

## HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2025-2028

# Bellingen LGA

Bellingen **Local Government Area (LGA)** is on the Traditional Lands of peoples of the Gumbayngirr Nation. Bellingen LGA neighbours Coffs Harbour, Nambucca Valley, Clarence Valley and Armidale LGAs and is part of the Coffs Harbour SA3 and Mid North Coast Local Health District. Bellingen LGA is predominantly rural, with several small townships and villages including the main towns of Urunga (coastal), Bellingen (valley), and Dorrigo (mountain plateau). The geography ranges from coastal dune and beach areas, river valleys and floodplains, hinterland and escarpment areas and volcanic landscapes on the Dorrigo plateau. Over half of the LGA is classed as national park or state forest, including World Heritage protected areas. The main industries include agriculture, forestry and fishing, manufacturing, construction and care and assistance industries. It is a popular tourist destination for holiday makers and day trippers.

## Demographics

### Population:

13,259 people, 2% of the North Coast population. Projected to increase by 2% by 2031 (compared to 5% increase North Coast)

### Population density:

8 residents per km<sup>2</sup> (17 per km<sup>2</sup> North Coast)



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



Median age **50** (47 North Coast, 39 NSW)



**26%** aged 65 years or over, projected to increase by 7% by 2031 (increase 18% North Coast and 29% NSW)



## Children and young people's health



Nearly **1 in 4** children assessed as vulnerable in one or more areas of early childhood development.



**1 in 2** found it difficult to access a local GP for a child in their care.



**1 in 2** found it difficult to access a specialist doctor for a child in their care.

Highest presence of post-natal depression in the North Coast. **3 times** higher than the North Coast average.

**Opportunity:** Work in partnership to improve education, support, community and peer-based services for children and families.

## Child immunisation rates

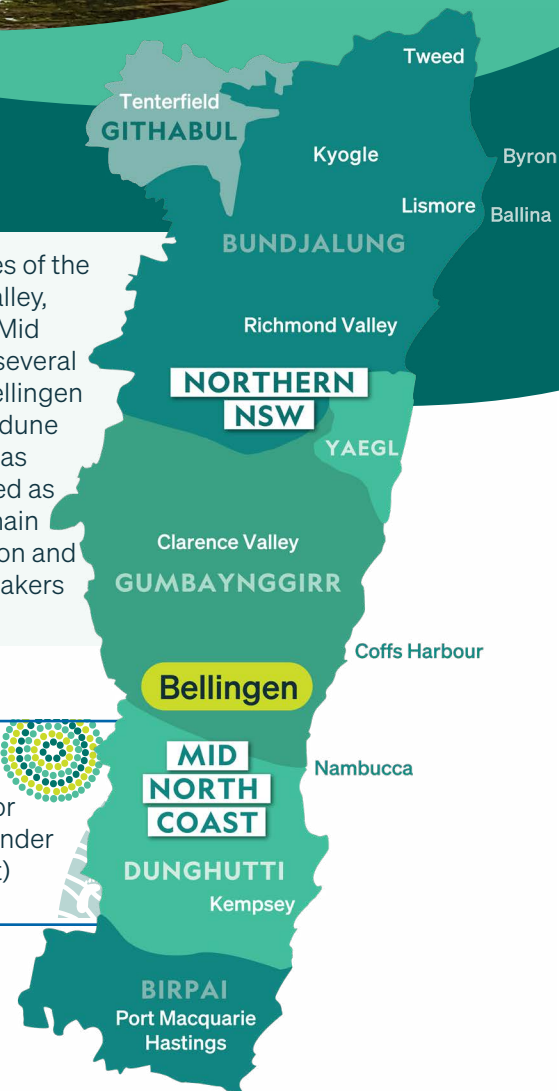
Full immunisation rates for children are considerably below the NSW and Australian benchmarks.

**85%** of 1-year-old children (94% in NSW and Australia).

**77%** of 2-year-old children (92% NSW and Australia).

**83%** of 5-year-old children (94% NSW and Australia).

**Opportunity:** Understand reasons for low immunisation rates and work with community and healthcare providers on improvement strategies.



## Older people

**54%** of people aged 65 years and over have at least one long-term health condition.

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

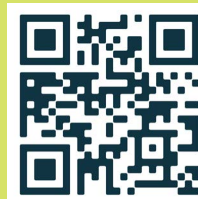
**62%** of survey\* respondents reported the ageing population is one of the most serious health concerns in the community.

**67%** of survey\* respondents found accessing services for older people difficult.

**Opportunity:** Increase support and education regarding available services for people as they age and for ageing relatives or people in their care.

**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 partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal peoples, families and communities. Galambila Aboriginal Health Service provides a range of primary health care services for Aboriginal people and their families residing in Gumbaynggirr country.

