

Northern Queensland Primary Health Network

Annual Report 2020-21

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NORTHERN QUEENSLAND
An Australian Government Initiative



» Meet Jos and read her story on page 33

Acknowledgements

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Northern Queensland Primary Health Network acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First Nation Peoples and the Traditional Custodians of this land.

We respect their continued cultural and spiritual connection to country, waters, kin, and community.

We also pay our respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging as the custodians of knowledge and lore.

We are committed to making a valued contribution to the well-being of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of northern Queensland.

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Message from our Board Chair and CEO

We're pleased to welcome you to NQPHN's 2020-21 Annual Report and provide you with an update on what we've worked on in the last financial year.

If recent history has taught us anything, it's how quickly things can change. This was definitely true for NQPHN during the 2020-21 financial year, which was one of great change, but also of new and exciting beginnings for our organisation.

In September 2020, there was a clear need to re-evaluate and realign how we, as the lead organisation for developing an integrated and coordinated primary healthcare system, were going to achieve measurable health improvements for the people of North Queensland. Through extensive consultation with our stakeholders over 52 sessions, NQPHN's refreshed Strategic Plan for 2021-26 was developed.

The Plan focuses on five key priority areas including Population Health Priorities, Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs, GPs and other Primary Care Professionals, First Nations Health, and System Integration. The plan also includes a number of goals that we will implement to achieve measurable change and success against our objectives.

You can find out more about our Strategic Plan in our Annual Report.

In the 2020-21 financial year, we also worked on building the right foundations to ensure we are best placed to achieve our strategic targets over the next five years.

Our people are the foundation of our organisation, so it was crucial that our teams were realigned to deliver on each of our refreshed priority areas. We established commissioning teams for First Nations Health, Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs, and North Queensland Health Priorities as well as teams focusing on primary care engagement and System Integration and Innovation.

Our new teams at NQPHN are outcomes-focused and share a passion for making a real difference to the health and wellbeing of North Queenslanders.

Although the year brought with it a lot of change, our commitments to our stakeholders and North Queensland communities remained clear and strong. As an organisation, we are committed:

- » to innovation for outcomes and embracing technology enabled care
- » to being strategic and transparent in our approach to commissioning and co-designing services and programs with our stakeholders
- » to purposeful engagement and collaboration with our stakeholders

- » to improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
- » to enabling place-based care for residents across our large geographical and remote region
- » and to building workforce capacity and capability.

We also saw a change to the structure of NQPHN's Clinical Councils and Community Advisory Groups, which moved to whole of region models. These models were adopted to ensure local nuances are acknowledged, but a whole of region collective approach is utilised to provide clinical and community advice on health needs and priorities, to review investment strategies, and to inform systems advocacy.

The new whole of region Clinical Council and Community Advisory Group is part of our approach to proactively seek the involvement and input of our key stakeholders to ensure that our communities receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

The resilience of our teams, our service providers, and our communities in light of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to inspire us throughout the year. Their ability and willingness to adapt quickly in an ever-changing environment is a very real example of the passion of our workforce to provide high quality care to North Queenslanders.

NQPHN's response to the pandemic shifted focus to support the Federal Government's COVID-19 vaccine rollout, which saw us working closely with healthcare providers, all levels of government, and other key stakeholders to vaccinate North Queenslanders.

You can read more about our work in the COVID-19 space in our Annual Report.

In October 2020, we launched our eagerly anticipated new corporate website. The website was a culmination of collaboration between our teams and was guided by feedback from our stakeholders.

Much like the commissioning and co-design work NQPHN undertakes, the end user was front of mind throughout the development process to create a user-friendly site that meets the needs of our stakeholders and that is reflective of our refreshed strategic direction.

Throughout the Annual Report you will see a selection of Our Region, Our People human interest stories which reflect the good work being done by our primary health care workforce to improve the wellbeing and health outcomes of our residents. We hope you enjoy reading about the positive impacts that our funded service providers are having on North Queensland communities.

We would like to extend our sincere thank you to our Board, staff, and all of our stakeholders for their dedication, hard work, and commitment to making real and meaningful change to primary health care in North Queensland.

We are confident that we have a bright, exciting, and promising future ahead of us that will positively impact the health and wellbeing of our residents.

We are proud of the way our staff have navigated this year of change for NQPHN.

Over the coming years, if we stay focused, work hard, and implement the strategies outlined in our Strategic Plan, we will be well-placed to achieving our vision of helping North Queenslanders to live happier, healthier, longer lives.



Nick Loukas
Chairperson
NQPHN



Robin Whyte
Chief Executive Officer
NQPHN

Who is NQPHN?

Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) is one of 31 regionalised and independent PHNs established nationally by the Commonwealth Department of Health to provide local communities with better access to improved primary healthcare services.

The NQPHN region extends from Moranbah in the south, up to the Torres Strait in the north, and west to Croydon and Kowanyama.

NQPHN is the lead organisation for developing – with our partners – an integrated and coordinated primary

healthcare system that delivers the best care possible to achieve measurable health improvements for the people of North Queensland.

NQPHN aims to improve health outcomes for all residents by supporting, investing in, and working collaboratively with local Hospital and Health Services, the primary healthcare sector, local government areas (LGAs), other health organisations, and the wider community.

Our objectives and Strategic Plan

Northern Queensland Primary Health Network’s (NQPHN’s) Strategic Plan 2021-26 is an ambitious plan which aims to strengthen the primary health care sector in northern Queensland.

The Plan outlines five priority areas of focus that will achieve NQPHN’s main objectives, and include:

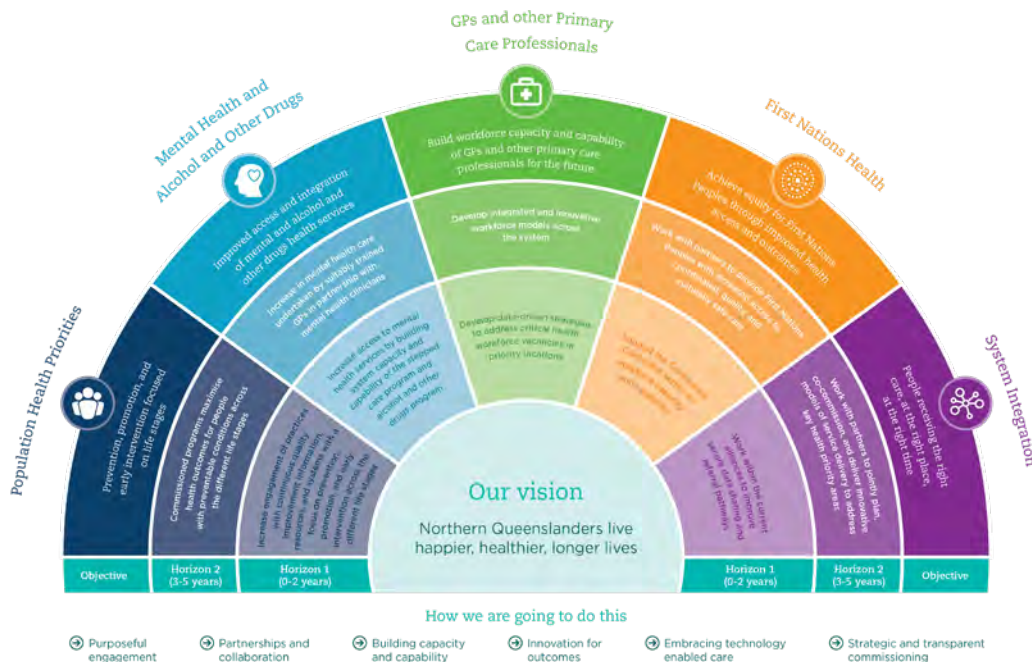
- » improved access and coordination of mental health services
- » equity for First Nations Peoples through improved health access and health outcomes
- » building workforce capacity and capability of GPs and primary care professionals for the future
- » ensuring people are receiving the right care, in the right place, at the right time
- » prevention, promotion, and early intervention focused on life stages of need.

NQPHN will achieve its objectives through:

- » purposeful engagement
- » partnerships and collaboration
- » building capacity and capability
- » innovation for outcomes
- » embracing technology enabled care
- » strategic and transparent commissioning.

While not excluding other health needs, these areas are NQPHN’s primary focus over the next five years so that it can achieve its vision of helping northern Queenslanders live happier, healthier, longer lives.

View full [Strategic Plan 2021-26](#)



NQPHN highlights 2020-21

Contracts

124 contracts executed across the region

With total expenditure and commitments of

\$79,073,886



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

55,910 Care Coordination services delivered to **13,114** ITC clients

56 Indigenous outreach workers, Indigenous health Project Officers, and Care Coordinators employed in the ITC program.

Digital Health

2,012 Completed and live HealthPathways across the region.

9% Increase on the previous year.

Mental Health

7,824 referrals processed by Connect to Wellbeing across the region.

Connect to Wellbeing

Media and communications

412 eBlasts / eNewsletters distributed

80 Media releases and responses

Facebook

281 Posts

267,381 Total post reach

952 Average reach per post

4,851 Followers

\$3,384 Spent on advertising

NQPHN is also on:

Alcohol & Other Drugs

15 Commissioned AOD services across the region.

8,963 Occasions of AOD services were provided.

Workforce

38 Education and training events delivered to

702 participants



Board of Directors

Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) has a commitment to strong, effective governance. We are an independent not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. A membership-based organisation, NQPHN is registered as a charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for Profits Commission.

The NQPHN Board is a skills-based Board, which has four key committees:

- » Nomination and Remuneration Committee
- » People and Performance Committee
- » Finance, Audit, and Risk Management (FARM) Committee
- » Clinical Governance Committee.

View the Board and Committees attendance for the 2020-21 financial year [here](#).

Nomination and Remuneration

This committee makes recommendations to the Members for director appointments and re-elections, and assists the Board to fulfill its corporate governance responsibilities regarding performance, induction programs, and continuing professional development for directors and remuneration of directors.

People and Performance

This committee provides oversight of organisational culture and other aspects of human resources. The committee makes recommendations to the Board regarding Senior Executive succession planning, remuneration and performance evaluation, reviewing compliance with the Corporate Code of Ethical Conduct, and overseeing any investigation of improper conduct initiated under NQPHN's Protective Disclosure (Whistle-blower) Program.

Clinical Council and Community Advisory Group

Clinical Council

The Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) Clinical Council provides the NQPHN Clinical Governance sub-committee of the Board with contemporary advice on local health needs and priorities ensuring that there is an appropriate evidence base to regional commissioning, specifically, planning and design of services, stakeholder engagement, and continuing development and refinement of the Health Needs Assessment (HNA).

Finance, Audit, and Risk Management (FARM)

This committee assists the Board in fulfilling its responsibility to exercise due care, diligence, and skill in relation to budget planning process and monitoring of performance. It also focuses on financial investment strategy, contracting arrangements, the integrity of NQPHN's financial reports and statements, adequacy, and performance of NQPHN's internal control framework, external and internal audit processes, and the framework established by management to identify, assess, and manage risk.

