

South West Hospital and Health Service

PULSE

OCT-DEC 2024 EDITION



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We respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands across the South West. We also pay our respects to the current and future Elders, for they will inherit the responsibility of keeping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture alive, and for creating a better life for the generations to follow.

We believe the future happiness and wellbeing of all Australians and our future generations will be enhanced by valuing and taking pride in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—the oldest living culture of humanity.

SOUTH WEST TRADITIONAL OWNERS

- Augathella – Bidjara** (Bid-jara)
- Bollon – Kooma** (Coo-ma)
- Charleville – Bidjara** (Bid-jara)
- Cunnamulla – Kunja** (Koun-yah) with other interests
- Dirranbandi – Yuwaalaraay/Euahlayi people** (You-wal-a-ray/ You-al-e-i)
- Eromanga – Boonthamurra** (Boon-tha-murra)
- Eulo – Budjiti** (Bud-ji-ti)
- Injune – Bidjara** (Bid-jara)
- Mitchell – Gunggari** (Gon-gari)
- Morven – Bidjara** (Bid-jara)
- Mungindi – Kamilaroi** (Car-milla-roy)
- Quilpie – Boonthamurra, Mardigan, Wongkumara** (Boonthamurra, Mardigan, Wongkumara) with other interests
- Roma – Mandandanji** (Mand-an-dand-gee)
- St George – Kooma** (Coo-ma) with **Kamilaroi, Mandandanji, Bigambul and Gungari** interests
- Surat – Mandandanji** (Mand-an-dand-gee)
- Thargomindah – Kullili** (Coo-lee-lar)
- Wallumbilla – Mandandanji** (Mand-an-dand-gee)

This newsletter is produced by the South West Hospital and Health Service. All feedback and contributions are welcome. All published material has been approved by the Health Service Chief Executive.

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WARNING: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned the following edition of The Pulse may contain images and names of an Indigenous Australian who has passed away.

Cover Image: Dr Oliver Hamilton on left, Dr Latifeh Horrocks on right and Santa is Dr Jim Hudson getting in the festive spirit at Charleville Hospital.



QUALITY



COMPASSION



ACCOUNTABILITY



ENGAGEMENT



ADAPTABILITY

“ Christmas isn’t about candy canes, or lights all aglow, it’s the hearts that we touch and the care that we show. ”

Mickey’s Once Upon A Christmas – Walt Disney Movie, 1999



From the Board Chair

For many, the festive season can be a time for reflecting upon the year that has been; the numerous achievements, and the challenges of providing services to our rural and remote communities in our ‘big sky country’ of South West Queensland.

On behalf of the South West Hospital and Health Board, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for your unwavering dedication, compassionate care and skills which enable our collective team to provide exceptional and safe healthcare to our communities. Every person, in every role, contributes to the difference we make daily to those who rely on our services.

The Board never ceases to be amazed at the full and caring commitment given by many, to ensure that the South West Hospital and Health Service is providing safe, effective, responsible and sustainable health care.

The Board team recognises the numerous demands you face daily, and we remain deeply grateful for the awe-inspiring teamwork, clever innovations and resourceful workarounds, which results in the team providing compassionate and quality care.

I wish you a joyful holiday season filled with peace, happiness, and (for those not rostered on to work duties) a well-deserved rest. My deepest admiration goes to the staff who will ensure that the quality services we have all come to trust, continue to be provided over the festive season, in one of the hottest months of the year. It’s not easy, and your commitment is appreciated.

After all, it’s *‘the hearts we touch and the care we show’* that matters.

Season greetings and warmest wishes,
Karen Tully and the South West Hospital and Health Board

Out and about with the Board



Karen Tully, St George Elder Mr Kevin Waters and Dr Anthony Brown at the official opening of the St George Community and Allied Health building



Celia Charlton, Anna Cross, Melissa Kennedy



Board Chair with Dr Mostafa Vahabi



Some of our Board members with Mitchell staff celebrating Jan Pallisier's 45 year Length of Service



From the Health Service Chief Executive

Welcome to the final edition of our newsletter for 2024!

As we reflect on the year, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the extraordinary contributions of our teams and communities across the South West.

As always your resilience, commitment, and passion have been truly inspiring. Our *special staff awards edition* in November showcased the incredible achievements and dedication of our people, and I thank you all for making a difference every day.

This edition also highlights some key milestones, including the 10th annual Community Advisory Network forum. This event reaffirmed the importance of community advocacy and the strong partnerships we've built to improve health outcomes across our region.

In the spirit of the festive season, our teams are pulling out the stops to 'Bring the Beach to the Bush' which has sparked incredible creativity and joy – and is a true testament to the festive spirit of our teams. Thank you everyone for all of your efforts in doing so.

As always, we have finished the year off with plenty of happenings including a very significant landmark agreement promoting First Nations health cooperation which you will find inside.

We also pay a special tribute to Debbie-Ann Landers and her lasting legacy. Debbie-Ann was a wonderful woman and advocate for First Nations people who gave so much of her time to helping so many others. My condolences to Debbie-Ann's family and loved ones.

The last few months also saw the opening of new buildings in particular the new Community and Allied Health Services in Charleville and St George and the Morven's new Community Clinic.

Thank you for your hard work and dedication throughout 2024. Together, we have achieved so much, and I look forward to continuing this journey with you in 2025. Wishing you all a safe, happy, and restful festive season.

Keep well and keep safe.

Dr Anthony Brown
Health Service Chief Executive





CELEBRATING A DECADE OF COMMUNITY ADVOCACY

The South West HHS marked a significant milestone with the 10th annual Community Advisory Network (CAN) forum held at the St George Wellness Centre at the end of October.

This year's event brought together not only many of our CAN members but also health professionals, community leaders, and advocates to celebrate a decade of community collaboration and discuss the future of healthcare in our region.

The forum began with an acknowledgment of Country, followed by inspiring opening remarks from Karen Tully, Board Chair, and Dr Anthony Brown, Health Service Chief Executive. Dr Brown highlighted the importance of strong community partnerships in driving better health outcomes across South West Queensland.

One of the forum's highlights was the Art for Relaxation workshop led by Susan Klein, Chair of the Roma CAN. Susan, a proud Jaularoi woman and professional artist, shared her innovative approach to healing through self-expression and creative arts. Her workshop demonstrated the therapeutic power of art, a practice she has championed both locally and internationally through her small business, Susie Klein Self-Expressive and Creative Art.

Leigh Burton, Executive Director Strategy, Performance and Governance, provided an insightful presentation on the Joint Health Needs Assessment as part of an innovative Queensland Commonwealth Partnership initiative. Drawing on his extensive experience in rural healthcare, Leigh outlined strategic priorities for meeting the diverse needs of South West communities and improving service delivery and provided an ideal opportunity for forum participants to review and discuss health and service needs that mattered most to them.

Shelley Lawton, Executive Director Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Engagement, delivered a compelling session on cultural awareness and health equity. A proud descendant of the Bidjara and Nwaigi people, Shelley emphasised the importance of targeted actions to close the health gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Her leadership, vision and commitment to partnerships continue to drive transformative outcomes across the South West.

Megan Kreis, Senior Director Partnerships Department of Health, highlighted the power of collaboration through the Queensland Commonwealth Partnership. With over 30 years of experience in healthcare, Megan shared her expertise in clinical redesign and the role of partnerships in enhancing service delivery beyond hospital care.



