



HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2025-2028

Ballina LGA

Located in the Northern Rivers region of NSW, the Traditional Custodians of the lands of the Ballina **Local Government Area (LGA)** are peoples of the Bundjalung Nation. Ballina LGA shares boundaries with 3 other LGAs; Byron, Richmond Valley and Lismore and is part of the Richmond Valley - Coastal SA3 region and Northern NSW Local Health District. Ballina LGA has beautiful, unique geographic features; beaches and rockpools, waterways (including the Richmond River), and the escarpment and plateau near Alstonville, overlooking the coast. With a growing ageing population, Ballina LGA has specific health challenges in the areas of healthy ageing and chronic disease prevention and management. The services sector, including health care and social assistance, and retail are the LGA's main industry followed by tourism and agriculture, construction and manufacturing.



Demographics

Population:

46,287 people, 9% of the North Coast population. Projected to increase by 6% by 2031 (compared to 5% increase North Coast)

Population density:

97 residents per km² (17 per km² North Coast)



4% identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (6% North Coast)



Median age **48** (47 North Coast, 39 NSW)



4% of population born in non-English speaking countries (1% North Coast, 19% NSW, 16% Australia)



26% aged 65 years or over, projected to increase by 22% by 2031 (increase 18% North Coast and 29% NSW)



Children and young people's health

Less than 1 in 5 children in Ballina LGA were assessed as vulnerable in one or more areas of early childhood development.

Child immunisation rates

Full immunisation rates for children are slightly below the NSW and Australian rates.

92% of 1-year-old children (94% in NSW and Australia).

88% of 2-year-old children (92% NSW and Australia).

94% of 5-year-old children (94% NSW and Australia).

Older people

58% of people aged 65 years and over have at least one long-term health condition.

3% of the population live with dementia (2% NSW and Australia).
Expected to increase as the 65 years and over population increases.

59% of survey* respondents reported the ageing population is one of the most serious health concerns in the community.

47% of survey* respondents found accessing services for older people difficult.

Challenges included a lack of services and difficulty in organising services.

Did you know: Care finders is a free service. It exists to support vulnerable people who have no one else who can support them to learn about, apply for and set up support services.

Scan the QR code to visit the Care finders website.



Aboriginal health and wellbeing

Healthy North Coast works in partnership with Aboriginal Medical Services across the region to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal peoples, families and community. Bullinah Aboriginal Health Service provides services to the Aboriginal communities across the LGA.

23% of people had an Aboriginal health check in Richmond Valley- Coastal SA3.

Connection to country and culture is key for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples social and emotional wellbeing.

Programs that Aboriginal peoples identified to help keep Aboriginal communities healthy and strong:

- Exercise and fitness
- Support with daily living/personal care
- Yarning circles
- Community health education events
- Men's health
- Training programs

Social determinants

67 per 1,000 people need assistance due to age or severe disability (75 per 1,000 North Coast, 58 per 1,000 NSW).

Domestic and family violence rate of **3 per 1,000** people (NSW 4 per 1,000 people).

Lowest in the North Coast region and has reduced by 6% in recent years.

There is extremely limited availability of affordable housing in the Ballina LGA. Of the **72** rental properties available **3** were affordable by a couple with 2 children on minimum wage and receiving family tax benefits and **0** properties were affordable for singles or couples on age pension, job seeker, youth allowance or a single person on minimum wage.

Adequate access to affordable housing is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Median total weekly personal income is **\$737** (\$652 North Coast, NSW \$813).

Second highest average personal income in the region.

28% single or lone households (25% NSW) and 4% group homes (4% NSW).

Social isolation can increase health risks.

Less than **1%** of people report very low proficiency in English (5% NSW).

Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD) score **1,015**, (Australia 1,000).

Ballina is placed as the second highest ranked LGA in the region, and is in the eighth decline nationally, indicating higher levels of socio-economic advantage.

Homelessness:

2 in 1,000

people experience homelessness (4 in 1,000 in North Coast and NSW, 9 in 1,000 in Australia).