Clinical Governance

This committee provides the Board with contemporary advice and recommendations on matters of clinical governance, commissioning (specifically, planning and design of services), stakeholder engagement, and continuing development and refinement of the Health Needs Assessment (HNA) and related strategic planning documents. All committees have levels of delegated authority for core decision making.

Board of Directors

- » Nick Loukas - Chair
- » Suzanne Andrews - Board Director
- » Tara Diversi - Board Director
- » Dr Nicole Higgins - Board Director
- » Dr Richard Malone - Deputy Board Chair
- » Luckbir Singh - Board Director
- » Ben Tooth - Board Director
- » Cate Whalan - Board Director

The Clinical Council provides a critical overview of the NQPHN regions to ensure that overall investment is in line with the regional HNA.

The council acts in an advisory capacity to the NQPHN Clinical Governance Committee which has the delegated responsibility of the NQPHN Board.

Membership of the council is comprised of GPs, allied health professionals, mental health clinicians,



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals, community/practice nurses, and public health/health promotion representatives. They meet at least twice per year.

Community Advisory Group

The NQPHN Community Advisory Group (the Group) covers the Cape and Torres, Cairns, Townsville, and Mackay regions.

Group members are comprised of health service users, consumers, carers, and community members, and act as a critical friend to NQPHN by bringing community perspective to advise the planning of activities and priorities. The Group's advice is aligned with NQPHN's Health Needs Assessment and local and Commonwealth priorities.

The aim of the Group is to enable health system improvement and reform in local regions and for identified community groups. They ensure that community ideas drive improvements in person-centred care to deliver better health outcomes that are locally-relevant and aligned to local care experiences and expectations.

The Group also guides and advises NQPHN to improve its social impact, cultural security, and patient safety of programs it commissions throughout the region.

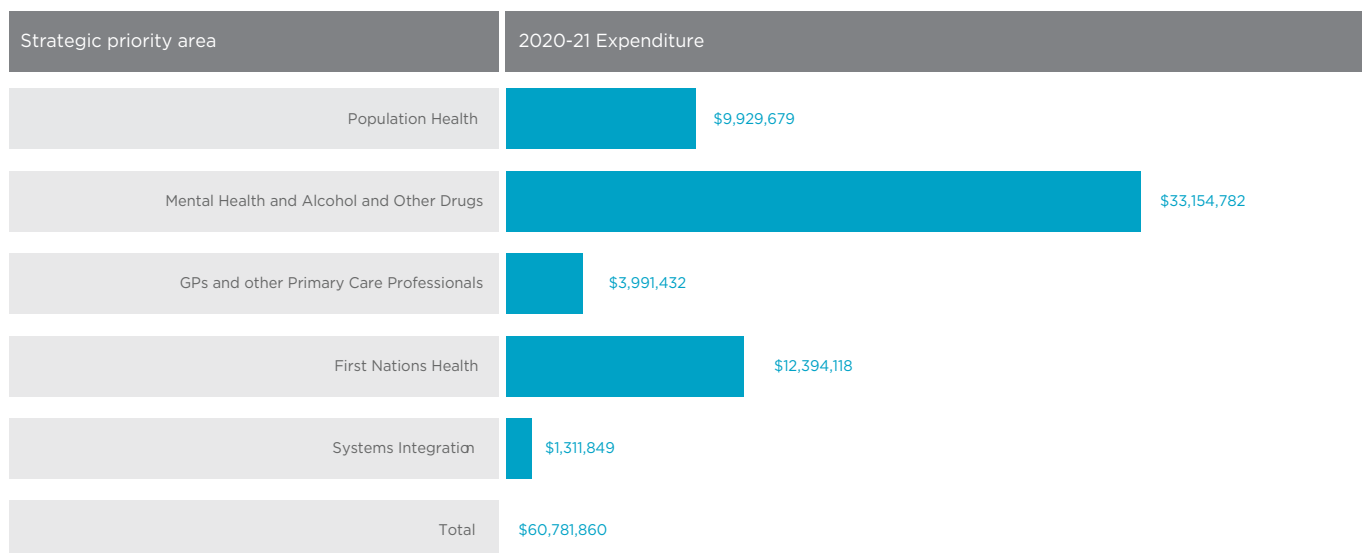
As champions of change, members maximise and leverage their own community networks to improve health outcomes through coordinated care.

The Group plays a key role in helping to guide NQPHN in ensuring activities are connected to and supported by the communities it serves.

Financials

The below bar graph shows NQPHN's expenditure on our strategic priorities in the 2020-21 financial year.

Download the full audited General Purpose Financial Statements [here](#).





Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) highlights

During the 2020-21 financial year, Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) worked towards achieving the actions committed to in its Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

The Innovate RAP enables NQPHN to make aspirational and innovative commitments to help gain a deeper understanding of our sphere of influence and establish best practice approaches to advancing reconciliation

over a two-year period from September 2020 to September 2022.

There are four main areas that NQPHN focuses on during the Innovate phase of its reconciliation journey, including:

- » relationships
- » respect
- » opportunities
- » governance.



Relationships

NQPHN is committed to working with communities to understand local needs to design and implement solutions that improve the health and wellbeing of residents.

In the 2020-21 financial year, NQPHN:

- » built relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW)
- » worked to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Islander stakeholders and organisations.



Respect

NQPHN has put an emphasis on building local capacity to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In the 2020-21 financial year, NQPHN:

- » increased understanding, value, and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge, and rights through cultural learning
- » demonstrated respect to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.

Opportunities

NQPHN is focused on finding opportunities to build local capacity to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In the 2020-21 financial year, NQPHN:

- » improved employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention, and professional development
- » increased Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.



Governance

Governance and tracking processes have been established to assist NQPHN to achieve its reconciliation commitments.

In the 2020-21 financial year, NQPHN:

- » established and maintained an effective RAP Working Group to drive governance of the RAP
- » provided appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments.

NQPHN will remain committed to further implementing reconciliation actions into everyday practice through the 2021-22 financial year — the second year of its Innovate RAP— to assist First Nations Peoples in North Queensland to live happier, healthier, longer lives.

ANNUAL NQPHN YOUNG INDIGENOUS ART AWARDS 2021



About the awards

The NQPHN Board of Directors launched its fourth annual NQPHN Indigenous Youth Art Competition in 2021.

The competition is an opportunity for NQPHN to recognise young, talented Indigenous artists across North Queensland as part of the organisation's commitment to support Indigenous youth, and a meaningful pathway towards inclusion of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

In 2021, the competition—based on the theme of 'Connection to Country'—saw some inspirational and unique artworks submitted by young local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander artists. The competition was split into two categories—a junior competition for young people aged between 12-14 years and a senior competition for those aged 15-18 years.

JUNIOR COMPETITION

First place: Yalla Jackonia

Artwork title: Waterfalls

Materials: Acrylic paint on timber skateboard deck

Meaning: Yalla's artwork relates to the beautiful country in Cape York and the Torres Strait, including the waterfalls, colours, stones, and the pools you can swim in. He is inspired by the landscapes surrounding him and loved using the brush to create textural effects.



Second place: Naomi Sansness

Artwork title: The sum of her past

Materials: Graphite

Meaning: Naomi's artwork is a self-portrait that depicts herself as a product of her father's grandmother, a first-generation Norwegian immigrant who was orphaned as a child, and her mother's grandmother, an Aboriginal woman who was stolen from her family. Naomi believes it's because of these important figures in her life that she is able to have connection to her land.



Third place: Quinn Go Sam

Artwork title: 'Towri' Shield of Lore

Materials: Acrylic paint on timber shield

Meaning: Quinn created this artwork as a representation of a sacred site to his people, the Wagaman Tribe. The artwork focuses on one of 10 watering holes in the Wagaman land, called Wurrugaal, and is the location of where tribes would come together to solidify their lores. The man pictured at the bottom of the shield represents the connection between the people and country. The hands represent the passing on of knowledge through the generations, past, present, and future and the work that is still to be done through the sharing of knowledge and acknowledgement to heal country.

The man (Quinn's father) and kangaroo depicted at the top of this shield portrays the connection between man, animal, and country.





SENIOR COMPETITION

First place: Wudarabin Snider

Artwork title: Nawla and Nujay

Materials: Acrylic on canvas

Meaning: Wudarabin is a Gugu Yalanji Bama from Laura Quinkan bubu and a Gwamu Murri from Bolin. This painting was inspired by her totem Nujay (freshwater turtle). When Wudarabin visits the reef and sees the Nawia (saltwater turtle) swimming, she feels connected to her totem, as she recognises their familiar features and similar environments. Wudarabin believes being connected to country means being present on country and experiencing the cold reviving water from the waterfalls, rivers, or oceans. Going camping and hunting, seeing the ancient cave art, and then going for a swim with the Nujay (freshwater turtle) in the freshwater is what healing country and connecting to country means, as she's not only living and experiencing country, but also caring for it. Wudarabin has represented a balance between saltwater and freshwater turtles and the vibrant colours within the environment, showing the different landscapes and different areas of country people are connected to.



Third place (equal): Chantel Joinbee

Artwork title: Living with blue

Materials: Acrylic on canvas

Meaning: Chantel's self-portrait was inspired by the portrait of Cathy Freeman produced by Craig Ruddy in 2011. As an Indigenous Australian living in modern society, racism and discrimination are still ongoing. Indigenous people are taught that the land is the mother and they are of the land, so they must respect the country and ultimately respect the people in the country. Fortunately, with people like Cathy Freeman demonstrating and exemplifying Indigenous culture, Indigenous people can feel a closer bond and pride to their country and people. Chantel loves her country and ethnicity, and hopes all countries and cultures come together, respect each other, express their individuality, stand out, and be a light.



Second place: Michael Baragud

Artwork title: Cultures colliding

Materials: Lino print

Meaning: Michael's artwork is about how he became Torres Strait Islander. This artwork relates to the theme "Worlds That Collide" because it is about Papua New Guinea and Torres Strait Islander cultures colliding and the background he comes from. This artwork is inspired by Uncle Glen Mackie and Brian Robinson. Michael used printmaking techniques where he proof printed first and then went back over any parts he had missed.



Third place (equal): Chantelle Passi

Artwork title: Waters of Murray Island

Materials: Screen print

Meaning: Chantelle's artwork is about the stormy deep waters around Murray Island in the Eastern Torres Strait. The shark jaw represents the traditional dancers and the sharks that swim in the waters. The water represents the stormy deep waters, and the jug represents the waters of respect and love that we carry and care for the people and nature. Water is important for connection to country because it's the main resource in our lives.



Health needs of North Queensland

Northern Queensland Primary Health Network's (NQPHN's) Health Needs Assessment (HNA) is a working document that evolves as new and more relevant information becomes available. It provides an overview of the NQPHN demographic profile identifying the greatest health needs within our region.