Louisa Dufty



Karen Tully



Harper Kelso
South West
Hospital and
Health Service



Jan Chambers and Leanne Patton



Dr Anthony Brown, Robyn Brumpton, Michael Wilson and Leigh Burton

The forum also featured interactive activities, including three Let's Dance! Sessions, two spontaneously led by Harper Kelso, a student undertaking experience with Southern Queensland Rural Health and one led by Siobhan Dow, encouraging participants to get active and connect. Attendees also enjoyed a capital infrastructure slideshow showcasing recent and upcoming projects, as well as enjoying opportunities for networking and health checks during breaks.

CAN Chairs from across the region shared their achievements and ongoing initiatives. Donna Burke, Board Governance Officer spoke about the upcoming review of the CAN, and highlighted the importance of consumer engagement in shaping health services and reaffirming South West HHS's commitment to partnering with communities for healthier outcomes.

The forum concluded with an open session facilitated by Karen Tully, allowing participants to ask questions and discuss future directions. Overall, the event was a testament to the collective efforts of South West HHS and its CAN members in fostering a connected and resilient healthcare network.

As we celebrate this 10-year milestone, South West HHS remains dedicated to building on these strong foundations to deliver equitable and high-quality healthcare for all.

Together, we can continue to make a difference in the lives of our rural and remote communities.



Leanne Patton and Dr Jim Hudson as Santa at the Charleville Hospital Christmas party

BRINGING THE BEACH TO THE BUSH

The Charleville Team threw down the challenge for this year's 2024 Christmas Cheer Decoration Competition to celebrate this year's theme: Bring the Beach to the Bush.

South West HHS Chief Executive Dr Anthony Brown said the Charleville team encouraged each of the facilities, wards and offices to turn their work spaces into a festive wonderland merging the best of beach vibes with the charm of the bush.

"Every year this Christmas Cheer brings smiles and delight to patients, families, and staff and this year was again no exception," Anthony said.

"This year our Board Deputy Chair Jan Chambers and I selected Charleville as this year's winner which we announced at our Virtual Town Hall on Wednesday 11 December. Charleville definitely went all out in bringing the beach to the bush and were the deserved winners!

"All the entries were special to each of the work areas they decorated. Thank you to all who took part.

"Thank you again to all our teams for your dedication to compassionate and person-centred care, especially at this special time of year."



Winning entry Charleville Hospital bringing the beach to the bush



Charleville Hospital winners for 2024

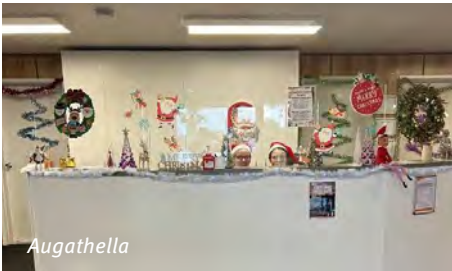


Surat Santa



Bungil Street, Roma

BRINGING THE BEACH TO THE BUSH



Augathella



St George



Mungindi



Bungil Street



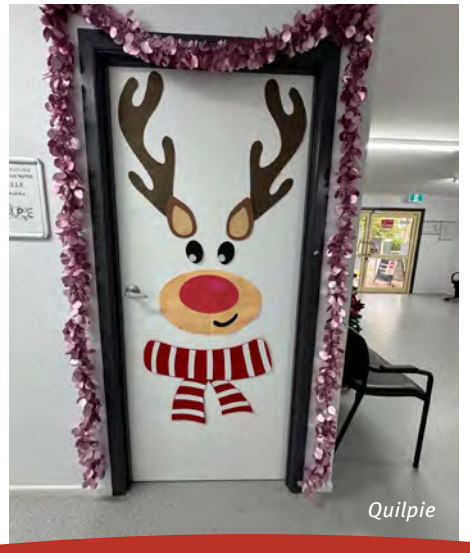
Dirranbandi



Charleville



St George



Quilpie



OUR COMMUNITIES

LANDMARK AGREEMENT TO PROMOTE FIRST NATIONS HEALTH COOPERATION

A landmark agreement aimed at improving health outcomes and equity for First Nations peoples has been signed.

South West Hospital and Health Board Chair, Karen Tully, said the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was designed to build on the relationships the South West HHS has with the Western Queensland Primary Health Network and three local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Organisations.

These include the Cunnamulla Aboriginal Corporation for Health, Goondir Health Services and Charleville and Western Areas Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health.

Karen said the MOU was a vital component of the South West HHS's First Nations Health Equity Strategy that was first launched in October 2022.

The purpose of the MOU is to:

- Promote cooperation between the participants in the planning and delivery of primary health care services for First Nations people living in the local government areas of Murweh, Quilpie, Paroo, Bulloo, Balonne, and Maranoa Regional Council
- Facilitate and nurture local senior management stewardship and clinical leadership within the participants' organisations
- Support greater collaboration, integration and innovation of the primary health workforce throughout the South West region
- Improve the health of people living in the shires of Murweh, Quilpie, Paroo, Bulloo, Balonne and Maranoa Regional Council through Our Way – Together the South West HHS First Nations Health Equity Strategy 2022 – 2025.

Karen said, through the MOU, participants acknowledged that a cooperative approach offered a practical means for implementing new services and models of care that spanned multiple organisational and service boundaries.

“There is also a strong joint desire to cooperate in the primary health commissioning of healthcare services in this region to ensure they are accountable and responsive to local needs,” she said.

Karen also acknowledged that about 13 per cent of South West residents identified as First Nations people and the region was home to 18 traditional and cultural custodians of the land.

“We recognise that while many advances in Closing the Gap have been made, further steps are necessary to ensure genuine health equity for First Nations people across the South West,” she said.

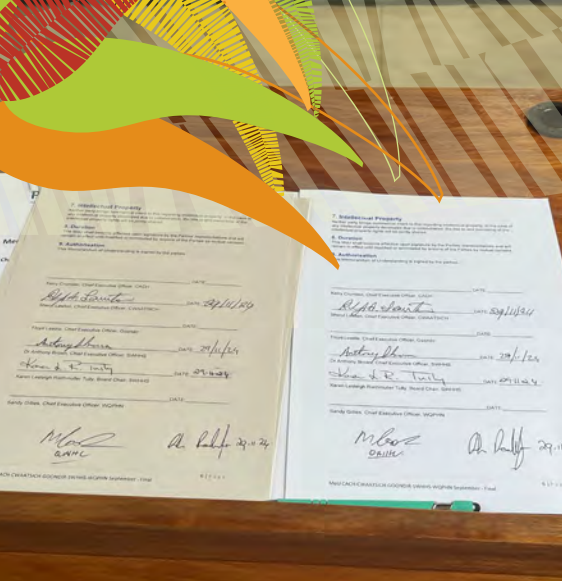
“We believe that access to healthcare is a universal right for everyone. But we also know that there is a deeper and more holistic way to provide more equitable care for First Nations people and communities across the South West. We are dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and our ongoing First Nations Health Equity Strategy will guide our health service and our communities along this healthcare journey.”

Karen said as part of the Health Equity Strategy, a governance structure also had been implemented in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations.

This governance structure will help support the ongoing design, delivery, monitoring, and review of healthcare services in our region. Health equity will function under a three-tier governance structure to foster innovation and collaboration and encourage a free-flow of information between the health service and all health equity stakeholders such as our MOU partners.



L-R: Matthew Cooke (Chair, Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council), Karen Tully, Sheryl Lawton (CEO, CWAATSICH), Dr Anthony Brown, Shaun Radnedge, (Mayor Murweh Shire Council) and Shelley Lawton.



UPDATE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HEALTH AND ENGAGEMENT

This year we have seen firsthand some exciting developments in the South West HHS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Engagement team.

