the pressing issue of chronic disease management, which remains a significant challenge for our communities. Dr Andy Williams, a GP Medical Educator, noted, 'From health issues such as long COVID, through to heart and lung disease to diabetes and arthritis, our population is struggling with a tsunami of ill health and nowhere is that more apparent than on the North Coast of NSW with our ageing population.' The forums featured a blend of local and regional experts, offering interdisciplinary discussions, case studies and profession-specific streams tailored to the needs of GPs, nurses, allied health professionals and practice managers.

Another notable event was the Immediate Care in Primary Health Conference, held on 22 June at Pacific Bay Resort in Coffs Harbour. With 173 health professionals in attendance, the conference featured a panel discussion on 'tackling health reform' and a diverse range of sessions covering immediate care in various contexts. Attendees praised the conference for its engaging presentations and the opportunity for meaningful networking. 'I think that was one of the best conference days

I've had in years – all the speakers were so engaging,' said one participant.

In addition to these large-scale events, Healthy North Coast offered a range of other educational resources. Our online CPD sessions included webinars on topics such as Children's Health Week, Older Persons Health Week, dementia, long COVID and vaccinations. We also hosted a 2-part webinar series on Voluntary Assisted Dying, providing vital information as the legislation came into effect.

Local Clinical Societies continued to play a key role in fostering professional connections and knowledge sharing. With societies available in 8 regions, our local communities had ample opportunities to engage in face-to-face meetings and online interactions.

Our educational efforts also included a Community Stroke Information Day, aimed at raising awareness and providing resources to First Nations Australians, who face a higher risk of stroke. Held on 10 August at the Dunghutti Elders Council, this event featured health checks, local stories and valuable resources for attendees.

Digital health in RACHs

The Digital Health in Residential Aged Care Program has made great strides in improving primary and specialist care access for North Coast's aged care residents. More than 60 residential aged care homes now benefit from advanced virtual health technology, allowing residents to receive care from the safety and comfort of their own homes.

One of the standout innovations is the Visionflex 'Telehealth Cart', which is being piloted in 10 residential aged care homes. This sophisticated system includes a camera for wound reviews and oral examinations, general observation tools, a digital stethoscope, an otoscope and a 3-lead ECG wire. It facilitates comprehensive remote consultations and evaluations.

A notable success story from this program involves an 83-year-old resident who accessed a Parkinson's Disease specialist in Sydney through telehealth. This technology not only improved his care experience but also spared him and his wife from the stress and complexities of travel. By avoiding the need for specialist transport and multiple hospital admissions, the telehealth approach proved both cost-effective and transformative, highlighting its potential to enhance patient care, especially in remote areas.



Workforce support and wellbeing

No general practices in Lismore have closed to date since the 2022 floods. An additional round of funding opened in March 2024, making this initiative part of a \$2.23 million package dedicated to supporting clinical and frontline staff.

The program operates through 4 key streams: wellbeing, education, locum support and disaster preparedness. To date, it has benefited 108 organisations and supported over 2,500 healthcare workers in enhancing their wellbeing, resilience and preparedness. More than 40 organisations have engaged in strengthening their business continuity planning.

This support has been crucial in ensuring that no general practices in Lismore have had to close due to the flooding disaster. As Kyle Wood, Owner of Southside Chempro, noted, the program offers essential relief and assistance to the health workforce, allowing them to continue providing vital services to the community during challenging times.





Safe Havens

Safe Havens were commissioned for three years by Healthy North Coast in 2022 through the NSW Government's Mental Health and Wellbeing Flood Recovery Package, off the back of devastating floods in the Northern Rivers region.

Operated by The Buttery and located in Lismore, Murwillumbah, Mullumbimby and Woodburn, Safe Havens offer adults a free, compassionate and friendly 'drop-in' service in a non-clinical environment for immediate, personalised mental health support and counselling.

Since opening the doors to the four Safe Haven services, 15,600+ hours of counselling has been provided to more than 14,400 participants. In June 2024 alone, more than 700 people connected with the Safe Havens showing that these services are still very much needed by the community.

"I think it's great news that the Safe Havens are being continued in the heavily flood-affected communities that we work in. Mental health services are both valued and needed." Safe Haven peer worker

Building Nurse Capacity

In May 2024, Healthy North Coast, in partnership with the Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA), launched 2 pivotal programs to bolster the skills of primary care nurses. The Transition to Practice Program (TPP) supported 8 new nurses with mentoring, educational resources and networking. Simultaneously, the Building Nurse Capacity (BNC) program involved 13 practices in developing nurse-led, team-based care models focusing on key health areas. With a combined investment of \$331,000, these initiatives aim to enhance care delivery and support improved health outcomes for North Coast residents.