The HNA is updated in collaboration with NQPHN's regional partners, stakeholders, health care services providers, community organisations, and residents.

This information is then used to identify our key priority areas which in turn inform effective commissioning of services to help northern Queenslanders live happier, healthier, longer lives.

This needs assessment incorporates the needs of consumers as well as the health workforce, as they are essential to the delivery of health services to consumers.

Our health context

Overweight and obesity

Children (5 - 17 years)

26.9% NQPHN 26.2% QLD

Adults (18+ years)

61.6% NQPHN 59.2% QLD

Daily smoking

13.8% NQPHN 11.4% QLD

Lifetime risky drinking

27.1% NQPHN 23.2% QLD

Cancer screening rate

Breast cancer screening

60.2% NQPHN 55.1% QLD

Cervical cancer screening

55.7% NQPHN 53.4% QLD

Bowel cancer screening

39.3% NQPHN 40.4% QLD

Childhood immunisation (fully-immunised)

Immunisation national target: 95%

1 year 94.1% NQPHN 94.7% QLD

2 years 92.5% NQPHN 92.6% QLD

5 years 95.4% NQPHN 94.7% QLD

Physical activity and nutrition

Sufficient physical activity

58.8% NQPHN 59.6% QLD

Recommended fruit intake

55.4% NQPHN 57.0% QLD

Recommended vegetable intake

7.2% NQPHN 7.1% QLD

Socio-economic determinants of health

Percentage of the population in the most disadvantaged on the index of relative socio-economic disadvantage quintiles:

26.6% NQPHN 20.0% QLD

Education

Percentage of the population that has completed year 11, or year 12, or equivalent:

53.0% NQPHN 58.9% QLD

Our priority areas in 2020-21

Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) responds to the health needs of its region as outlined in NQPHN's Health Needs Assessment while being guided by the National PHN Performance and Quality Framework for targeted work.

Five priority areas have been identified to strengthen the primary health care sector in northern Queensland and to achieve the objectives set out in NQPHN's Strategic Plan 2021-26. These priority areas include:

- » improved access and coordination of mental health services
- » equity for First Nations Peoples through improved health access and health outcomes

- » building workforce capacity and capability of GPs and primary care professionals for the future
- » ensuring people are receiving the right care, in the right place, at the right time
- » prevention, promotion, and early intervention focused on life stages of need.

While not excluding other health needs, targeted focus on these priorities will make the greatest impact on helping northern Queenslanders to live happier, healthier, longer lives.

Population Health

Objectives

Northern Queensland Primary Health Network's (NQPHN's) Population Health priority objectives include prevention, promotion, and early intervention that is focused on the life stages.

In the 2020-21 financial year, NQPHN supported primary health care providers to address factors impacting Population Health through increased engagement of practices using continuous quality improvement information, resources, and systems.

The key population health priorities for NQPHN include:

- » maternal and child health
- » chronic disease management and prevention
- » sexual health
- » healthy ageing
- » Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health
- » multicultural health.

Longer term, NQPHN's commissioned programs will maximise health outcomes for people with preventable conditions across the different life stages.

By addressing the needs of North Queensland communities, and focusing on prevention and early intervention activities, there will be fewer preventable hospitalisations in the NQPHN region for people with chronic and vaccine preventable diseases.

Combined, these activities will contribute to improved health outcomes for all population groups in the NQPHN region.

Key projects

Connect Communities to Cook

NQPHN partnered with the Good Foundation and Mackay Regional Council to bring Jamie's Ministry of Food to Sarina and Mackay for one five-week cycle in each location.

The program taught participants about healthy lifestyle modifications, low-cost healthy cooking options, and healthier food alternatives which can be implemented in their day to day lives.

Funding from NQPHN was used to ensure over 100 participants from at risk groups were able to attend, including:

- » disengaged and/or at-risk young people
- » isolated women
- » people with chronic and complex conditions
- » Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
- » people living with a disability.

Key statistic

214

Participants in total





Mossman Healthy Lifeskills program


During the 2020-21 financial year, the Mossman Healthy Lifeskills program delivered culturally informed community-based programs that addressed awareness, prevention, early intervention, and promoted self-management of chronic disease.


The program, provided by Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service, also assisted participants to access transport to activities and telehealth.

Participants took part in a variety of activities including Latin dancing, football, basketball, gardening, aquafit, walking groups, and gym.

The program was affected by both COVID-19 restrictions and the wet season, which meant the program needed to be flexible and had a greater reliance on telehealth.

Key statistics

50 Clients were delivered over 70 occasions of service each month 

10 Referrals each month to services including GPs, physiotherapists, diabetes educators, nurses, and other health workers 


Remote Food Gardens Champions

The Mental Health Professionals Network's (MHPN's) Older Australians and Mental Health project aims to increase the capability of the mental health workforce regarding the mental health of older people.

On behalf of the Primary Health Network (PHN) Cooperative, Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) engaged the MHPN to:

- » develop and host three professional development webinars over an 18-month period
- » deliver webinars that target an Australia-wide interdisciplinary audience and have a focus on older persons
- » make recordings of the webinar available for downloading
- » promote the webinar through a range of strategies to interested practitioners across Australia
- » establish and support practitioner networks in each PHN region.

Key statistic

8 The program visited eight schools and three communities across remote areas within the Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service region 

State of Mind Support program


Cairns Hockey Association's State of Mind Support program uses hockey as a vehicle to deliver positive health and wellbeing awareness and support programs to Cairns residents.


Cairns Hockey utilised the profile of the game in the region and its satellite programs across remote Indigenous communities of Far North Queensland, Cape York, and Torres Strait Islands to positively impact the mental health and wellbeing of the hockey family and broader community.


Cairns Hockey collaborated with mental health professionals to develop a grassroots health promotion campaign to reduce stigma, increase mental health literacy, and encourage help seeking behaviours among residents.

The program directly targeted members and club volunteers through a social media strategy that highlighted challenges across the mental health space and identified benefits of engaging in conversation and accessing information directly related to mental health support programs.

Key statistics

200 Participants from five remote communities 

40 Players received mental health first aid training 

20 Leaders across all ages, genders, and cultures who volunteer as State of Mind Ambassadors 

Health Education in North Queensland Schools

NQPHN funded Life Education Queensland to provide health education in North Queensland schools. The education was provided through a range of programs that were comprehensive, curriculum-aligned, age-appropriate, and focused on students' physical health and social and emotional wellbeing.

The aims of the education were to:

- » provide early intervention in children and young people to discourage them from negative behaviours
- » build resilience in children and young people by teaching them tools to better deal with adversity and develop self-confidence and a sense of achievement
- » increase knowledge, confidence, skills, and strategies to support informed decision making around current and future health needs
- » prevent future chronic disease and mental health problems, as well as empowering young people to develop and maintain healthy, respectful relationships.

Life Education Queensland also delivered a nutrition education program called Healthy Eats, which in 2020 won a national Social Impact Measurement Network Awards (SIMNA) last year for Outstanding Collaboration.

Key statistics

173 Schools in North Queensland



1,664 Sessions



34,580 Students in total attended the sessions. 11% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



45% Increase in the number of school vegetable gardens in participating schools



50% Increase in school breakfast programs



151% Increase in the consumption of fruit and vegetable (above the national average)



Project Booyah Mackay

Project Booyah, delivered by Queensland Police Service, is a structured, evidence and strengths-based program for at-risk or disengaged youth. The program aims to achieve the following outcomes for participants:

- » re-engagement with education, employment, and vocational pathways
- » improved mental and physical health outcomes
- » improved self-esteem and resilience
- » reduced involvement in criminal and antisocial behaviours
- » reduced rates of abuse and victimisation.

Project Booyah includes participation in a 16-week program with post-program mentoring of up to 18 months. Participants complete a certificate qualification, a rite of passage camp experience, literacy/numeracy assessment, a drug and alcohol workshop, and cultural awareness training.

Under the guidance of a Police Coordinator and Youth Support Officer the first cohort of seven young men aged between 15 and 17 years graduated from the program in the 2020-21 financial year. The pride, sense of accomplishment, and comradeship between the young men at the ceremony was extremely positive, as was their outlook for the future.

The young men will continue to be supported and mentored by the Project Booyah delivery team to assist them to achieve their goals.

Key statistics

For this cohort, achievements included:



Obtaining certificate qualifications in First Aid, Responsible Service of Alcohol, Basic Barista and Hospitality



Three of them re-engaged with secondary education



Three obtained part-time employment



One participant secured full-time employment



All of the participants identified areas of interest for future employment and are actively seeking traineeships or apprenticeships in these areas.

Meet Jay and Emma

OUR REGION, our people

Mobile health service reaching out to those in need.

In early 2019, Jay and Emma met when they found themselves facing similar challenges. Both were struggling with addiction, sleeping rough, and had no close family or friends to reach out to for help or support.

One day the pair were visiting the local Rosies - Friends on the Street van, when they were introduced to Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) funded service, Wheels of Wellness (WOW).

WOW is an outreach service that delivers respectful and dignified mobile general practitioner and nurse clinics to Cairns' most vulnerable individuals.

The WOW mobile clinic's doctors, nurses, and support staff go out into the community to provide the right care, in the right place, at the right time to those in need.

When Emma decided to get a general medical check-up through WOW, both she and Jay were not expecting the life-changing news that was to come.

"At my first check-up with the WOW team, I had some standard tests done which showed that I was eight to nine weeks pregnant with my first child," said Emma.

"Living on the streets and finding out I was pregnant was a little bit scary, it was a bit of a shock.

"We didn't really know what to do, and I'm so grateful that WOW was there to guide us in the right direction.

"Without WOW, we probably would not have had the same access to all the health services for pregnancy such a GP, ultrasounds, support, and especially the medications."

After their initial check-ups, WOW provided an important single point of contact for the mum-and-dad-to-be to access reliable health information and services, while also providing a supportive social network.

Jay and Emma also developed a connection with WOW staff who helped them to navigate difficult life circumstances, prepare to welcome a newborn, and the associated medical services.

"If we hadn't had access to the services that WOW provided, we probably would not have found out that Emma was pregnant until much later," said Jay.

"It took us some time to become comfortable with the service and staff, but we are grateful to have discovered the service and met some great people.



Jay and Emma drastically changed their lives through the help and support from WOW.

"I don't know what we would of done if we didn't have WOW to help us."

Thanks to the Wheels of Wellness team of doctors, midwife nurses, and staff both Jay and Emma received all the medical and emotional support they needed to safely bring their daughter Sapphire into the world.

"We were fully supported by the staff—Bec, Nurse Midwife Mel, and Dr Anthony who became like family to us," said Emma.

"We are so lucky to have Sapphire, she's the best baby and we now can't imagine our lives without her!"

Since the couple began their journey with WOW, Jay and Emma have gone from strength to strength.