These developments reflect our commitment to advancing health equity and supporting our First Nations communities across the region.

Reporting directly to the Health Service Chief Executive (HSCE), the First Nations Peak Advisory Committee is a significant development to support strategic oversight and delivery of services across our region. The Committee will play a crucial role in implementing strategy at both the service delivery and service planning levels. Furthermore, it will provide valuable advice to the HSCE and report to the Board through the First Nations Health Equity Committee.

Nominations for Committee membership closed on 22 November 2024, and we look forward to announcing the successful members shortly.

Another exciting development this year was the introduction of the First Nations Leadership Program. This program is designed to support First Nations staff early in their careers, helping them grow and develop into future leadership roles. It is open to all streams and levels, with a focus on First Nations individuals who are not currently in leadership positions.

Further details and expressions of interest will be distributed in the coming weeks. This initiative represents a critical investment in the future leadership of our health service.

Thank you to all members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Engagement team, South West HHS staff and our partners for your continued commitment to advancing health equity and outcomes for our communities.

Together, we are making a difference.

Shelley Lawton
EDATSIHE

Workforce Updates

Megan Allwood – Indigenous Program Support Officer

We are pleased to welcome Megan Allwood, who joined the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Engagement team on 11 November as the Indigenous Program Support Officer. Megan’s expertise and passion for supporting our communities will greatly enhance our team’s efforts.

Tayla Willis – Executive Support Officer (EDATSIHE & EDAH)

Tayla Willis has been with us since May 2024, providing joint executive support to the Executive Director Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Engagement (EDATSIHE) and the Executive Director Allied Health (EDAH). Tayla’s commitment and dedication have been integral to supporting the work of our teams.

Project Officer – First Nations Workforce Review

The team is preparing to commence recruitment for a Project Officer to lead the First Nations Workforce Review. This role is vital in ensuring we continue to attract, retain, and support First Nations professionals across all areas of our health service.

Team Updates

- ✓ **Making Tracks:** Progress continues with new reporting mechanisms focused on health outcomes.
- ✓ **Cultural Capability Audit and Review:** Efforts are underway to assess and enhance cultural capability across our services.
- ✓ **Health Equity Implementation Plan:** Out of 38 commitments and 70 deliverables, 24 are completed, 39 remain in progress, and 7 are yet to commence.
- ✓ **First Nations Health Equity Committee:** This Committee has been meeting regularly since December 2023, driving significant progress in equity outcomes.
- ✓ **Next Phase Planning:** Consultation for the 2025-2028 Implementation Plan will begin in early 2025.



OUTREACH VISIT A GREAT SUCCESS

This wonderful team – Janell Lobb (Nurse Navigator – Cunnamulla), Nina Jordan (Indigenous Liaison Officer – Cunnamulla), Nikki Pamerter (Nurse Navigator – Charleville), Stewart Reid (Health Equity Service Redesign Toowoomba), Carolyn Mandersloot (Palliative care CNC – Charleville) and Gayle Klein (TRACC – Cunnamulla) headed on an Outreach visit during September!

They started in Cunnamulla, then travelled to Quilpie, Eromanga, Thargomindah, Yowah and Hungerford.

The team said it was a very worthwhile trip with good outcomes and good cohesion while gaining a better understanding of the strengths of other clinical team members within South West Queensland.

It was the perfect opportunity to engage with locals, listen to locals and to look at the adversities in these towns and communities. With Janell sharing the following highlights, they are already planning their next trip!

A diary of our Outreach visit

After our introductions at Cunnamulla on Monday 9 September, our tribe ventured forward in our two-car convoy, first stop Quilpie arriving around 4.30pm for an overnight stay. The next day saw Caroline, Nikki and Gayle have the opportunity to talk about our roles at the Quilpie Multipurpose Centre Gyrica Gardens, with 13 attendees including a mix of local nursing, Council staff including the new Community Services Co-ordinator Kerry as well as some of Quilpie’s older residents who proved to be very invested in what we had to discuss and who had lots of great questions to ask.

After meeting with the amazing locals at Quilpie we drove towards Eromanga, with a plan to meet with community and conduct an art session at the local pub. Despite flyers being shared extensively with local assistance, attendance was not as high as we hoped however, the positive outcome was that we managed to talk to the publican and the local motel owner and the manager of the Dinosaur Museum on our visit.

It was also pleasing that locals remembered some of us following our last visit, and information provided on our last visit remained on display. Despite having never travelled to these areas before, Stewart and Caroline also got a better understanding just how remote this town was, and our immense respect for Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) colleagues and the importance of our continuing to work closely with this service.

On Wednesday, we drove to Thargomindah. Our team met the local staff and had a look at their facility and it was a great opportunity for Caroline to meet with the local nursing staff including the new Clinical Nurse Carol, Helena, Alex, and Carmel. Caroline was able to share with this cohesive team her experience, her hopes, and ideas around palliative care. The advantage of early referrals was also discussed, and we explored options and referral pathways for local residents with staff.

Caroline also discussed her role in supporting this remote community in conjunction with the RFDS and her values around educating local staff and community members around palliative care. Janell and Gayle also engaged with the team to touchbase, particularly Janell who is very supportive around navigating the health system which can at times be complex.

From Thargomindah, the team travelled towards the township of Yowah via a long dusty dirt road with lots of amazing wildlife, but all arrived safely. Yowah welcomed our team with open arms with the team engaging with locals over food provided by the ‘Hungry Miner’ through informal interactions either with a group or one on one. While this approach was informal it worked well within the local climate of this resilient town and continued to build trust and rapport.

There were hours of face to face conversations with over 20 locals in attendance. Janell and Nina, as well as Gayle, have been able to develop good connections with many of these locals and feel confident that in times of adversity they would be contacted.





Janell and Nina also continue to engage with locals around improving telehealth options for the community and Stewart was most interested in how we can collectively move forward in this space. The feedback from the community from these interactions was very positive.

On Thursday, the convoy drove towards Hungerford, again on a long dirt access road, and were met warmly by Sheree who has been our main contact and is very proactive. We met with at least three of the residents and, with a population from the 2021 census of 19 people, this was not too bad.

Again, the team engaged with these locals, particularly Janell, Nina and Gayle who are building an amazing rapport. And it was also positive to introduce our team to these locals and for Nikki, Stewart and Caroline to personally see how remote Hungerford is, and what facilities and resources are accessible. We were able to share some up-to-date information and were invited to go back in November to present to the healthy ageing groups at Remembrance Day which is sure to draw a good crowd.

During this outreach, our conversations included lovely introductions primarily led by Janell about our team and then presentations from Gayle from TRACC around resilience, wellbeing, having conversations, resilience, checking in on others as well as referral pathways.

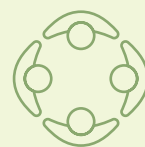
Nikki and Janell spoke about their roles as a nurse navigators to their respective audiences and about bringing things together to promote the best care options – including navigating travel referrals if required. They were asked many questions, and the audience were always well engaged.

Caroline also share her role in palliative care with a few light-hearted conversations woven within her messages around the importance of preparation particularly as we age. Caroline also shared messages such as the right to choose, her passion around being able to die at home with respect and to value the importance of those local supports that are already available such as family, friends and local nursing staff who are also often long term residents of these remote areas.

All in all, it was a very worthwhile trip with good outcomes and great cohesion within our outreach tribe. It also gave us all a better understanding of the strengths of other clinical team members within South West Queensland.

We were also enriched by some wonderful insights from Nina around Indigenous culture, and it was a great opportunity to be present and visible to these communities even when the approach was more casual than we had planned.

