

BETTER HEALTH *stories*

OCTOBER–DECEMBER 2023

I'm delighted to share and celebrate with you a range of impactful primary healthcare updates from our region in our first edition of **Better Health stories**. Each quarter, we will showcase the work that we and our partners are doing to support better health outcomes for our North Coast communities. Now more than ever, equitable access to and quality of primary health care is paramount to quality of life. Our **Better Health stories** demonstrate the value we bring to the North Coast in the strategic focus areas of coordinating, commissioning and capacity building.

Monika



Monika Wheeler | Chief Executive

SNAPSHOT

6

Aboriginal Medical Services have partnered with Healthy North Coast for landmark agreement

61

North Coast Residential Aged Care Homes now equipped with latest telehealth technology

536

occasions of service have been delivered by newly opened Medicare Urgent Care Clinics

415

older people assisted in accessing community support services through the Care Finders Program

\$10m

invested to support Northern Rivers young people through the Resilient Kids Program

150

local aged care, emergency services teams and agencies attended disaster preparedness training

2,113

clients received a service from the newly commissioned Primary Mental Health Program

1,015

clinicians participated in Healthy North Coast in-person and online clinical education events



View online
hnc.org.au/better-health-stories

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands across our region, and pay our respect to Elders past, present and on their journey.



Coordination

New Urgent Care Clinics improving access to same-day care

In November, Medicare Urgent Care Clinics (UCCs) opened in Coffs Harbour and Lismore, **delivering 536 occasions of service in the first six weeks of operation.**

UCCs make it easier for the community to access care for urgent, but not life-threatening illnesses and injuries, helping reduce the pressure on hospitals and emergency departments.

They are open extended hours including over the weekend, offer bulk-billed services, and can take walk-in patients.

168 additional hours of face-to-face medical and nursing primary care has been delivered each week, with 38% of these hours being delivered out of hours and over the weekend.

The UCCs are a valuable addition to our existing healthcare services including local general practices, Aboriginal Medical Services, North Coast Health Connect, and the Head to Health service.



Read more hnc.org.au/medicare-urgent-care-clinics

Partnership increases focus on Aboriginal health outcomes

In late 2023 a landmark agreement was established with six North Coast Aboriginal Medical Services. The partnership will place an increased focus on improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the North Coast.

We know that our Aboriginal community members often experience poorer health than non-Aboriginal people, and recognise that improvement relies on effective cross sectoral partnerships and leadership of Aboriginal organisations and communities.

This partnership has been years in the making, and it is exciting to see it come to fruition through aligning the vision of seven passionate and committed primary healthcare organisations.

Scott Monaghan
CEO Bulgarr Ngaru Medical
Aboriginal Corporation



Read more hnc.org.au/media/aboriginal-partnership



Commissioning

Helping older people access aged care services

Australia's aged care system is complex, with some older people finding it difficult to navigate and access the care and supports they need.

The Care Finders Program is a FREE service that supports vulnerable older people who have no one else to help them to learn about, apply for and set up support services.

On the North Coast, four organisations have received funding to provide this important service. Since its implementation in early 2023:

415

people have been assisted.

4,000

interactions have been recorded between clients and Care Finder staff.

2,277

occasions of service were recorded, which includes helping older people find aged care services, supporting them through the assessment processes and the My Aged Care system.

“ I am so pleased there is finally a service like Care finders because the system is just too confusing to do it alone. Thank you for always helping me and supporting me through this time in my life where I felt like I had no one else to help me find help.

Care Finder recipient



“

I had a lot of “ah ha” moments from being able to understand myself better, each of these moments I LOVED.

Improving mental health outcomes

The Healthy North Coast Primary Mental Health Program was commissioned as a result of the 2022 Mental Health Reform Project. The program focuses on multi-disciplinary mental health and wellbeing treatment with **three hubs and 16 spoke services across the North Coast.**

The program includes the Healthy Minds Program, Mental Health Nurse Program, service models targeted at 12-18 year-olds, a suicide prevention program, a low intensity mental health service, and a counselling support program

2,111 clients received a service of which 681 were new clients and 292 identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

66.3% of clients showed improvement in outcome scores (up from 24.5% in Q1).



Capacity Building

Transformative clinical education paves the way for improved patient care

Our Education Team hosted **43 in-person and online education events that saw 1,015 clinicians attend.** The flagship Clinical Society Chronic Disease Forums in November saw almost 200 health professionals come together in Lismore and Port Macquarie, while the previous quarter's Clinical Society events discussed ways to improve the management of osteoporosis on the North Coast. Voluntary Assisted Dying webinars helped to provide information about the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2022 legislation to support local GPs.

Excellent format and delivery, lots of opportunity to ask questions to specialists and update knowledge.

The information was very specific. It was refreshing to have such an open forum on a subject of such sensitive nature.

Voluntary Assisted Dying webinar participants

Improving primary care access for aged care residents through telehealth

Thanks to our Digital Health in Residential Aged Care Program, over 60 North Coast residential aged care homes are now equipped with virtual health technology to enable the delivery of primary and specialist care telehealth services so that residents can now access primary and specialist care from the safety and comfort of their own home. This includes 10 residential aged care homes (RACHs) who are piloting the Visionflex 'Telehealth Cart', an advanced virtual care system that features a camera for wound review or oral examination, general observation equipment, a digital stethoscope and otoscope, plus a 3-lead ECG wire.

Training and capacity building activities are being delivered to RACH staff as well as to local general practices.



TELEHEALTH CASE STUDY

Thanks to new telehealth equipment, an 83-year-old North Coast aged care home resident significantly improved his care experience and quality of life to access a Parkinson's Disease specialist in Sydney. His local healthcare team was also able to join up for a comprehensive review of his condition and support plan. This technology-enabled care not only enhanced the resident's wellbeing but also eliminated the stress and logistical complexities for he and his wife in travelling to Sydney. The use of telehealth presented considerable savings to the health and aged care systems by avoiding the cost of arranging a specialist helicopter, the need for a registered nurse (RN) escort, hospital admissions at both the local and accepting hospitals in Sydney (which are prerequisites for air transport services), and the expenses related to ancillary staff in Sydney. This approach demonstrated a seamless, cost-effective way to deliver specialised medical care, underscoring the potential of telehealth in transforming patient experiences, particularly for those in remote locations.