Both Jay and Emma have drastically changed their living situations and secured housing and employment. They have also undergone drug treatment to ensure that their happy and healthy daughter has the best life they can offer.

WOW has also been on their own journey by expanding their healthcare offerings in addition to their mobile outreach service, to further assist Cairns residents to live happier, healthier, longer lives.

In May 2021, Wheels of Wellness opened the WOW Hub located next to the Cairns Base Hospital, to provide vulnerable and at-risk individuals with a place of respite from street living and to assist them to engage with traditional health care services.

Earlier in 2021, Wheels of Wellness was also nominated for the 2021 Queensland Reconciliation Awards and received the highly commended award in the Health and Wellbeing category.



Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs

Objectives

Northern Queensland Primary Health Network's (NQPHN's) Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) priority objectives include improving access and integration of mental health and AOD services.

NQPHN is committed to enhancing and establishing a range of evidence-based and culturally appropriate mental health and AOD support services which are accessible to all residents across North Queensland.

In the 2020-21 financial year, NQPHN increased access to mental health services by building system capacity and capability of the stepped care program and AOD program.

Key projects

Suicide Prevention Community Action Plan

The purpose of the Cairns and Hinterland Suicide Prevention Community Action Plan (SPCAP) initiative was to lead the collaborative development of a community and sector endorsed path forward for coordinated suicide prevention activities across the Cairns and Hinterland region.

In December 2020, extensive consultation was undertaken with stakeholders in Cairns North, Atherton, Innisfail, Edmonton, and Mossman.

Further consultations were undertaken in May-June 2021, including direct engagement with several Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) in the region.

We also worked extensively with the Cairns and Hinterland SPCAP Community Advisory Group via a series of four workshops from March-June 2021. During these workshops, the group:

- » identified issues and priority actions
- » developed the vision and purpose of the plan
- » refined ideas and prioritised actions
- » endorsed the final Cairns and Hinterland SPCAP

Older Person's Mental Health National Webinars

The Mental Health Professionals Network's (MHPN's) Older Australians and Mental Health project aims to increase the capability of the mental health workforce regarding the mental health of older people.

On behalf of the Primary Health Network (PHN) Cooperative, Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) engaged the MHPN to:

- » develop and host three professional development webinars over an 18-month period
- » deliver webinars that target an Australia-wide interdisciplinary audience and have a focus on older persons
- » make recordings of the webinar available for downloading
- » promote the webinar through a range of strategies to interested practitioners across Australia
- » establish and support practitioner networks in each PHN region.

Key statistics

Between March-May 2021:

51

Engaged with 51 stakeholders across a five-day consultation process across North Queensland



155

Written survey responses submitted by community members regarding ideas that could be implemented locally to strengthen suicide prevention activities



Key statistics

2,799

People attended the webinars



459

Webinar recordings downloads



The Courage Project

The Courage Project is a collaboration between Bravehearts, Mackay Women's Service (MWS), and NQPHN to deliver a mental health service to disadvantaged and disengaged children and young people (under the age of 14) in the Mackay, Isaac, and Whitsunday regions that have experienced trauma related issues.

The Courage Project provides therapeutic and advocacy supports to children and young people who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, physical and/or sexual assault and who are at risk of self-harm.

The service uses evidence-based and trauma-informed approaches to support children and young people in their healing journey. The Project's multidisciplinary teams work one-on-one with the young person, as well as with their non-offending family members and support services.

Key statistics

During the period of October 2020 (when the project commenced) to March 2021, there have been:



97	Referrals received
59	Child sexual abuse (CSA) presentations
14	Physical violence presentations
9	Presentations of both CSA and physical violence
10	Suicidal/self-harm presentations
7	Sexual behaviour problem presentations



69	Mackay
13	Whitsundays
16	Isaac

Joint Regional Wellbeing Plan for North Queensland

The Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan outlined the expectation of a whole-of-system approach to planning mental health and suicide prevention services at a regional level. The expectation is that Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) and Primary Health Networks (PHNs) will take a whole of system approach to regional planning which will, at a minimum, seek to encompass:

- » service planning provided through the health system funded by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, non-government organisations (NGOs) provisioned services, and the private mental health sector
- » planning for the link between mental health services, suicide prevention services, drug and alcohol services, and broader services provided to people including through the NDIS, employment, education, and other social support services.

In the NQPHN region, the first Joint Regional Wellbeing Plan for North Queensland (the Plan) was publicly released in January 2021. The development of the Plan was overseen by a Steering Committee of NQPHN and Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) senior staff, consumer/carer representatives, and the Queensland Health Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Branch, supported by consultants Engagement Plus. Better Health North Queensland has assumed governance of the project.

The priorities of the Plan include:

- » workforce, including the peer workforce
- » service access and coordination
- » Aboriginal and Torres Strait partnerships in healing
- » physical health needs of people living with mental illness
- » suicide prevention
- » alcohol and other drugs harm reduction.

An expanded Steering Committee reflective of the three sectors, will guide the implementation of the foundation Plan and the development of the full comprehensive Plan during the 2021-22 financial year.

Key statistics

198

Individuals contributed to the Plan through face-to-face group or individual consultations in 27 events over 15 locations, or through survey responses





ICE Help – Community Based response to ICE

Lives Lived Well’s ICE Help (Community Based Response to ICE) is a specialised, community-based treatment and intervention program that supports young people and adults, families, and carers who are struggling with methamphetamine dependence in the Mackay, Whitsunday, and Isaac regions.

The program, funded by NQPHN, delivers:

- » evidence-based drug and alcohol services including specialised support for individuals struggling with methamphetamine dependence
- » assessment, intervention, withdrawal management support, relapse prevention, and long term follow up for ICE users and those in recovery
- » treatment matched interventions to maximise service engagement, uptake, and success
- » harm minimisation strategies using an inclusive and proactive approach
- » support for families and carers who are impacted by methamphetamine dependence and strategies to enhance and strengthen family relationships
- » a coordinated approach among treatment services and self-help groups involved in the care of substance users and their families professional training to build the capacity of local providers, family, and community to effectively address ICE usage and supported recovery
- » coordinated, integrated methamphetamine family and carer support and services using existing referral pathways and local provider networks
- » seamless referral, communication, and consultation between partner agencies and other key stakeholders.

During the 2020-21 financial year, the ICE Help program:

- » lead and supported the development of localised detox support services in collaboration with Mackay Hospital Health Service and primary healthcare providers

Key statistics

708

New clients to the ICE Help program in the 2020-21 financial year.



2,155

Annual occasion of service to clients.



- » provided targeted AOD and ICE awareness education sessions including interactive presentations, workshops, and group programs to family, friends, and community members
- » created awareness of and delivered drug and alcohol first aid training to community members and other key stakeholders
- » raised awareness amongst the GP community of capacity building activities to better manage clients through alcohol screening and brief intervention education sessions
- » serviced the Isaac region fortnightly through an outreach AOD Case Manager.

AOD Continuing Care Program

St Vincent De Paul provide Drug and Alcohol residential recovery services in Mackay that specifically support participants over the age of 18 to reach their full potential in an abstinence-based environment. The Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Continuing Care Program was established as a complementary service to the residential model to better engage, prepare, and support individuals and their families to receive comprehensive information and care.

The Continuing Care program is comprised of three components:

- » pre-treatment support whilst the individual is waiting to enter a residential rehabilitation facility
- » post-treatment support which begins at the eight-week mark of the individual’s recovery
- » family support including providing information packs, support groups, and both clinical and non-clinical supports.

Key statistics

135

New clients



1,335

Occasions of service



328

Outward client referrals



925

Activity participants





Cairns Suicide Prevention – The Way Back Support Service

In May 2021, The Way Back Support Service commenced in Cairns to provide psycho-social follow up support for individuals who have been admitted to hospital following a suicide attempt.

This initiative is delivered in Cairns by Wellways Australia as part of an evidence-based national strategy developed by Beyond Blue.

This nationally trialled service model supports people through the critical recovery period following a suicide attempt.

The service is being governed through a collaboration between Wellways Australia, Beyond Blue, Queensland Health, and Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) to ensure compliance with the national model, accountability, and integration with the Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service.

Support for the individual commences with screening and referral by hospital acute services. Trained Support Coordinators then make contact with the individual within 24 hours for further assessment and use tools such as Safety Plans, local networking, and targeted resources to support them.

Key statistics

12 During their first month of operation, The Way Back Support Service supported 12 individuals following a suicide attempt



Cape York Mental Health and Wellbeing Service

During the 2020-21 financial year, the Royal Flying Doctors Service (RFDS) of Australia further evolved their Cape York Mental Health and Wellbeing Service across the Cape York communities of Bamaga, Seisia, Umagico, Injinoo, New Mapoon, Weipa, Napranum, Mapoon, Cooktown, Laura, Wujal Wujal, Lockhart River, Pormpuraaw, and Kowanyama.

The experienced team of psychologists, social workers, mental health nurses, and Indigenous health workers provided a range of mental health and wellbeing support services including counselling, psychosocial support, psycho-education, and acceptance and commitment therapy.

Through strong links with the Queensland Health Mental Health and ATODs Service and robust clinical governance, the RFDS clinicians have also maintained effective shared care arrangements for people most at risk.

The Cape York Mental Health and Wellbeing Service is provided under the NQPHN Mental Health Stepped Care Guidelines that address the needs of remote communities for place-based care.

Key statistics

In the 2020-21 financial year, the Cape York Mental Health and Wellbeing Service:

883 New clients



4,301 Occasions of service



2,818 Outward client referrals



Meet Karen

OUR REGION, *our people*

Karen Bennett has been a hairdresser for 31 years and owns two barbershops in Townsville – Bennett's Barbershop and Industry Barbershop. Her barbershops have a reputation for being a warm, welcoming space where no topic is off limits.

The clientele of both barbershops is diverse. On any given day Karen and her team can be found attending to soccer mums, kids, tradies, Australian Defence Force personnel, retirees, business owners, sportsmen, and more. Karen and her team understand that their clients trust in them and because of this, they're at the forefront of their community when it comes to suicide prevention.

"We liaise with people from all walks of life every single day and when a client sits in our chair, it is about much more than just a haircut, we connect on an emotional level as well," said Karen.

"For this reason, I had my team attend the Community Response to Eliminating Suicide (CORES) Suicide Prevention Training – I knew all 15 of us would benefit from it."

CORES Queensland is a not-for-profit community organisation funded by Northern Queensland Primary Health Network which focuses on suicide prevention. CORES Queensland Coordinator Ross Romeo said at the heart of the program is the one-day suicide intervention training.

"The training is designed to teach people the skills to recognise the early warning signs of someone at-risk whilst also teaching the practical skills needed to know what to say, what to do, and where to go for help," said Ross.

"The people trained are not there to solve the problems of the person at-risk, their role is to recognise warning signs and connect the person at-risk to available services.

"This non-clinical peer-support model of training forms part of the strategies communities can use to tackle suicide."

Karen said her team can quickly build a rapport with clients where the clients confide in the barbershop team.