Most importantly, it was a wonderful opportunity to engage with locals, listen and learn about adversities in these towns and hear from them about their needs and how they can be best served. It was also enlightening to share the values that we as clinicians can walk alongside these existing resources and continue to support many resilient clinical staff and their equally resilient community members.



HONOURING THE LIFE OF DEBBIE-ANN LANDERS

Debbie-Ann Landers provided 31 years of dedicated service as an Operational Services Officer to Queensland Health for South West Hospital and Health Service at Roma Hospital.

She started as an Operational Services Officer at Roma Hospital in 1993 and knew her job inside out and loved working with everyone she encountered.

Debbie-Ann formed many beautiful friendships with her work colleagues and enjoyed sharing time with those she worked with. She worked in various areas of the Roma Hospital and also became a union delegate in her workplace in which she was passionate about.

She loved working with the elderly at Westhaven, and in time she spent working at Westhaven she became a favourite among the staff and residents. The residents and staff felt an instant warmth from her and she drew people with her beautiful smile, kindness and friendship.

If you have ever been to the Roma Hospital, it is very likely you would have stopped to chat to Debbie-Ann or seen her warm beautiful smile when passing her in the corridor at the Roma Hospital.

We thank you Debbie-Ann for your dedicated service of 31 years as an Operational Services Officer for Queensland Health at South West Hospital and Health Service.

May you now rest peacefully. Your work is done.



Debbie Landers with former Queensland Premier Anastasia Palaszczuk

NEW INFUSION PUMPS FOR ST GEORGE

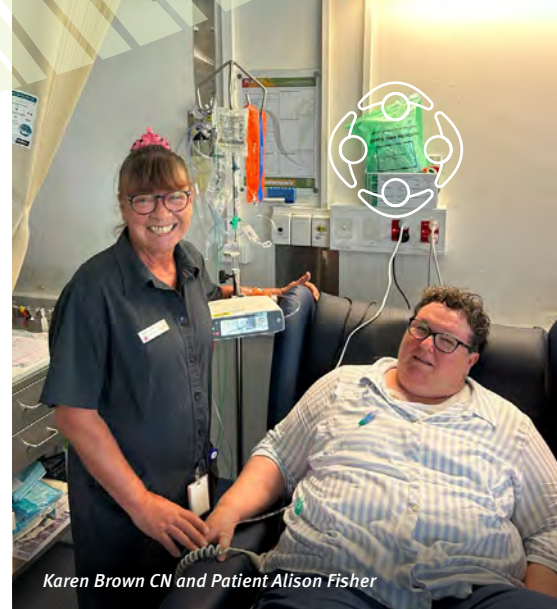
St George Cancer Care Service recently received two new infusion pumps to assist with chemotherapy infusions.

The local St George Masters Rugby League Club have a “Goose Club” raffle as a fundraiser each December, with the funds donated locally. This year, we were fortunate that funds raised were donated to St George’s Cancer Care Service to purchase two new infusion pumps.

On our “Go Live day”, our first patient to use the new infusion pumps was Mrs Alison Fisher. Alison was very excited to be part of “Go live” with the new pumps as she has an infusion every 6 weeks and had listened to her nurse Karen, speak about them for so long. It is quite fitting that Mr John Barrett OAM, former President and Lifetime Member of the St George Rugby League football club will be among many community members benefiting from the pumps.

Karen Brown, Clinical Nurse Cancer and Palliative Care, is very excited to have the new state of the art touch screen pumps. Her patients will greatly benefit from their accuracy and she loves how user friendly they are, alongside the fact they use so few consumables compared to our previous pumps.

Thank you St George Masters for your donation that will benefit many patients who can have treatment locally!



Karen Brown CN and Patient Alison Fisher



St George donation patient and donors



ST GEORGE BLOKES BREKKY

St George Community and Allied Health team were a part of a health promotion morning in partnership with Care Balonne, Queensland Police Service, St George Men’s Shed, TRACC and the South West HHS on 9 October.

Together, they hosted a Bloses Brekky aimed at bringing men together to better support the wellbeing of our Bloses across St George and surrounding communities. Robyn Brumpton, Service Director – St George Community and Allied Health, said men from different organisations such as the Balonne Shire Council, local tradies, contractors, retirees and our local Men’s Shed participants were all in attendance.

“This event was more than just a breakfast. It was a chance to connect, learn and discuss important health topics that impact men,” Robyn said.

“We know that staying healthy takes a community and it was exciting to work together to make this event happen and to assist in making a positive impact on men’s health,” Robyn added.

The Community and Allied Health team had a range of stations set up to provide information on a wide range of topics such as:

- ✓ Blood pressure, weight, height and waist circumference checks
- ✓ Sun Safety
- ✓ Healthy Eating
- ✓ Ausdrisk Diabetes information
- ✓ Alcohol and smoking
- ✓ Bowel Cancer screening
- ✓ Heart health and Stroke Prevention
- ✓ Mental Health Awareness
- ✓ Prostate and Testicular Cancer information



CELEBRATING OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY WEEK

L to R: Cate locum OT, Jackie OT, Melinda Service Director OT background, Grace, OT

This year Occupational Therapy Week was celebrated between 21 and 27 October under the theme ‘Celebrating 80 Years of Connection’.

We have some wonderful Occupational Therapists (OT) across the South West, let’s say hello to a few!

Meet Jackie from Charleville

I feel Occupational Therapy at its core is based on connection – from individual clients, families, communities, universities, students, colleagues, and the broader OT network spread across the country – we aim to build strong relationships to support independence and wellbeing at all levels.

Living and working as a rural generalist OT in Charleville is highly rewarding as our small, close community allows me an opportunity for deep connections from birth to end of life. I also have the privilege to travel to very remote locations and connect with isolated people with incredible life stories and unique occupations.

My experiences as a rural OT also enriches my professional and personal life beyond what I could ever have imagined, and continues to spark my passion for the profession daily. I look forward to making many more connections within my career and am proud to represent 80 years of OT in 2024.

Meet Cate locum from Charleville

A pivotal moment for me was in the early 90’s when I worked in Darwin with a New Zealand trained OT. She and I had similar numbers of years of experience since graduation. After leaving the area, she contacted me to say she was working in the USA.

I thought, “if she can pass that exam I can”, subsequently I studied for and passed the exam, obtained registration in a couple of states, and flew with my husband and two young kids to Idaho where I took up a position in a regional not for profit hospital.

I was thrown into a completely different health service, culture and experience and quickly had to relearn many OT skills. I still have close friends from our two and a half years there and often look back on how much it enabled me to grow as an OT.

Meet Grace from Charleville

I have developed many professional connections with colleagues across a variety of locations in Queensland and with connections within the communities which has been invaluable.

A significant moment during my career was having regular community OT meetings. Meeting with all local OTs to remain up-to-date with each person’s scope has improved OT networks, service delivery in rural communities, and been a significant positive factor in connecting with other OTs and connecting clients to the provider that best suits their goals.

Our connected OT network significantly enriches my learning across practice areas and assists me with personal connections to reduce feeling isolated in rural areas.



Meet Tess from St George

Becoming an OT, and working in a rural hospital, has led to such a rewarding and fulfilling career, filled with wonderful colleagues and clients.

Building and upholding 'Connections' with our clients, their families, our colleagues, and our communities is a fundamental element to the role of an OT and one I find most fulfilling.

I get a great sense of enjoyment out of building relationships with all our clients and enjoy the personal touch it adds to the service we provide as OTs. Being an OT in my hometown also allows me to build on already existing connections I have with other locals in the community, and although I may not know them personally, we share a joint connection of the love of a rural lifestyle and in most cases a great appreciation for rural healthcare.