Specialist Outreach Clinics

Since their establishment in 2000, Healthy North Coast's Mid North Coast Specialist Outreach Clinics have offered vital specialist medical services in Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie. The clinics provide a wide range of specialities, including neurology, dermatology, psychiatry and endocrinology. Equipped with advanced procedure and treatment rooms, they feature facilities for nerve conduction studies, EEG and UVB light treatment.

Specialists travel from various locations across Australia to deliver care, supported by a dedicated team of nurses, technicians and administrative staff. In 2023-2024 the clinics delivered 7,076 occasions of service, reflecting an 8% increase on the previous year. As noted by a visiting specialist and a patient, the clinics offer an exceptional working and care environment, with staff who consistently go above and beyond.

Health Pathways

In 2023/24, Healthy North Coast continued to enhance the Mid and North Coast HealthPathways, a crucial resource that aligns care teams across hospitals and communities. This portal provides general practitioners, specialists, nurses and allied health professionals with comprehensive guidance on assessing, managing, and referring patients based on local service availability and requirements.

During this period, the HealthPathways team developed 15 new clinical pathways, reviewed 119 and updated 102. Key achievements included the launch of the GP to GP Referral page in June 2023, which saw 90 registrations. The program also introduced new pathways in areas like Diabetes Medications and Mental Health Stepped Care. Notably, user access requests surged to 402, reflecting the growing reliance on this valuable tool. The program was promoted at 42 education events, highlighting its integral role in improving regional healthcare delivery.

Statement of Profit and Loss

		JUN 2024 (\$)	JUN 2023 (\$)
Revenue	From Continuing Operations	81,661,952	81,587,554
	Interest and Distribution Income	2,562,021	1,572,291
	Unrealised gain/(loss) on investments at fair value	294,985	224,024
Expenses	Commissioned Services	(63,283,753)	(57,578,842)
	Employee Benefits Expense	(11,429,909)	(9,104,846)
	Client Support Services	(2,769,864)	(7,287,285)
	IT and Telecommunications	(1,419,935)	(1,547,700)
	Depreciation and Amortisation Expense	(1,655,953)	(1,994,097)
	Conference Attendance and Hosting	(305,442)	(236,105)
	Insurances	(187,681)	(196,544)
	Printing, Postage and Stationery	(76,810)	(77,674)
	Property Expenses	(383,373)	(255,874)
	Consultancy Expenses	(123,349)	(249,607)
	Agency/Advisory expense	(916,078)	(1,669,116)
	Minor Works		(580,799)
	Interest Expense on Lease Liability	(92,980)	(101,265)
Other Expenses		(1,637,017)	(1,757,792)
Year end surplus		236,814	746,323
Income Tax Expense		-	-
Net profit for the Year		236,814	746,323
Other Comprehensive Income		-	-
Total Comprehensive Income for the Year		236,814	746,323

Statement of Financial Position

			JUN 2024 (\$)	JUN 2023 (\$)
Assets	Current Assets	Cash and Cash Equivalents	16,639,430	17,864,196
		Trade and Other Receivables	9,406,971	3,645,174
		Other Financial Assets	31,876,391	29,529,228
		Other Assets	39,757	191,802
	Total Current Assets		57,962,549	51,230,400
	Non-Current Assets	Trade and Other Receivables	72,190	84,440
		Property, Plant and Equipment	2,213,727	2,371,615
		Intangible Assets	89,478	126,309
		Right-of-use Assets	2,278,534	2,662,949
	Total Non-Current Assets		4,653,929	5,245,313
	Total Assets		62,616,478	56,475,713
Liabilities	Current Liabilities	Trade and Other Payables	20,812,768	14,236,729
		Borrowings	1,891,843	-
		Lease Liabilities	515,767	709,906
		Contract Liabilities	28,452,093	31,322,910
		Provisions	400,000	5,000
		Employee Benefits	957,948	698,742
	Total Current Liabilities		53,030,419	46,973,287
	Non-Current Liabilities	Lease Liabilities	1,914,019	2,043,178
		Employee Benefits	76,848	100,870
	Total Non-Current Liabilities		1,990,867	2,144,048
	Total Liabilities		55,021,286	49,117,335
	Net Assets		7,595,192	7,358,378
Equity	Retained Earnings		7,595,192	7,358,378
	Total Equity		7,595,192	7,358,378



**HEALTHY
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An Australian Government Initiative

Healthy North Coast is an independent, not-for-profit organisation proudly delivering the PHN Program in North Coast NSW. We are committed to improving the health of our communities through quality primary health care. The PHN Program is an Australian Government initiative.

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