"Our clients often talk to us about things they wouldn't even tell their partner or best mate.

"Sometimes our clients want specific advice, but most times they just want a safe space to talk and be heard."

Karen describes the CORES training as invaluable. Her team learnt how to recognise warning signs of suicide and how to say the right things at the right time. They also learnt how to ask the direct questions needed and provide the correct response, including suicide prevention resources and referrals to services.

"Just two days after we completed the training, one of my team members had a vulnerable client sit in her chair and open up to her," said Karen.

"The client indicated that they were not in a good place emotionally, were struggling to cope, and didn't know where to turn.

"We were able to immediately, and discreetly, provide them with one of the CORES referral cards containing contact numbers for support services.

"Completing this training is absolutely going to save lives."

The one-day CORES training is available to community members 15 years and over, any organisation, service provider, workplace, school, etc. CORES Queensland currently has programs in Burdekin, Hinchinbrook, Innisfail, Townsville, Charters Towers, and the Whitsundays. Karen said she would 100 per cent recommend that everyone, especially those in the personal service industry, attend the CORES Suicide Prevention Training.

"The more people in our community that know how to appropriately respond to and assist people in crisis, the better off we all are," said Karen.

"We can all play a part in reducing the stigma surrounding mental health and suicide.

"I am so grateful to Ross and his team for delivering this training course. My team and I can now confidently have those difficult conversations around mental health, anxiety, and suicide awareness."

Between 4,500-5,000 people have been trained in Queensland and, on average, every fourth person trained has used their skills to intervene and help a person at-risk. The training empowers community members feel more equipped to help North Queenslanders live happier, healthier, longer lives.



Local hairdresser making a difference in her community through meaningful conversations with clients.

Meet Robert

OUR REGION,
our people

Robert Taylor is a firm believer that understanding an individual's substance use in the present moment, as well as understanding and addressing its root causes, is key to supporting people who use alcohol and other drugs (AOD).

Robert is the Therapeutic Team Leader at Queensland Injectors Health Network (QuIHN) Cairns and is using this concept in the region to provide locals with appropriate, patient-centred, and evidence-based support to improve their wellbeing.

QuIHN Cairns provides a free and accessible Dual Diagnosis Therapy program that considers the intersection of someone's mental health and their substance use and is delivered through one-on-one therapy with a trained clinician.

Robert said this specialised approach to AOD treatment assists to address barriers for people trying to access appropriate support services in the region.

"QuIHN's Dual Diagnosis Therapy program is unique in that it can both assess and treat a client's mental health and substance use holistically," said Robert.

"This lowers barriers to treatment for clients as they only need to engage with a single clinician, rather than with multiple services.

"QuIHN also takes a trauma-informed approach to treatment which looks to not just understand someone's substance use in the present moment, but to understand and address its root causes.

"The high level of training of our Therapeutic Team, the low barriers to entry to our service, and our ability to address a client's needs holistically and in depth, mean that QuIHN has an immensely important role in the AOD system in the Cairns region."

Sarah*, a client at QuIHN Cairns, is one local who has improved their wellbeing through the Dual Diagnosis Therapy Program.

Sarah has been engaged with QuIHN since 2018 to address long term illicit stimulant use associated with the self-management of ongoing symptoms of significant childhood trauma.

"Sarah has engaged with QuIHN at various stages of their journey towards change and healing, meaning that the team has been able to support her in a number of ways through multiple treatment episodes," said Robert.

"Initially Sarah presented with very poor mental health, and at significant risk of legal and other harms associated with her daily substance use and accompanying lifestyle.



Robert dedicated to providing holistic alcohol and other drugs support to Cairns residents.

"Early work with Sarah focused on helping facilitate stability and safety through therapeutic interventions and appropriate referrals to psychosocial supports in the community.

"This wraparound care approach allowed Sarah's engagement with QuIHN to begin to work on the underlying causes of her poor mental health and corresponding substance use.

"During Sarah's subsequent episodes of treatment with QuIHN, the therapeutic work undertaken has been able to deepen as she has built greater insight and resilience into her substance use and the experiences of trauma that had contributed to her poor mental health.

"The client has been assisted to make positive changes in her internal and external worlds and is now experiencing far greater stability in her relationships, work life, and overall wellbeing.

Robert is passionate about assisting QuIHN's clients to receive place-based and patient-centred care, assisting them to live happier, healthier, longer lives.

"Our goal is to provide the best service that we can for our client group," Robert said.

"QuIHN is grateful to be able to provide the specialised service that we do to the Cairns region.

"We see ourselves as an active member of the broader Cairns and Far North Queensland community and are proud to be able to work with our client group towards individual and community wellbeing.

"Though we are always looking for ways to improve our service delivery, knowing that we are delivering quality and responsive service and making a difference to clients is very satisfying."

*Name has been changed to protect their privacy.



GPs and other Primary Care Professionals

Objectives

Northern Queensland Primary Health Network's (NQPHN's) GPs and other Primary Care Professionals priority area objective is to build workforce capacity and capability for the future.

NQPHN supports health care providers to address factors impacting population health by providing education and resources to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and coordination of care.

Support provided to primary care providers in the 2020-21 financial year includes:

- » quality improvement activities and best practice methods

- » designing improved models of care
- » support with accreditation requirements
- » data analysis
- » Medical Benefits Schedule billing utilisation.

In the GPs and other Primary Care Professionals space, NQPHN aims to develop data-driven strategies to address critical health workforce vacancies in priority locations.

NQPHN's longer term goal is to develop integrated and innovative workforce models across the primary health care system.

Key projects

Cancer Screening Quality Improvement Program

NQPHN, in collaboration with the Queensland Health Cancer Screening Unit, delivered a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) program to address bowel, breast, and cervical cancer screening.

Quality improvement activities across Mackay, Townsville, Cairns, and Cape York and Torres Strait regions were developed which provided the participating practices with access to educational events, interactive webinar sessions, tools, publications, and resources.

The program goals and objectives included:

- » improved accuracy and cleanliness of clinical data to enable best practice care, leading to better health outcomes
- » increase in the number of eligible patients participating in cancer screening programs.

The program activities were paused early on in the financial year due to COVID-19. The program recommenced in September 2020 following a dramatic decline in screening numbers during the initial COVID-19 outbreak.

Key statistics

Since September commencement:

20% Individual participating practices reported up to 20% improvement in clinical data quality and over 10% improvement in the number of eligible patients who were up to date with cancer screening



An increase in recording of patient cancer screening status in practice software was seen across the NQPHN region

Transition to Practice Program

As the national professional association for nurses working in primary health care, Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA) has been central to supporting nurses through projects and programs aimed at improving the health of Australians via the delivery of quality, evidence-based care.

The aim of the Transition to Practice Program is to increase the confidence, skills, and knowledge of recently graduated and experienced nurses moving into primary health care settings.

In the 2020-21 financial year, the program provided transitioning nurses with access to an experienced clinical and professional mentor, who provided a minimum of 40 hours of clinical and professional mentoring (directly or indirectly) over a period of 10 months.

Both the transitioning nurse and mentor had access to over 150 online education activities and resources.

All program participants had access to experienced registered nurses for on-going program support and the opportunity to participate in group discussions. APNA also conducted regular 6-8 weekly teleconferences with participants to assist with any ongoing needs.

The majority of transitioning nurses in the program rated the education as being “extremely Influential” in their transition experience.

Key statistics

19

Transitioning nurses completed the program across 17 locations



Sexually Transmissible Infections (STIs) and Blood Borne Viruses Update

NQPHN, in collaboration with the Mackay Hospital and Health Service (MHHS) and James Cook University (JCU), provided a sexual health update and education evening for clinicians in the Whitsunday region. This area has a high transient and backpacker population.

This joint venture was held in response to a reduction in STI testing numbers in the Mackay region.

2020 showed a sharp decrease in STIs and HIV test counts from public laboratories with an overall reduction by 10 per cent compared to the same time frame in 2019. In 2020, there were decreases in:

- » syphilis testing by 4 per cent
- » chlamydia testing by 11 per cent
- » gonorrhoea testing by 8 per cent
- » HIV testing by 9 per cent.

This data indicates there is a decrease in testing in communities which in turn contributes to less visibility about the actual burden of infection, and fewer opportunities to treat and prevent STIs and HIV*.

Information presented at the event included:

- » identifying priority populations for STI and BBV testing
- » strengthening the uptake of STI and BBV testing in primary health care
- » identifying and treating STIs according to recommended treatment guidelines
- » initiating contact tracing
- » diagnostic interpretation
- » current HIV prevention strategies
- » HIV Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)
- » HIV Post-exposure Prophylaxis (PEP).

*Queensland Sexual Health Ministerial Advisory Committee.

Key statistics

31

This event attracted a total of 31 health professionals, a combination of medical officers, nurses, midwives, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers from the Whitsunday and Collinsville area





Breathe Easy, Breathe Safe

NQPHN, in collaboration with the Mackay Base Hospital, developed a comprehensive model of care, called Breathe Easy, Breathe Safe, to address the issue of high hospital presentation and admission rates for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and chronic asthma.

Through enhanced integration of tertiary and primary care services, transfer of care to the general practice setting is enabled by way of a well-coordinated handover including an interim action plan, thereby enhancing the coordinated management of people with chronic respiratory conditions.

Reports received by individual patients demonstrate the effectiveness of this care and an improvement in management and quality of life.

COPD is the fifth leading cause of death in Australia, and accounts for 51 per cent of the total disease burden due to respiratory conditions.

COPD is the leading cause of hospital admissions and has been reported to be responsible for 3.9 per cent of the total disease burden (AIHW 2019a). It is the leading specific cause of total burden in women (65-74 years) and the second leading cause in men in the same age bracket*.

[*www.aihw.gov.au/reports/asthma-other-chronic-respiratory-conditions/copd-chronic-obstructive-pulmonary-disease/contents/deaths](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/asthma-other-chronic-respiratory-conditions/copd-chronic-obstructive-pulmonary-disease/contents/deaths)

Key statistics

53

Patients who presented to the Mackay Base Hospital Emergency Department during the months of January to March 2021 were offered the Breathe Easy, Breathe Safe intervention model of care



75%

Of these patients accepted the care, receiving education and referral to relevant general practitioners and peak bodies



Meet Dr Kangru

OUR REGION,
our people

Whitsunday Doctors Service is focused on providing the highest standards of care possible for their patients, and they are using their own practice data to achieve it.

Led by GP Dr Konrad Kangru, the practice has committed to ensuring their patient data is accurate and up-to-date by taking part in the Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) Data Program.

Through the Data Program, a general practice's data is extracted, analysed, and then used to positively influence patient health outcomes within the primary healthcare setting.

The program also benefits the practice by distinguishing the best way to streamline business processes, assisting with continuous quality improvement (CQI), identifying opportunities to maximise appropriate utilisation of MBS billing, and improving data quality for accreditation preparation.