Meet Abby from Roma

It's a privilege to be part of the OT community, and I think what makes me feel most connected in the community is that there is always someone out there willing to help if you need it and you're willing to reach out. It's amazing how you can attend a course solo but you always seem to make connections and have OT's offering to be contacted if they can help with anything. This is especially important to me working rurally where we don't always have access to a huge network of supports.

My main example of professional connections leading to transformative outcomes for clients and my practice is within hand therapy. I have been very fortunate to make connections with lots of amazing hand OT's which has really helped me to develop confidence and skills in this area to achieve better outcomes for patients.



Meet Meg from St George

Being able to support people to continue living independent lives in their community following an accident, injury or illness is a great privilege.

This year's OT Week theme of 'Connections' is really evident to me in our rural communities and healthcare teams where there are so many dedicated clinicians who are committed to achieving the best outcomes for their patients our local communities.



Meet Erynn from Roma

Looking back on my connections I have developed in my first year as an OT, I most value the relationships that have been developed with the other OT's within the South West.

With the unique challenges which are faced within the rural generalist caseload, this close team network and connections empowers us all as clinicians, through greater opportunities for skill sharing, building of confidence, and allowing more comprehensive care to be delivered to our clients.



From left: Abby, Erynn, Jack (locum OT)



TIME TO STAY SUN SAFE

It is that time of year again when we are all getting outdoors more and enjoying the beautiful sunshine.

Thanks to funding from Queensland Health’s Prevention Strategy Branch, the HOPE Program has provided portable sunscreen dispensers for Charleville and Cunnamulla schools!

HOPE’s Jenny Peacock said the dispensers were making it so much easier for the students and teachers to remember to apply sunscreen everyday.

“We’re encouraging all students to make sunscreen part of their daily routine to help stay protected from the harsh Aussie sun,” Jenny said.

“This collaboration is about working together to keep our kids sun safe and healthy! Thanks to the Prevention Strategy Branch for supporting the South West HHS HOPE Program.”





TOP TIPS FOR GRADUATES IN CHARLEVILLE

What an incredible start to the final week for our Year 12 students!

The HOPE Program recently partnered with local services to give our seniors a memorable day full of fun and learning. On Monday, students enjoyed a team-building day, followed by valuable party-safe tips from the Police, Lifeline, and Dr. Katie to ensure everyone stays safe and well during their end of school celebrations.

A special thanks to past student and Murweh Shire mechanic, Luke, who demonstrated how to change a tyre and shared essential car maintenance tips – an important life skill for our soon-to-be graduates as they head out on new adventures!

We wish all of our graduating students the very best as they step into the next chapter of their lives. The future is bright!



UNDER 8'S DAY FOR PICK OF THE CROP

Little hands, big growth!

Our little Pick of the Crop gardeners at Begonia State School have had a wonderful time decorating pots and planting their very own seeds. We can't wait to see these seedlings sprout alongside these future green thumbs.

Of course Begonia SS is one of our Pick of the Crop schools. They are such a beautiful school with a handful of kids, but such a strong and proactive community who have all come together to support their Pick of the Crop Action Plan, including working bees and the likes to set up greenhouses and gardens.

The teachers are also super supportive in integrating the school garden into classroom teaching. This is also really carried on by the parents at home who have established their own veggie gardens.

The Healthy Communities team recently attended the school's Under 8s Day to plant some veggie seeds for the kids to take home in the future. We've have heard back from the school and we're delighted to hear that they have been taken home and planted in their veggie gardens to tend to over the Summer holidays!





COOK AND CONNECT ACROSS THE SOUTH WEST

The Healthy Communities team has been cooking up a storm in many of our communities across the South West over the past few months.

Helen Wassman, South West HHS's Executive Director Allied Health, said it was always a great adventure for our university students to get out and about across the South West and take the opportunity to share their learnings in particular about healthy eating.

"Our wonderful Dietetic students from Griffith University have recently brought the Cook + Connect program to life in Mitchell, Roma, Wallumbilla, and Injune," Helen said.

"Together, they cooked up delicious beef burrito bowls, mixing flavour and fun in our communities.

"Along with the tasty meals, participants also enjoyed valuable nutrition education to enhance their cooking skills."

Helen said the Healthy Communities team also had an amazing year of Food and Friends in Surat with a flavourful finale!

"Participants made a pizza dough from scratch with the community nutritionist and then had fun getting creative with toppings brought in by everyone," she said.

"They even added some fresh rosemary grown right there at the library!"





COUNTRY KIDS GET GLIMPSE OF HEALTH CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

The HOPE Program and our Southern Queensland Rural Health partners were recently thrilled to partner with the Charleville School of Distance Education to host a Teddy Bear Hospital for the younger students and an Emergency Scenario for the older students at Mini School.

A huge thank you to the local Allied Health clinicians, Paramedic Harry and Dr. Paul for their invaluable support in bringing the activities to life!

These hands-on activities were designed not only to engage students in exciting health career possibilities but also to provide a fun and interactive way to boost their health literacy. We hope the experience inspired the next generation of healthcare professionals and sparked curiosity about the vital work that happens in the medical field!



KEEPING THE FESTIVE CHEER IN CHECK

The festive season may not always be a happy time for everyone, with many people experiencing additional pressures and stress.

But our South West Hospital and Health Service Mental Health Team has some timely advice – not just for the weeks ahead but also for throughout the year.

“Holiday periods like Christmas and New Year, when people are spending a lot of time together, can generate their own pressures and stresses,” Service Director Mental Health Aurora Bermudez said.

“But there are many strategies available to help you through the holiday season – and professionals you can turn to at any time of the day or night. For instance, Christmas can feel very isolating if you don’t have family and friends nearby.

“If this is the case, it’s important to keep to your routine as much as possible and do something you enjoy, such as go for a walk, watch a movie, do some gardening, or cook your favourite meal. At the same time, Christmas time can also be overwhelming for some people with the pressure to buy presents, celebrate and spend time with family and friends.

“If you’re feeling overwhelmed in the lead-up to Christmas, write a to do list to help you feel organised. If you can’t spend money, do something meaningful or offer to help with preparing the meal, cleaning the house, or babysitting.

“It’s also OK to say no to things and it’s important you spend time with people who are supportive. Remember, you don’t have to go to every activity or get together. Take a day off from the celebrations, or even just a morning or afternoon, and enjoy some down time.

“And if you’re feeling overwhelmed, lonely or anxious, you can reach out and talk to someone.

“You could reach out to a supportive relative or friend by sending a text or message on social media, inviting someone over for a coffee or making a phone call.”

[Further Resources →](#)

If you are concerned about your own or someone else’s alcohol or other drug use, call Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS), a free, 24/7 anonymous and confidential telephone counselling and information service on 1800 177 833 or visit: www.adis.health.qld.gov.au

Aurora said professional mental health support is also always available 24/7 by phoning 1300 MH CALL (1300 64 2255).

Any member of the community seeking a public mental health service anywhere in Queensland can dial this state-wide number.

“By contacting the 24-hour mental health call line, you will be put in contact immediately with an appropriate mental health service for advice and support,” she said.

“The 1300 MH CALL number helps us deliver the right care and support at the appropriate time which is important for people experiencing mental health stress.”

However, Aurora stressed the 1300 MH CALL number was not a replacement for emergency services or support services.

“Mental health consumers and the wider community requiring emergency assistance should always continue to use the triple-zero number in times of emergency,” she said.

“South West residents also should remember the importance of eating healthy, staying hydrated but limiting their alcohol intake over the festive season. What we eat and drink is linked to our mood and both our physical and mental health.

