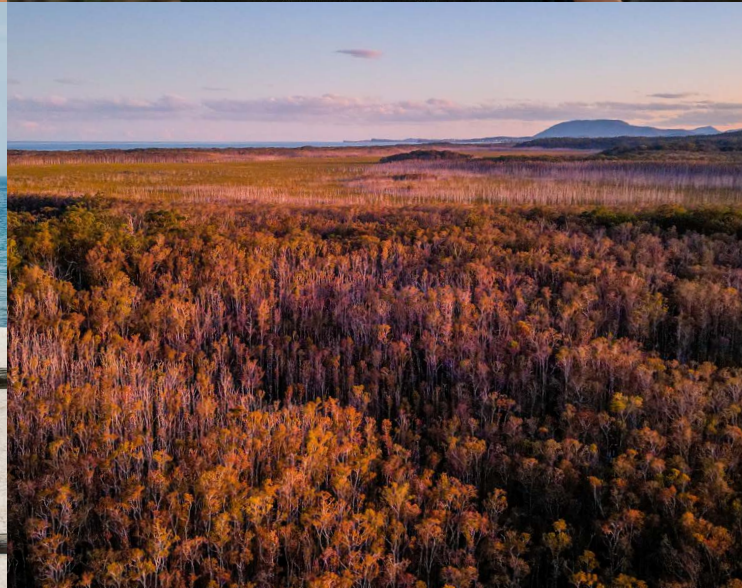
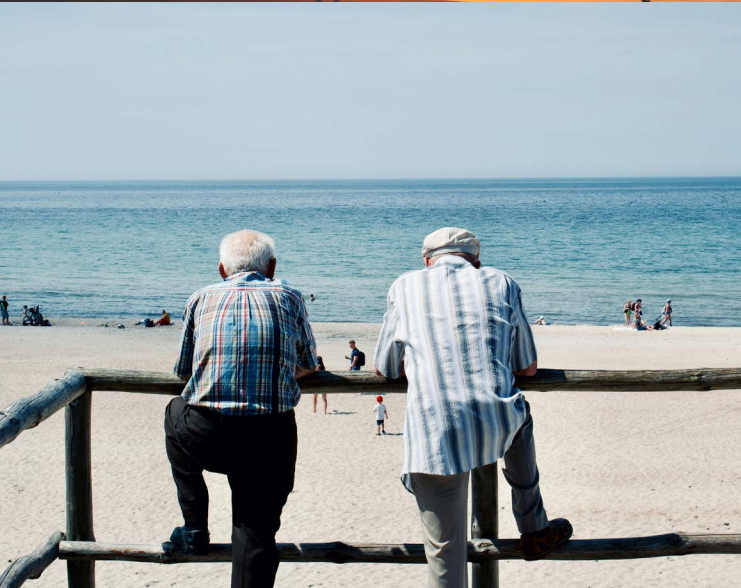


BETTER HEALTH *stories*

HEALTHY
NORTH COAST

phn
NORTH COAST
An Australian Government Initiative

Summer 2025



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

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



Coordination

Tackling loneliness through community connection

Almost half of NSW residents experience loneliness, with studies highlighting that loneliness is linked to poor physical and mental health, increased psychological distress, and even premature death.

'Social prescribing' is a non-medical way of connecting individuals to services, supports, community programs, and social activities to help address unmet social needs as a route to good health.

Healthy North Coast recently completed a social prescribing pilot called **Healthy Me, Healthy Community** in Port Macquarie. Delivered by Feros Care, over 250 participants were actively supported through the program over 14 months.

Over 65% of participants experienced reduced loneliness after completing the program

Participants were linked with an average of 2.7 different activities like social groups, exercise, arts, education, sports + volunteering

Over half (55%) either completed the full program, or opted out due to being satisfied with the support they received

Rob's story:

“After being encouraged by his wife, Port Macquarie local Rob Thompson connected with the program.

“You can't put a price on what happened to me - it turned my life around. I would have been suicidal. It's all been because of meeting Ali [Manager Healthy Me, Health Community at Feros Care].

“I now play soccer, am on the board of the stroke recovery group and have got myself a job. I was spiraling, and now my life couldn't be better.

“I'll tell anyone that listens because this program means everything to people like me.””



At our Social Prescribing Showcase with Leanne Wells (health policy consultant), Dr Rosanne Freak-Poli (senior researcher & epidemiologist), Rob Thompson, Monika Wheeler (CEO Healthy North Coast), Jo Winwood (Associate Director, Healthy North Coast) & Luke Elias (Director, Healthy North Coast)

[Learn more about social prescribing](#)



Commissioning

Making a difference: 3 in 5 young people see mental health gains after visiting headspaces on the North Coast

Across the seven headspace centres commissioned by Healthy North Coast, **1,457** young people were provided with support for the quarter ending December 2024. Three out of every five of these young people showed a significant improvement in mental health outcomes, as measured using MyLifeTracker.

MyLifeTracker consists of five items targeting areas of importance to young people: general well-being, day-to-day activities, relationships with friends, relationships with family and general coping.

The success of the headspace model in the region has led to the recent opening of another centre in Ballina, operated by Social Futures.

The North Coast region has one third more mental health-related emergency department presentations than the rest of NSW. headspaces are a vital service for young people, helping to build early and positive help-seeking behaviours that will support wellbeing management in participant's later years.

3 in 5 young people demonstrated a significant improvement in mental health outcomes

The average visit frequency for a young person visiting a headspace centre was **3.5 visits**

Young people received support a total of **4,491** times in the quarter

[Find out more](#)



Opening the region's newest headspace in Ballina with Tony Davies (Social Futures CEO), Donna Burns (headspace Board), Monika Wheeler (CEO Healthy North Coast), Justine Elliot MP, Leon McCann (Co-Chair Young People's Advisory Committee), Emma McBride MP, Jason Trethowan (CEO headspace)



Capacity Building

Local clinicians gain confidence in chronic pain management after specialist training

The North Coast region suffers from an undersupply, and uneven distribution of medical specialists. The 2025-2028 Health Needs Assessment identified the North Coast region has lower FTE rates of medical specialists (1.2 per 1,000 residents) compared to NSW (1.6 per 1,000 residents) and Australia (1.6 per 1,000 residents).

Specialist In-Reach Education involves a local medical specialist attending a general practice, providing a clinical education session for all practice staff, then spending the afternoon with a GP, reviewing patients who require specialist input. Recently, specialists from the Multidisciplinary Pain Clinic at Lismore Base Hospital visited six general practices in the Northern Rivers area, educating them in best-practice management for patients with chronic pain.



Dr Kate Gupta delivering Specialist In-Reach Education in Port Macquarie

+34% improvement in GP self-rated confidence for managing patients with chronic pain (5.8/10 pre session to 7.8/10 post session)

+36% improvement in GP self-rated confidence in discussing chronic pain and its management with patients (8.17/10 post-session, up from 6/10 pre-session)

After the session, participating GPs are **+47%** more confident to support other GPs within their practice with chronic pain management

[Find out more about Specialist In-Reach Education](#)

Healthy North Coast has recently published their 2025-2028 Health Needs Assessment to guide health planning and commissioning on the North Coast for the next three years.

[Check it out here](#)