"Understanding and utilising data is tremendously important for our practice," said Dr Kangru.

"We love being able to demonstrate to our patients, to our students and registrars, and to the visiting accreditation team that we actively seek to provide the very best standard of primary care we can, with the resources available.

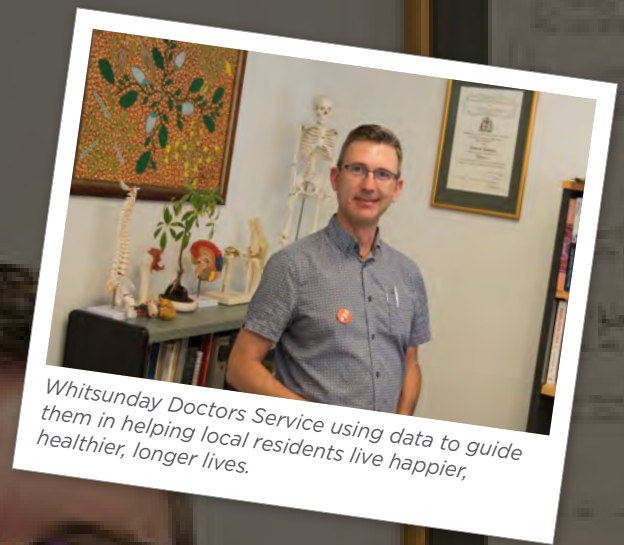
"Our GPs participate in continuing audits for women's health, diabetes, and skin cancer management.

"We assess our performance on smoking cessation rates, and how regularly we are performing proper spirometry to better diagnose early chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

"We ask our students how common these conditions they're seeing with us are, and which groups are at highest risk.

"Our nurses grab our patients from the waiting room before they see the doctor to quickly update height, weight, and waist measurements, and see if progress really is being made."

By utilising meaningful and accurate data, Dr Kangru and his practice team are able to establish goals to work towards in relation to the care they provide for their patients and the greater Whitsunday community, and work out what they need to do to achieve them.



Whitsunday Doctors Service using data to guide them in helping local residents live happier, healthier, longer lives.

Dr Kangru said it is important that his practice takes the extra time to ensure their data is complete and up-to-date.

"There is no simple way for us to define what our endpoint is meant to be, let alone how we're going to get there, if we don't have meaningful and current data," said Dr Kangru.

"Every day in general practice we are confronted with unique clinical encounters managed in discrete patient episodes.

"While we might conduct 20, 30, or 40 different n=1 clinical trials each day, it is our own access to data which guides our decisions.

"Although we might think that we're too busy to collect data, and it isn't relevant to our own practices, data has always been valued in medicine.

"Collecting and analysing our practice data is how we are able to measure that we are being successful in our work, such as decreasing the number of preventable hospitalisations or preventing complications of chronic disease.

"It also enables us to demonstrate that the standard of care we provide in a regional setting is as good as anywhere else in Australia.

"If we didn't record important patient data, collate it, share it, and improve upon it, then we wouldn't know if we are actually achieving our goals.

"Our practice data provides us with an evidence base that steers us in the right direction so that we can make the biggest impacts on the wellbeing of our patients."

First Nations Health

Objectives

In the 2020-21 financial year, Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) worked towards achieving equity for First Nations Peoples through improved health access and outcomes.

NQPHN aims to support the Community Controlled sector on building workforce capacity and capability.

Addressing the prevalence of chronic disease amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents in the NQPHN region requires holistic primary health care interventions through culturally safe service models.

In the 2020-21 financial year, NQPHN funded services for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people that:

- » delivered culturally appropriate primary and preventative health care
- » improved access to primary health care particularly in rural and remote areas
- » empowered communities to advance localised approaches to delivering primary health care.

To assist in achieving equity for First Nations Peoples, NQPHN also:

- » continually nurtured its relationships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACHHOs) and key stakeholders in communities, including local councils
- » sought out partnerships with non-health agencies to support collaborative strategies that recognise social determinants of health as key variables to addressing quality of life
- » evaluated and developed integrated, multi-disciplinary team approaches to chronic disease management.

Key projects

On the Move with Deadly Foods

On the Move with Deadly Foods is an interactive education program conducted by AFL Cape York to facilitate the voluntary adoption of eating and physical activity behaviours that are conducive to health and wellbeing.

The program involves AFL Cape York Development Coordinators engaging with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander primary school aged students and youth aged up to 17 years old from the Cape York, Torres Strait, and Gulf regions through scenario-based learning.

Through the program, participants have gained:

- » increased awareness of diet and physical activity knowledge conducive to health and wellbeing
- » improved attitude towards healthy eating and physical
- » improved understanding of localised food supply as facilitators and barriers to support healthy diet and physical activity behaviour change.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted face-to-face service delivery during some of 2020. As an interim measure, the On the Move with Deadly Foods program utilised social media platforms to engage students and communities and worked remotely with teachers in the Cape York, Torres Strait, and Gulf regions to deliver the program.

During the 2020-21 financial year, On the Move with Deadly Foods also held a cooking camp in Napranum, facilitated food growing projects in partnership with schools, and supported AFL Ambassador Chris Johnson to visit the Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) to promote key health messages.

Key statistics

25+

Communities reached at 45 locations in the Gulf, Cape York, and Torres Straits regions



12,300

People reached since its inception in 2019



Integrated Team Care (ITC)

The aim of the Integrated Team Care (ITC) program is to assist Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to:

- » obtain primary health care as required
- » provide care coordination services to eligible Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people with chronic disease who require coordinated, multidisciplinary care
- » improve access for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to culturally appropriate mainstream primary care.

The ITC program is delivered by teams of Indigenous Health Project Officers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Outreach Workers, and Care Coordinators within the Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) region across both Indigenous and mainstream primary care sectors.









During the 2020-21 financial year, the ITC program was delivered by three organisations in the NQPHN region - Northern Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Alliance (NATSIHA), Northern Australia Primary Health Limited (NAPHL), and Northern Peninsula Area Family and Community Services (NPAFACS).

Key objectives of the ITC program are to:

- » contribute to better treatment and management of chronic conditions for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people enrolled in the program
- » improve access to appropriate health care through care coordination and provision of supplementary services for eligible Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people with chronic disease
- » foster collaboration and support between the mainstream primary care and the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health sector
- » improve the capacity of mainstream primary care services to deliver culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
- » increase the uptake of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items, including Health Assessments for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and follow up.

Key statistics

In the 2020-21 financial year, there were:

8,338	Occasions of transport to and from appointments to 2,457 unique patients	
4,053	Occasions of support from specialist services and care coordinators to 1,224 unique patients	
1,732	Occasions of support from outreach or visiting health professionals to 1,118 unique patients	
561	Occasions of medications collection to 192 unique patients	
2,219	Occasions of support to access appointments with a GP and/or nurse for 1,025 unique patients	
520	Occasions of support to access diagnostic tests and/or referrals for 362 unique patients	
2,819	Occasions of community liaison for 642 unique patients	
1,973	Occasions of advocacy for 975 unique clients	

Bump2Bubba

The Bump2Bubba program, developed by Apunipima, is a nutrition program that uses best practice approaches to support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander mothers in Cape York to practice optimal nutrition before, during, and after pregnancy.

Supported by funding from NQPHN, the program was expanded in the 2020-21 financial year to service up to six Cape York communities.

The program initially included a social media marketing campaign and the upskilling of health workers. The program expansion also led to the development of an online training package and education videos developed on country about key nutrition topics related to maternal and child health. These videos were developed in consultation with participating communities.

The videos include:

- » Kowanyama Bush Food Story
- » Kowanyama Celebrating Food and Culture
- » Lockhart River Mayi Ngampulungku (Our Food)
- » High iron stew for bub
- » Let's Yarn About Anaemia animation

Additional achievements from the Bump2Bubba program in the 2020-21 financial year included:

- » the production of an educational anaemia animation called 'Let's Yarn about Anaemia' developed in conjunction with maternal and child health workers and launched in March 2021
- » the development of 'Healthy Kids Healthy Habits' Program flipcharts and distribution to maternal and child health staff for Cape York communities
- » the development of a suite of online nutrition awareness education sessions for the maternal and child health workforce including 'Sugar in Baby's Bottle'
- » the review and update of nutrition components of the Baby One Program Manual
- » the creation of merchandise such as plates and pannikins which promote optimal and culturally appropriate nutrition messages
- » the development of bush food videos in collaboration with local community members and elders
- » provided support for local stores to stock appropriate infant foods.

Key statistics

49,200

Views of the educational videos on social media, 878 reactions, and 1,100 shares



Schools Up North (SUN)

The Schools Up North (SUN) program, run by Youth Empowered Towards Independence (YETI) and funded by NQPHN, builds the capacity of secondary school staff across Cape York and the Torres Strait to better support students experiencing mental health difficulties.

During the 2020-21 financial year, the SUN Program progressed the development of a school-based mental health platform in which teachers in remote schools are agents of change in enhancing engagement and early referral of Indigenous students experiencing mental health difficulty.

SUN brought high-value resources including expert consultants in Indigenous mental health and trauma to secondary schools to support their improvement efforts to hold young people in safe, supportive learning environments.

The program partnered with school communities in Weipa, Thursday Island, Kowanyama, and most recently, Bamaga.

This school-based capacity building is now supported through links with community based primary mental health care services being delivered by agencies such as the Royal Flying Doctors Service (Cape York) and Wakai Waian Healing (Torres Strait).

Key statistics

37

Teachers across Kowanyama, Western Cape College, and Tagai State College attended the Managing COVID in the Remote School Environments workshops



13

Senior teachers commenced the Graduate Certificate in Trauma Aware Schooling with SUN support



9

Teachers and teacher aids undertook the Menzies Health Skills for Life student resilience program training



33

Teachers and support staff participated in the Kowanyama Socio Historical background workshop delivered by Dr Ernest Hunter



Remote Alcohol and Drug Interventions and Outcomes (RADIO)

Remote Alcohol and Drug Interventions and Outcomes (RADIO) is a hub and spoke style program delivering Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) treatment for young people in Cape York, Mossman, and the Torres Strait.

The initiative, developed by Youth Empowered Towards Independence (YETI) and supported by funding from NQPHN, provides young people in remote communities with:

- » information and referrals
- » support to reduce alcohol and other drug use
- » coordinated case management
- » help to improve social and emotional well being
- » help to build connections with family and community
- » connections to other services.

RADIO works with a number of partner organisations to deliver the AOD support, including:

- » Cooktown District Community Centre
- » Gungarde Community Centre Aboriginal Corporation
- » Mossman Elders Justice Group
- » NPA Family and Community Services
- » Torres Health Indigenous Corporation
- » Weipa Community Care Association.

RADIO has created a sustainable workforce through professional development, supervision and mentoring, and a bespoke data base of workers recruited from local communities.

By building the capacity of place-based services, RADIO has enabled better access to culturally appropriate AOD services for young people in remote regions of Far North Queensland.