3 in 1,000

people at risk of homelessness (4 in 1,000 in North Coast and NSW, 7 in 1,000 in Australia).

*Throughout this document 'survey' refers to the 2024 Better Health Community survey undertaken as part of the Health Needs Assessment 2025-28 consultation process

Preventative health and chronic disease

Just under 1 in 5 people have 2 or more chronic conditions.
The most common chronic conditions are anxiety and asthma.

Cancer screening participation:

45%
National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NSW 40%)

58%
BreastScreen Australia (NSW 50%)

52%
National Cervical Screening Program (NSW 46%).

The most diagnosed cancers:

1. Skin cancer
2. Urogenital cancer
3. Breast cancer.

The cancer with the highest death rate is respiratory cancer.

Opportunity: strengthen preventative health programs, and provide education opportunities in partnership with LHDs and community organisations to ensure early intervention and prevention for chronic disease.

Risks:

Current smoking		Alcohol consumption ²	
Ballina	NSW	Ballina	NSW
15%	12%	27%	18%
Physical activity ¹		Inadequate fruit intake	
Ballina	NSW	Ballina	NSW
72%	77%	54%	55%
Obese		Overweight (not obese)	
Ballina	NSW	Ballina	NSW
31%	31%	33%	34%

¹ aged 15 years and over, who did not meet 2014 physical activity guidelines
² estimated number of persons aged 15 years and over who consumed 5 or more standard alcoholic drinks on any day in the last 12 months at least monthly

When you were asked...

What kind of programs would you like more of, to keep you and your community healthy and strong?

Exercise and fitness

Health screening services

Women's health

Art and cultural programs

Which do you see as the most serious health concerns in your community?

Mental health issues

Ageing population

Drug and alcohol use

Lack of access to healthcare services

Mental health

What you have shared about your experiences with mental health:

1 in 10 people needed to access a mental health service but couldn't.

5 in 10 people reported mental health as one of the most serious health concerns in the community.

6 in 10 found it difficult to access a psychologist, counsellor or social worker.

Opportunity: strengthen preventive health programs and partnerships with community organisations to plan, respond, and support community mental health and recover from environmental disasters.

The top challenges to access mental health services:

- Cost
- Lack of services
- Difficult to organise appointments.

In Richmond Valley-Coastal SA3, the rate of suicide deaths is 17 per 100,000 population (11 per 100,000 population NSW).

Over 1 in 5 people in the Northern NSW local health district (LHD) area, have experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress.

Just over 1 in 10 residents in Richmond Valley-Coastal SA3, accessed GP mental health services (highest in the region).

Did you know: Medicare Mental Health Centres can help you access the local mental health services and supports that are right for you. No referral needed, access by phoning 1800 595 212.

Healthcare in Ballina LGA

Ballina District Hospital is a rural community hospital providing a range of public healthcare services (emergency department, general, renal, rehabilitation, surgical services, medical imaging, community health).



Opportunity: Continue to work in partnership to support recruitment and retention of the healthcare workforce.

Access to primary and community health services

57% of ED presentations are for lower urgency care (52 % North Coast, 48% NSW).

After-hours GP attendances rate in Richmond Valley-Coastal SA3 is **5%** (Australia 17%).

Declining rates of bulk billing for medical care impact affordability and access for some residents.

Opportunity: Improve access to primary care services for lower urgency care needs.

Barriers to accessing primary care include:

- Long wait time for an appointment with a specialist
- Cost
- Difficulty getting an appointment.

Did you know: If you need medical advice and care, call Healthdirect for free, 24/7 on 1800 022 222 and speak to a registered nurse. They can also connect you or your children with virtual health care services, so you can receive care from wherever you are.

Scan the QR code to go to the Healthdirect website.



Healthy North Coast commissioned services

HNC commissions a range of community-based services to address local health needs. These include:

- Aboriginal health
- Alcohol & Other Drugs
- Mental health
- Youth specific
- Integrated Team Care.

For more information about the services available in Ballina LGA, please scan the QR code:

If you have any questions please email Betterhealth@hnc.org.au