26% of people had an Aboriginal health check in Coffs Harbour SA3



Aboriginal peoples' responses when asked "what kind of programs would you like more of to keep your community healthy and strong"

Exercise and fitness

Yarning circles



## Social determinants

**62 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 **4 per 1,000** people (NSW 4 per 1,000 people).

Reduced 5% since 2021.

Just over **9 in 10** survey respondents noted housing availability as a concern for the community.

There is limited availability of affordable housing in the Bellingen LGA. Adequate access to affordable housing is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Median total weekly personal income is **\$613** (\$652 North Coast, NSW \$813).

**29%** single or lone households (25% NSW) and 4% group homes (4% NSW).

Social isolation can increase health risks.

Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD) score **981**, (Australia 1,000).

Of the 12 LGAs in the North Coast region, Bellingen is ranked 8th out of the 12 LGAs for disadvantage. People who live in rural areas of the LGA are more likely to experience disadvantage in accessing healthcare.

### Homelessness:

**2 in 1,000**

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

**2 in 1,000**

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

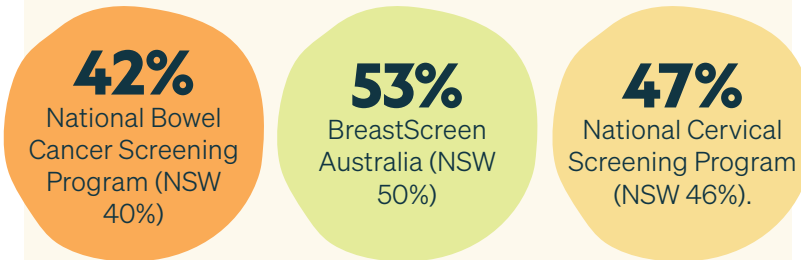
\*Throughout this document 'survey' refers to the 2024 Better Health Community survey undertaken as part of the Health Needs Assessment 2025-28 consultation process

# Preventative health and chronic disease

1 in every 5 people have 2 or more chronic conditions.

The most common chronic conditions are anxiety, osteoarthritis, asthma and depression.

## Cancer screening participation:



## The most diagnosed cancers:

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

The cancer with the highest death rate is bowel cancer.

## Risks:

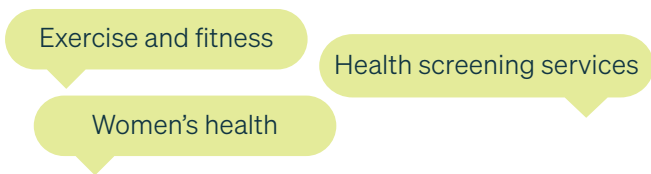
Current smoking		Alcohol consumption <sup>2</sup>	
Bellinggen	NSW	Bellinggen	NSW
<b>18%</b>	12%	<b>22%</b>	18%
Physical activity <sup>1</sup>		Inadequate fruit intake	
Bellinggen	NSW	Bellinggen	NSW
<b>79%</b>	77%	<b>54%</b>	55%
Obese		Overweight (not obese)	
Bellinggen	NSW	Bellinggen	NSW
<b>39%</b>	31%	<b>34%</b>	34%

<sup>1</sup> aged 15 years and over, who did not meet 2014 physical activity guidelines

<sup>2</sup> 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?



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



## 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



**4 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.

The top challenges to access mental health services:

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

In Coffs Harbour SA3 the rate of suicide deaths 16 per 100,000 population (11 per 100,000 population NSW).

Bellinggen LGA has a high presence of ADHD and depression.

**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.

**Opportunity:** Explore and implement innovative approaches to strengthen prevention, treatment and mental health support programs suited to a rural area. This should include increased education and support for community members and healthcare providers, and access to digital based services.

## Healthcare in Bellingen LGA

Bellingen District Hospital is a small rural facility providing emergency care, general medical and surgical services, and some allied health services. Residents may need to travel to larger centres like Coffs Harbour for services which can present challenges.

Dorrigo Multi-Purpose Service provides emergency services, aged care services and a limited range of community and allied health services via outreach from Coffs Harbour Hospital.

Community health centres in Bellingen and Dorrigo provide a range of primary and allied health services.



### Access to primary and community health services

**75%** of ED presentations are for lower urgency care (52 % North Coast, 48% NSW).

Residents raised wanting more support for alternatives to the ED when no GPs are available.

After-hours GP attendances rate in Coffs Harbour SA3 is **4%** (Australia 17%).

Access to after-hours GP services remains a challenge and may contribute to higher ED admissions.

**Opportunity:** Enhance digital health services and education to improve inclusive access to care, particularly in rural areas. Continue to work in partnership to support recruitment and retention of the healthcare workforce.

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 Bellingen LGA, please scan the QR code:

If you have any questions please email [Betterhealth@hnc.org.au](mailto:Betterhealth@hnc.org.au)