Key statistics

206 Clients supported by RADIO



1,745 Contact hours undertaken between staff and clients



2,121 Hours of case work performed



Wakai Waian Healing

Wakai Waian Healing provides direct, focused, and culturally appropriate psychology and counselling support services to 16 Island communities in the Torres Strait.

During the 2020-21 financial year, Wakai Waian Healing increased mental health and wellbeing literacy and local community capacity by facilitating a resilience program at the Torres Strait Secondary College.

The service has also established trust and credibility in local close-knit Torres Strait communities through their Community and Culture Mentoring Group.

Wakai Waian Healing also focused on local workforce development during the 2020-21 financial year. The majority of the service's staff were recruited locally to ensure cultural connections and community support of the service.

Wakai Waian Healing's targeted response to addressing the needs of remote communities of the Torres Strait supports NQPHN's objective to deliver the right care, in the right place, at the right time for all North Queenslanders.

Key statistics

176 New clients





Smoking Cessation Support Program

'Give Up Por Buba' Smoking Cessation Support Program was implemented across Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) communities to assist pregnant women and their families to cease or reduce smoking during pregnancy until the child is up to six months of age.

This evidence-based program, run by NPA Family and Community Services (NPAFACS) and funded by NQPHN, was developed locally in consultation with community and Elders to ensure it is culturally appropriate and is located at the Healing Centre in Injinoo.

During the 2020-21 financial year, the program:

- » worked towards reducing the number of cigarettes smoked by women during pregnancy
- » developed sustainable support networks for pregnant mothers within community
- » improved local capacity for the education, treatment, and management of smoking during pregnancy
- » provided a culturally appropriate learning environment for the discussion amongst local pregnant women of smoking cessation
- » helped to develop individualised strategies for preventing smoking at home.


Smoking cessation support activities through the Give Up Por Buba program ranged from face-to-face individual sessions, group sessions, and telephone sessions where clinically appropriate. Yarning circles with community Elders were also used to provide support to women and their families.


The program works in collaboration with Torres and Cape Hospital Health Service, midwives, health workers, general practitioners, social workers, counsellors, and case workers in the region.


During the 2020-21 financial year, Give Up Por Buba worked to develop rapport and trust with clients and reported an increase in phone consults and home visits due to restrictions posed by COVID-19, monsoonal wet weather, and Sorry Business.

Smoking cessation support for pregnant women is now available in all appropriate NPAFACS programs and staff are familiar with the appropriate referral pathways. The program has also improved primary healthcare capacity for the NPA region to better identify, monitor, and reduce smoking rates and increase self-efficacy to quit or reduce smoking.

Key statistics

59% Women who were referred into the program reduced the amount they were smoking whilst pregnant 

18% Women who took part in the program ceased smoking completely during their pregnancy 

5 Sessions undertaken by each participant 



Meet Jos

OUR REGION, *our people*

After attending a Cultural Awareness and Appreciation Workshop in early 2021, Jos was left feeling invigorated – eager to put her learnings into practice and share the knowledge she gained with her colleagues.

Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) Manager Mental Health Far North Jos Middleton has worked in the mental health field for 20+ years and is passionate about providing culturally appropriate mental health services to rural and remote Indigenous communities.

Jos and her team deliver psychological therapies across Cape York communities to those presenting with mild to moderate mental health needs.

The informative, interactive, and culturally safe workshop she attended was fully funded by Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) and delivered by local Indigenous Cultural Facilitator Nerelle Nicol.

Nerelle said the workshop is intended to encourage participants to set out on a journey of learning by offering participants a safe and engaging environment to have open conversations and share their experiences.

“The mainstream primary care and allied health service providers who attend the workshop gain greater insight into the issues that contribute to the health disparities of First Nations Peoples,” said Nerelle.

“Participants learn new ideas for improving engagement and communication that help build trusting relationships to assist in addressing health needs in a culturally safe and appropriate way.

“The aim of the workshop is to build capacity and support the service providers to develop and deliver culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our region.”

Jos said the Cultural Awareness and Appreciation Workshop was one of the most powerful, overwhelming, and educational cultural training days she has attended.

“It was great to have local Indigenous facilitators bring local knowledge and culture to the day to assist with relevance,” said Jos.

“The workshop facilitated by Nerelle reinforced a lot of existing knowledge I had previously learnt about working with Indigenous clients.

“The training highlighted how everything is interconnected and the importance of addressing the social determinants of health.

“I strongly believe that the most important thing in a person’s life is their mental wellbeing – and the way we engage with others to ensure they feel safe is fundamental.”

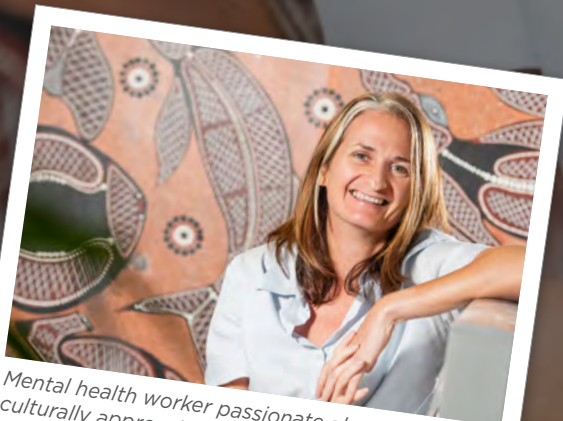
Jos described the workshop as exceptional and believes it should be mandatory for anyone working with Indigenous clients to ensure they receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

Following this workshop, the RFDS Mental Health Team partnered with headspace Cairns to arrange a Cultural Awareness and Appreciation Workshop for 25 staff members from both services to attend.

“I have told so many people about this training as I think everyone should have to attend,” said Jos.

“I’m confident everyone who attends will be able to take something away from it.

“I’ve already started putting my learnings into place to reduce stigma around mental health care in Indigenous clients and increase awareness so, hopefully, people ask for help sooner rather than later.”



Mental health worker passionate about delivering culturally appropriate care to Cape York communities.

System Integration

Objectives

Northern Queensland Primary Health Network's (NQPHN's) System Integration priority area objective is for North Queensland residents to receive the right care, at the right place, at the right time.

To achieve this objective, in the 2020-21 financial year NQPHN worked within our current alliances to improve secure data sharing and referral pathways.

System Integration involves the coordination of data sharing and collecting information to enable primary healthcare providers to better care for North Queenslanders when and where they need it.

Through system integration, NQPHN supports and educates healthcare providers to use digital health systems and secure data to improve and coordinate patient care.

NQPHN's longer term objective for system integration is to work with our partners to jointly plan, co-commission, and deliver innovative models of service delivery to address key health priority areas for North Queensland.

Key projects

AGPAL High Performing Primary Care Series and Learning Management System

NQPHN contracted the Australian General Practice Accreditation Limited (AGPAL) to develop and deliver a series of webinars that focused on continuous quality improvement and Practice Incentives Program Quality Improvement (PIPQI), RACGP Standards 5th edition and accreditation, population health, digital literacy, and coordinated care.

The interactive webinars were delivered by subject matter experts and industry leaders and led participants through practical problem-solving applications relevant to their practice.

Topics covered in the learning series included:

- » building and strengthening workforce capacity
- » achieving the Quadruple Aim in healthcare
- » embedding a culture for continuous quality improvement
- » capitalising and leveraging off existing primary care initiatives
- » extending and enhancing digital literacy and data engagement
- » implementing sustainable primary care
- » promoting coordinated/integrated care within the region.

A regionally specific eLearning platform was also developed to serve as a home for education, training, and digital resources relating to the learning series. The platform provides an opportunity for participants to revise content, resources, and recordings following the live sessions and also offers other healthcare providers a chance to benefit from the educational content and engage in self-paced learning and development opportunities.

Key statistics



53

Participants attended series one - Continuous quality improvement and PIPQI

32

Participants attended series two - RACGP Standards 5th edition and accreditation

37

Participants attended series three - Population health and digital literacy

16

Participants attended series four - Coordinated care



My Health Record

My Health Record is a secure, online summary of an individual’s key health information. Authorised healthcare providers have access to this important health information, which assists in patients getting the right treatment, at the right time.

Throughout the 2020-21 financial year, NQPHN worked to ensure general practices, pharmacies, and specialist practices were educated regarding the importance of My Health Record and its meaningful use in daily practice. This included:

- » assisting with registration to My Health Record
- » informing and upskilling practice staff in My Health Record through Digital Health Updates and practice visits
- » provision of support to revise and maintain digital health infrastructure and access to relevant resources and information through the Australian Digital Health Agency.

There was also a large focus within general practice and pharmacy on participating and enabling electronic prescribing, with the introduction of the token and active script list models. NQPHN worked to increase activation of electronic requesting amongst eligible practices using their existing clinical information systems.

Key statistics

In the 2020-21 financial year, there were:

21.1%

Increase in dispense record uploads to My Health Record by pharmacies in the NQPHN region



25.1%

Increase in prescription uploads to My Health Record by general practices in the NQPHN region



My health for life

My health for life is a healthy lifestyle program funded by the Queensland Government in partnership with Health and Wellbeing Queensland. This disease prevention program aims to support Queenslanders to reduce their risk of developing chronic conditions such as heart disease, stroke, or type 2 diabetes.

In the 2020-21 financial year, NQPHN increased awareness of the My health for life program within the primary healthcare sector and encouraged ongoing referrals from general practices. This was achieved through:

- » ongoing promotion of the My health for life program on the NQPHN website, social media platforms, and fortnightly NQPHN newsletters
- » inclusion of My health for life information on Lifestyle Modification Programs pages across the Far North Queensland, Townsville, and Mackay HealthPathways sites.

A quality improvement toolkit was also created to support general practices to identify patients eligible for the MH4L program and to provide ongoing support to these patients. The toolkit was developed to leverage the use of existing CAT software, clinical information system recalls and reminders, and My Health Record.

Key statistics

In the 2020-21 financial year, there were:

3,489

North Queenslanders completed the My health for life risk assessment



1,598

Individuals eligible to join the My health for life program



Meet Dr Kennedy and Toni

OUR REGION,
our people

Dr Aaron Kennedy and Toni Simmons have a shared view that arming people with the right information and resources can drastically improve health outcomes for patients, and they have put this belief into practice through the Mackay HealthPathways Autism initiative.

The Mackay HealthPathways Autism initiative is empowering primary health care professionals in the region to improve and support the health and wellbeing, across the lifespan, of individuals on the Autism spectrum. In a world first, the project was implemented to develop a targeted clinical HealthPathway that could support general practitioners (GPs) and primary health care professionals to link children, adolescents, and adults with autism to the most appropriate health services for their individual needs.

Dr Kennedy, Senior GP Clinical Editor for Mackay HealthPathways, was responsible for compiling existing research and information about autism using HealthPathways, to ensure GPs could access meaningful and evidence-based information in a concise format during a patient consult.