“So while many of us might be guilty of overindulging over the festive season, it’s important to try to eat and drink alcohol in moderation as much as possible.”

Some useful links and contacts:

- For mental health support 24/7
Phone 1300 MH CALL (1300 64 2255).
- Dear Mind
mentalwellbeing.initiatives.qld.gov.au
- Lifeline on 13 11 14 or lifeline.org.au
- 13 YARN (13 92 76) or 13yarn.org.au
- Kids Help Line 1800 551 800 or kidshelpline.com.au
- QLife: 1800 184 527 or qlife.org.au
- Beyond Blue 1300 22 46 36 or beyondblue.org.au
- Headspace: 1800 650 890 or headspace.org.au

TUCKING IN TO TASTY TUCKER ON CHRISTMAS DAY



Whatever the weather in the South West, festive cheer won't be lacking on Christmas Day for inpatients and aged care residents at hospitals and aged care services in the region.

"Wherever they are, it's still a special day and our inpatients and aged care residents who will all be able to tuck into a festive-flavoured breakfast, lunch and dinner," South West Hospital and Health Service Advanced Dietitian Laura Bate said.

"We always try to give people something special and different for Christmas Day and make it a bit of an occasion for them – and as ever our wonderful health facility staff around the region will be doing their very best to make it so," she said.

Inpatients and aged care residents on regular, full texture meals will start the day with a Christmas breakfast of bacon and poached eggs, along with a selection of breakfast cereals, various toast or breads and tea, coffee, and fruit juices.

For lunch, there will be a Christmas roast, accompanied by roast vegetables and gravy or a side salad, followed by plum pudding with custard and cream and / or seasonal fresh fruit.

Depending on the facility, the Christmas roast may be either turkey, ham, chicken or lamb. This will be decided through consultation with consumers.

Inpatients and aged care residents who don't want the full roast meal for lunch will also be able to opt for assorted sandwiches or a salad of the day instead.

For dinner, there will be a lighter meal of assorted cold meats with salad as well as seasonal fruit.

"We've found that, nowadays, people prefer a lighter meal in the evening after their big lunch," Laura said.

Inpatients and aged care residents on restricted meals – such as a soft or pureed menu, or who have various other dietary or food allergy requirements – won't be forgotten and will have special Christmas meal selections to choose from.

Individual health facilities also will put their own special stamp on Christmas Day with decorations and additional goodies such as festive cupcakes and brownies, Christmas cookies and Christmas balls and other tasty treats without special dietary restrictions, as well as for staff.

For instance, St George Hospital is having a baked Christmas ham and making a roasted vegetable and beetroot salad, Laura said.

"They are also serving boiled fruit cake with the works – custard, fruit, cream, and jelly – for dessert.

"At Roma Hospital, they will be serving roast chicken.

And at Charleville Hospital and Waroona Multipurpose Service, Christmas morning and afternoon teas will include a mix of chocolate coconut balls and rum balls.

"There will also be a freshly made fruit cake, which is made on rotation each year by the Charleville cooks, to see who can make the best fruit cake!

"At Waroona and Westhaven, there will also be a full catered Christmas lunch leading up to Christmas to which family are also invited to attend. So, there will be something for everyone at facilities across our region."



Charleville Hospital cook Frances Huata making her signature coconut ice balls for Christmas.



SELF-CARE, WE CARE MULTICULTURAL FESTIVAL

The year's Self-Care We Care Multicultural Festival kicked off on Saturday 5 October in Charleville's Graham Andrews Parklands with a deeply meaningful Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony, led by Ray Robinson, Pat Fraser and Alara Geebung, setting the tone for an afternoon focused on culture, and connection.

Charleville's Self Care We Care Multicultural Festival 2024: a celebration of culture and wellbeing is an annual event part of Mental Health Week.

HOPE Program's Jenny Peacock said the Festival once again brought the local community together for a vibrant day of cultural performances, wellness activities and shared conversations about mental health.





OUR TEAMS

Health and Safety Representatives, members of the SWHHS Health Safety and Wellbeing Team with invited speakers Simon Joice and Andrew Measham from South West HHS.

SOUTH WEST HHS SAFE WORK MONTH HEALTH AND SAFETY REPRESENTATIVE FORUM

Health and Safety representatives (HSRs) from around the South West gathered in Roma on 9 October to participate in an event to celebrate Safe Work Month organised by the Health Safety and Wellbeing Team.

Lawrie Usher, Manager Workplace Health and Safety, said the day provided a great opportunity to participate in an education day with colleagues from across South West, share ideas and discuss issues common to their roles.

“Simon Joice, Queensland Health’s Senior Director Health and Safety – along with Principal Advisor Andrew Measham – attended in person to speak with HSR’s on the importance of their role within the HHS in terms of helping us provide a safe and healthy workplace for staff and supporting a strong safety culture,” Lawrie said.

He said participants were also provided a practical session on the use of Chernalert provided by Todd White, Principal Advisor Queensland Health and Paul Walker who is the Principal Trainer for RMT.

RMT are the providers of the Chernalert system that is the source of truth for chemical safety across Queensland Health.

“Other topics covered on the day provided by Queensland Health included a rural and remote perspective of the revised Safety management System, and an update on electrical safety” Lawrie added.

“Participants were also able to discuss issues happening in their own work groups which enabled us to develop potential solutions based on our local experiences.

“Facilitation of the day was provided by the Health Safety and Wellbeing Team and the attendance in person of the invited guests from Corporate Office ensured the day was a resounding success. A range of ideas are already being put forward for the day to be bigger and better in 2025.”

Some of the feedback from the day included:

- ✓ *Just a quick note to say thank you again for an amazing day yesterday, and for organising the amazing speakers and the subjects they spoke on and shared with us. We as HSR’s in the South West are very fortunate to have such inspirational and dedicated team members of the Health Safety and Wellbeing team.*
- ✓ *Thank you for yesterday, a great day and I did learn lots. Guest speakers were great.*
- ✓ *Thanks to you and the team for another great forum.*

Lawrie said the ability to be able to come together as a group, representing the safety and values of the South West, cannot be underestimated with the learnings from the day providing further strength to the safety of the workforce and the knowledge base of the HSRs.



NURSES JOIN FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT DAY

South West HHS nurses recently gathered at the Australian College of Nursing (ACN) Leadership Development Day in Roma at an event designed to inspire, educate, and challenge participants to reflect on their roles as leaders.

This valuable opportunity brought together nurses at various stages in their careers, providing a platform for networking, collaboration, and further personal growth.

Throughout the day, attendees engaged in insightful discussions on leadership and personal development, gaining practical tools and strategies to enhance their leadership capabilities.

Whether just starting their nursing journey or seasoned professionals, participants left equipped to make meaningful and lasting impacts in the healthcare sector.

The ACN Leadership Development Day reinforced the importance of leadership within nursing, encouraging nurses to view themselves as leaders in every role they undertake, and to continue shaping the future of healthcare through their leadership and care.

SOUTH WEST SHINES AT THE DISASTER RESILIENCE CONFERENCE

It was a proud moment for South West Hospital and Health Service at the Australian Disaster Resilience Conference (ADRC) 2024 in Sydney in early September.