“Autism is a complex condition and GPs feel under prepared, under educated, under resourced, and their systems don’t function very well to allow people on the spectrum to access those systems well,” said Dr Kennedy.

“HealthPathways was designed to provide health professionals with a knowledge base and ready to use resources, that are always available and locally relevant, so the information provided to a patient is relevant to the medicine a GP locally practices.

“I was tasked with utilising the existing structure of the HealthPathways platform to cover assessment, management, local resources, local referral options, and further resources that would help clinicians.”

The initiative was a collaboration, spanning over two-years from research to implementation, between Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN), Mackay Hospital and Health Service, Mackay HealthPathways, the Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC), the University of Queensland, Streamliners, and the Queensland Centre for Intellectual and Developmental Disability.

Early consultations with local health care professionals, subject matter experts, and the community showed that existing pathways only focused on early identification and diagnosis, showing a gap in management post diagnosis. The findings captured from local research also matched closely with results from international literature on the topic.



Collaborative project helping to improve the health and wellbeing of patients on the autism spectrum.

Integrated Health Manager and General Practice Liaison Officer at Mackay Hospital and Health Service Toni Simmons worked closely with Dr Kennedy in the Mackay HealthPathways Team and shared both a professional and personal purpose in driving the initiative.

“What a lot of people forget, Autism is a condition that you have for your whole entire life, so the idea was to develop pathways that cover the whole lifespan,” said Toni.

“From a health professional’s perspective, we had this amazing tool and vehicle to implement change, and not just on a local perspective, but also scale that up across an entire community.

“I also got involved and passionate in this space as I have lived experience with a child that’s on the spectrum. I know and saw firsthand what some of the gaps were after you get the diagnosis—getting information on where to go, on management, and what’s available.

“By equipping our health professionals with the right tools and resources, we can support them in helping their patients live happier, healthier, longer lives.”

The Autism HealthPathways was launched for clinical use in Mackay and introduced to local GPs at a symposium event titled ‘Through their eyes... Through their lives...’. It has since been accessed by primary care professionals across the Mackay region, with further interest in the HealthPathways expressed more broadly.

“Since the launch, utilisation of the pathway has been tracked to ensure continuous quality improvement, so that feedback and improvements are captured and reflected in iterative versions,” said Dr Kennedy.

The Autism HealthPathways can be accessed by other regions within the HealthPathways community, assisting primary health care professionals to better support their patients on the spectrum to receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time across the lifespan.

COVID-19

Objectives

Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) supported the Australian Government's COVID-19 pandemic primary care response and recovery, and the COVID-19 vaccination program rollout, working closely with healthcare providers and all levels of government, as well as other key partners in health, to ensure a successful outcome across our region.

NQPHN's primary care response to COVID-19 recognised the essential role of general practice, pharmacy, Aboriginal Medical Services/Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, allied health, and other primary care services, as well as aged care, home care, and disability care services in protecting the health of the community.

In the 2020-21 financial year, NQPHN acted as a key conduit and source of information and action for healthcare providers and the community throughout the response, recovery, and vaccination rollout phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, collaborating with federal, state, and local government, as well as non-government organisations.

NQPHN supported the Department of Health in its COVID-19 efforts, including:

- » the establishment and ongoing support of dedicated GP respiratory clinics
- » playing a key role in an effective COVID-19 vaccination program rollout
- » the implementation of expanded access to telehealth services
- » focused education and training of the primary healthcare workforce
- » enhanced protection for remote communities, including First Nations peoples.

NQPHN focused on clear and consistent communication about these initiatives to both the health workforce and the wider population to equip Australia's primary care system with the means to protect the community and primary care workers themselves against the threat of COVID-19.


Key projects


General practices


On behalf of the Australian and Queensland governments, NQPHN had a role in supporting, advocating for, and communicating with general practitioners (GPs) and general practice staff including practice managers, nurses, and administration staff about the COVID-19 initial and ongoing response and vaccination rollout. NQPHN committed to ensuring the accurate and timely dissemination of key COVID-19 information to general practices throughout the pandemic.


Key statistics


By June 2021, supported by NQPHN through its key involvement in the EOI processes:


71% Practices in North Queensland delivering COVID-19 vaccines 

2 NQPHN hosted interactive webinars for General Practice during vaccination rollout 

160 Virtual attendees at webinars with guest speakers including Dr Lucas de Toca, acting first assistant secretary of the COVID-19 Primary Care Response, Dr Karen Price, RACGP President, and Dr Sarah Chalmers, ACRRM President 

50% Practices starting to vaccinate in the second tranche of the COVID-19 vaccination program taking part in a webinar to hear and gain insight from other North Queensland practices which had been administering the COVID-19 vaccine 

 Successfully advocated for increased vaccine allocation for North Queensland GPs

30,000 COVID-19 vaccine appointment cards to general practices on behalf of the Department 

GP Respiratory Clinics

The Australian Government, supported by Primary Health Networks, established more than 100 GP-led respiratory clinics around the country to clinically assess, treat, and test people with mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms.

Key statistics



Supported up to six GP-led respiratory clinics in the region – two in Cairns, and one each in Charters Towers, Townsville, Mackay, and the Whitsundays. As of 30 June 2021, NQPHN continued to actively support four GP-led respiratory clinics across the region. These clinics formed part of an integrated health system response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and assessed, tested, and diagnosed mild-to-moderate respiratory conditions at no cost to the general public.



Between July 2020-June 2021, GP-led respiratory clinics received more than 15,000 presentations and delivered more than 5,000 COVID-19 vaccinations

These clinics have also been tasked with a key role in the COVID-19 vaccination program rollout. GP-led Respiratory clinics play a supporting role to mainstream general practice during the COVID-19 pandemic response efforts.



Helped coordinate all four GP-led respiratory clinics in the region to on-board as COVID-19 vaccine providers as part of the rollout process



Hosted 26 fortnightly community of practice GP respiratory clinic meetings to ensure peer-to-peer learning, and continuous quality improvement with models of care



All NQPHN GP-led respiratory clinics continue to operate as assessment and testing clinics, responding to increases and decreases in demand, and as COVID-19 vaccinators for the community

Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACFs) and in-home care and disability services

NQPHN continued to provide information and support to residential aged care facilities (RACFs) and in-home care and disability service providers across North Queensland during the COVID-19 pandemic response,

including during the initial vaccination rollout, utilising and strengthening existing relationships to ensure a successful outcome.

Key statistics



Key role in the RACF vaccination rollout. By the end of June 2021, all aged care residents who consented were fully vaccinated as part of the vaccination rollout program, including 25 RACFs in Cairns, 23 in Townsville, and 14 in Mackay



Hosted a RACF COVID-19 Outbreak Identification and Readiness virtual meeting presented by Dr Steven Donohue from Tropical Public Health Services, attended by 44 RACF workers



Coordinated a Far North Queensland vaccination blitz, with vaccine teams travelling 2,400km on the road to administer 2,400 first and second COVID-19 vaccinations to more than 1,200 aged care residents and staff



Hosted a COVID-19 update for in-home care providers, with 64 attendees along with guest speakers from the Aged Care Quality Commission and Cairns Public Health Unit 64 individual dial-ins



Coordinated the delivery of six separate forums to more than 270 aged care, in-home care, and disability service representatives. These forums provided an update on the COVID-19 response efforts, as well as guest presentations from the Department of Health, Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and Queensland Government Public Health officials (Tropical Public Health Services).



Developed and distributed a Microsoft Teams video conferencing and webinar user guide to support RACF and in-home care communication



Facilitated personal protective equipment (PPE) refresher training with Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service and local RACFs



Established a dedicated Aged and Community care section within the COVID-19 community and providers subsections on the NQPHN website.



Communications

Working under a strategic communications plan, NQPHN acted as a key conduit and source of information for healthcare providers and the community throughout the response and vaccination phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, collaborating with federal, state, and local

government, as well as non-government organisations, on delivering key messages to the primary care sector relating to the virus and the vaccine rollout.

Key statistics

240+	Updates distributed to GPs, RACFs, and other primary health providers, reaching 130,000 inboxes		Supported and collaborated with all four local Hospital and Health Services to communicate their vaccine rollouts in rural and regional communities across the region
3000+	Views on its dedicated COVID-19 webpage		Developed an extensive media and community awareness campaign to both communicate the role of the GPRCs in the primary care setting and to raise the profile of the clinics within the community
2,100+	Emails received and replied to		Developed and distributed a 'GP messaging for media' document to support general practices in their response to requests from media for comment
30	Distributed 15 media releases with coverage in more than 30 media outlets		Provided regular internal COVID-19 updates to NQPHN staff
300,000	Launched a campaign in July 2020 to better support increased COVID-19 testing rates in North Queensland - this was delivered via social media, Spotify and geofencing, reaching more than 300,000 people		

Meet Natalie

OUR REGION,
our people

Registered nurses comprise the largest clinical workforce in the country, with around 450,000 registered nurses and midwives in Australia, according to Department of Health statistics.

And in the response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, nurses are on the frontline, playing a critical and significant role in fighting the spread of the virus.

They continue to be at the forefront of patient care and are actively involved with evaluation and monitoring in the community.

Natalie Hardy, a nurse at Upper Ross Medical Centre in Townsville, is a local example of how nurses are playing a crucial role during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Natalie is helping to lead the way in the fight against the spread of COVID-19 through her vaccination and education work at the practice's GP Respiratory Clinic.

Upper Ross Medical Centre is one of four GP Respiratory Clinics across North Queensland providing a dual role in the COVID-19 response by remaining an ongoing COVID-19 assessment, testing, and treatment facility, as well as delivering vaccines to all eligible individuals, including those from overseas.

Natalie said that she has seen nurses' role during the pandemic evolve to much more of a focus on education.

"People seem to be more at ease when I answer their questions about the COVID vaccine, and what they need know before I administer the vaccine," Natalie said.

"I enjoy the part of my job that is educating people around the importance of the COVID-19 vaccine and how we're protecting each other as a community.

"Nurses have also had to adapt to the increasing use of telehealth that gives us greater flexibility in how we are able to continue to provide patients with the health care they need."



Nurse Natalie a shining light in COVID-19 response

Natalie said she had always had a passion for nursing from a very young age.

"My mum says that from about the time I was four, she always knew I was going to end up being a nurse," Natalie said.

"I would see the nurses pull up across the road to check on elderly patients, and I would run out of my house to go and help.

"My biggest reason for being a nurse is the ongoing relationships I get to have with the patients, for example with their care plans and immunisations.

"I've always enjoyed being part of their whole-of-life health journey, and I'm doing what I truly love."

NQPHN Chief Executive Officer Robin Whyte said nurses, as the healthcare profession with the largest number of members, play an integral part in health care for the community, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Nurses are at the frontline of detecting, managing, and preventing the spread of this virus, as well as playing a key role in education across the spectrum of preventative health," she said.