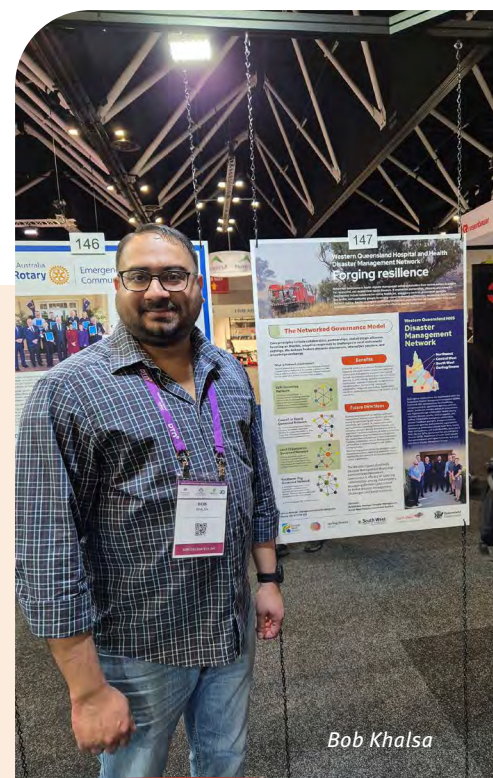


Our Manager Disaster Management, Bob Khalsa, presented two key posters:

- ➔ “Forging Resilience: The Networked Governance Model”
- ➔ “Enhancing Rural Emergency Response: The Sandpiper Mass Casualty Bag”

Bob said this was the first-time for participation for our Disaster Management Unit at a national conference!

“We loved showcasing innovative approaches in disaster management and emergency response in rural health and I want to say a big thanks to everyone who supported this incredible milestone for our team!”



Bob Khalsa



RACGP VISITS THE SOUTH WEST: SHOWCASING FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEDICAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) recently embarked on a comprehensive tour of the South West region to explore opportunities for strengthening our medical workforce.

The delegation visited various locations, including Surat, Roma and Westhaven, St George, Cunnamulla, Charleville and the Royal Flying Doctor Service Base, Surat General Practice, and the Maranoa Medical Centre.

The visit also provided an invaluable platform for South West HHS to showcase its potential to support and grow our next generation of General Practitioners (GPs).

Dr Carl de Wet, South West HHS’s Executive Director of Medical Services and Clinical Governance, highlighted the importance of this collaboration.

“This was a great opportunity for us to demonstrate to the RACGP the benefits of establishing a close working relationship. Their support is crucial in addressing our General Practice workforce needs for the future,” he said.

Under the RACGP framework, their model enhances the learning experience for registrars and GP supervisors, ensuring the delivery of quality primary care for Australian communities.

“South West HHS is committed to contributing to this mission by fostering a sustainable pipeline of GPs and rural generalists,” Dr de Wet added.

“This is achieved through local teams comprising medical educators, supervisors, and administrators who provide robust support for Australian General Practice Training participants”.

Kristie Forrest, RACGP Manager for Rural Pathway and Rural Generalist Training Programs, expressed her gratitude for hosting them.

“A huge thanks to Carl, Liz, and Leonie for all the organising, driving, and sharing so openly with us,” she said.

“Your time and knowledge were invaluable. I’m hopeful we’ll succeed in attracting registrars to the region. My ‘to do’ list grew significantly, but I’m inspired by the connection to purpose that makes the work feel worthwhile.”

Rebecca Towns, RACGP Workforce Planning Manager for Queensland, also commended the South West HHS team.

“Thank you for your time, presence, and knowledge. Touring the region with you was an inspiring experience. It’s incredible to see how well you all work together and how much the community values your presence,” she said.

Dr Karin Jodlowski-Tan, RACGP National Clinical Head of Rural Pathways, echoed these sentiments.

“We are deeply grateful for the hospitality of you and your team. The connections we’ve made during this visit are invaluable. There are so many ideas stemming from our discussions with people on the ground, and I’m hopeful many of these will translate into tangible outcomes,” she said.

“We look forward to continuing our efforts to improve the long-term workforce and, ultimately, the health of South West communities.”



The team visiting Surat General Practice



At Charleville Royal Flying Doctor Service – Kristie Forrest, Bec Towns, Dr Karin JT, Leonie Whitfield, Dr Carl de Wet and Dr Charles Ellis-Hallett



On the road with Dr Karen Savery, Kristie Forrest, Dr Karin Jodlowski-Tan, Dr Carl de Wet, Bec Towns and Leonie Whitfield

Building the Future Together

Dr de Wet said the visit emphasised the critical role collaboration plays in addressing rural health workforce challenges.

“By working together, South West HHS and RACGP aim to create a stronger, more resilient healthcare system that meets the needs of South West communities while providing meaningful opportunities for the next generation of medical professionals,” he said.

“This partnership promises a bright future for both local healthcare and the broader rural health landscape.”



SOUTH WEST STRENGTHENS TIES WITH UNISQ

In September, South West HHS had the privilege of hosting a team of researchers from the University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ).

The visit marked a significant step forward in strengthening the partnership between the two organisations and advancing research initiatives to improve regional healthcare outcomes.

The UniSQ researchers participated in our Senior Leaders Connect forum to showcase valuable insights into their cutting-edge research programs. During their time in the South West, the team also toured several healthcare facilities and engaged with staff to better understand the region’s communities and the patient-centred care provided by the HHS.

South West HHS’s Executive Director of Medical Services and Clinical Governance, Dr Carl de Wet, emphasised the importance of this vital collaboration.

“The visit allowed the researchers to see, feel, and comprehend the unique healthcare landscape of the South West. It highlighted both the strengths of our services and the areas where further development through research could lead to improved consumer outcomes,” Dr de Wet said.

The researchers met with key healthcare professionals, including Michelle Rathjen, Nurse Practitioner in Paediatrics, and Rohan Ballon, Rural Interprofessional Clinical Educator. Their itinerary included tours of Westhaven Aged Care Facility, Surat Multi-Purpose Health Service (MPHS), St George Hospital and Medical Practice, and Roma Hospital.

They also met with Goondir Health and South West HHS Research Governance Officer, Robyn Brumpton. These engagements provided a firsthand understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the region.

“We are privileged to collaborate with such leading researchers in their fields. Their expertise opens avenues for research that can shape better services and outcomes for our communities,” Dr de Wet add.

Meet the Researchers

The visiting team from UniSQ’s Centre for Health Research brought diverse expertise across various fields, including mental health, aged care, health equity, cancer survivorship, and technological innovations. Some of the key researchers included:

- **Professor Sonja March:** Director of the Centre for Health Research and Mental Health & Wellbeing Theme Leader. Her projects focus on improving mental health care delivery, especially for children, adolescents, and regional communities.
- **Associate Professor Melissa Taylor:** Ageing and Health Theme Leader. Her work explores innovative approaches to ageing and aged care, emphasising quality of life and workforce development.
- **Professor Amy Mullens:** Health Equity Theme Leader. Her research addresses disparities in healthcare outcomes among priority populations, including culturally diverse and neurodiverse groups.
- **Dr Nicole Heneka:** Associate Professor in Cancer Control and Survivorship Care. She leads initiatives aimed at enhancing care for cancer survivors, with a focus on patient-centred approaches.
- **Professor Rajib Rana:** Technological Innovations, Artificial Intelligence, and Health Theme Leader. His projects leverage AI to address mental health, chronic illness, and emergency response challenges.

Dr de Wet said the visit underscored the shared commitment of South West HHS and UniSQ to drive research that addresses regional healthcare needs.

“By leveraging the expertise of UniSQ’s researchers and the practical insights of South West HHS staff and teams, the partnership aims to foster innovation and deliver tangible benefits to South West communities. The collaboration signifies an exciting chapter in advancing regional healthcare through research and innovation,” he said.

“Together, South West HHS and UniSQ are poised to create a future where evidence-based practices and cutting-edge technology transform healthcare delivery and outcomes for the better.”



NURSE PRACTITIONER WEEK 2024

Michelle Rathjen (left) out and about as a Nurse Practitioner

Between 9 and 15 December 2024, we celebrated Nurse Practitioner Week, shining a spotlight on the exceptional work Nurse Practitioners (NPs) do across the South West.

With this year’s theme, “VOICES FOR HEALTH: The Future of Healthcare – Nurse Practitioners Leading Change!”, we acknowledge their critical role in driving high-quality, accessible healthcare and improving the lives of those in our communities.

South West HHS A/Executive Director Nursing and Midwifery Services, Lisa McArdle, said Nurse Practitioners were highly skilled Registered Nurses with advanced education and clinical expertise, enabling them to work independently to provide a wide range of healthcare services.

“They are authorised to diagnose and treat illnesses, prescribe medications, order and interpret diagnostic tests, and refer patients to other specialists,” Lisa said.

“NPs play an especially vital role in rural and remote regions like the South West, where they provide essential care to communities that might otherwise struggle to access timely health services. In the South West our NPs deliver compassionate and comprehensive care across hospitals, clinics, and community settings.

“Whether managing chronic diseases, supporting preventive health initiatives, or addressing acute care needs, NPs ensure that no one is left behind.

“Their collaboration with general practitioners, allied health teams, and community groups strengthens the fabric of our health service, making care more seamless and responsive.”

Lisa said that by focusing on patient-centred care and health education, NPs empower individuals and families to take charge of their health, fostering healthier and more resilient communities.

Nurse Practitioner Week is a time to recognise and appreciate the unique contributions NPs bring to healthcare. It’s also an opportunity to:

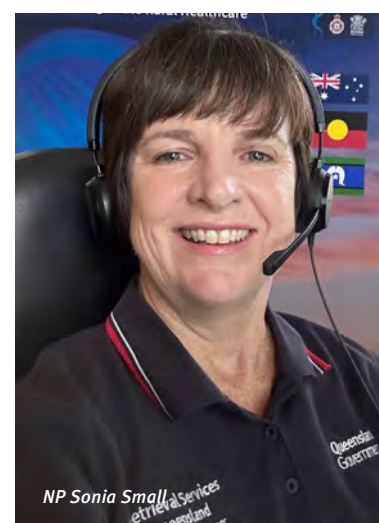
- Highlight their impact on improving access to care in rural and remote areas.
- Advocate for greater recognition and support for the profession.
- Showcase their leadership in healthcare innovation and service delivery.

Lisa said our NP’s unwavering commitment to their patients and communities resonated across the South West.

“Their leadership, expertise, and compassionate care are transforming healthcare—ensuring a brighter, healthier future for us all,” she said.



NP Ann Cross



NP Sonia Small



NP Pauline Kehl

CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS DAY

As part of this year's Allied Health Professionals Day (AHPs Day), 14 October 2024, many of our teams joined for morning teas to recognise and celebrate the significant contributions of our Allied Health professionals.

AHPs Day began in 2018 in the UK, born from the vision of a dietitian and a speech therapist, and it quickly gained support, going global in 2019. This year's theme, "Stronger Together," highlighted the power of multidisciplinary care, which is increasingly recognised for its clinical and economic value in health system reform.

Executive Director Allied Health Helen Wassman said the theme also reflected the work achieved right here in the South West.

"As a multidisciplinary team, our strength comes from our collaboration, working together to provide seamless, high-quality care across our communities," Helen said.

"Allied Health professionals make up almost a third of the Australian healthcare workforce. They work side by side with doctors and nurses in delivering holistic, evidence-based care across various sectors, including health, disability, and aged care.

"Their work is critical to ensuring that our health system delivers consistent and excellent patient outcomes.

"Thank you to all our Allied Health professionals for your dedication and commitment. Together, we are indeed stronger!"



CELEBRATING OUR OPERATIONAL SERVICES TEAM

Operational Services Recognition Week, a dedicated time to celebrate the vital work of our operational staff was celebrated from 7 to 11 October.

Operational Services staff form the backbone of our healthcare system, ensuring that everything runs smoothly behind the scenes. Whether it's food preparation, patient transport, cleaning, groundskeeping, waste management, laundry, security, or travel services, their work is integral to patient care and hospital efficiency.

Throughout the week staff were encouraged to take part in celebrating the South West HHS Operational Services Staff.

Health Service Chief Executive, Dr Anthony Brown, said these teams often work quietly in the background, but their contributions were fundamental to the care we provide.

"To all South West HHS operational staff, thank you. Your unwavering commitment makes a difference in every aspect of our health service. You are a crucial part of our success, and this week is a small way to say we value and appreciate your work," Anthony said.



OUR RESOURCES

NEW BUILDINGS OPEN ACROSS THE SOUTH WEST

Two new Community and Allied Health Service buildings, and Morven’s new Community Clinic, were recently officially opened.

The new clinic in Morven replaced the previous 75-year-old facility and has been warmly welcomed by the local community.

South West HHS Chief Executive Dr Anthony Brown said this new build was part of a program of works to replace the primary and allied health buildings at Charleville and St George, as well as the clinic at Morven, which started in August 2023.

“The three projects were undertaken by Hutchinson Builders and supported a combined total of 137 jobs across the three sites: Charleville (44), St George (44), and Morven (49).

“The new Morven building brings together under the one roof, both clinic services and the previously separately housed local ambulance creating a more seamless and safer clinical environment. By relocating the ambulance to the new clinic means there is no longer a need to retrieve the ambulance before retrieving patients. The ambulance can depart direct from the new clinic. A new one-bedroom, self-contained unit for relieving staff is also included in the build.”

The new builds deliver improved layout, accessibility, and manoeuvrability throughout each facility, as well as improved storage capacity for medications and drugs.

“The modern layout of the new buildings provides for improved quality of care and ability to undertake medical procedures,” he said.

“They are modern buildings with greater insulation values and generally improved sealing against drafts and heat losses to improve comfort levels.

“The new buildings demonstrate our commitment to continue delivering quality health services to these communities.”

The new Morven clinic, along with the allied health buildings at Charleville and St George, are of modular construction.

All three modular facilities were manufactured at the Hutchinson Builders yard at Yatala on the Gold Coast and transported to each prepared site for installation and commissioning.

The modular construction used in the construction significantly reduced building time and makes it easier to add additional structural components in the future as needs require. Building offsite and then delivering completed modules to the hospital grounds for fitting together reduces impacts on patients, staff, and parking.





New staff accommodation for Charleville and St George

In further exciting news for Charleville and St George, additional modules have recently arrived on site to deliver much needed additional staff accommodation.

Health Service Chief Executive, Dr Anthony Brown, said the project would deliver four single units each for Charleville and St George.

“Each unit will be in the form of a modern modular building, containing a bedroom, lounge, dining area, bathroom, kitchen, and laundry with an external veranda,” Dr Brown said.

The modular construction units were built by QBuild before being delivered to site.

He said tenders have also been called in the next month for contractors to undertake the necessary groundworks for installation of the modular units.

“Sourcing accommodation is a challenge in all rural areas of Queensland,” Dr Brown said.

“The Charleville and St George projects, along with other planned accommodation works across our region, such as the recently completed staff accommodation at Mungindi, will help the South West Hospital and Health Service attract and retain vital health workers to the region, along with helping to reduce ongoing accommodation costs.

“As a health service, we are continually reviewing our accommodation portfolio across all locations to ensure the supply of government-supplied accommodation matches the changing nature of our workforce.”

Patient travel subsidies for South West residents

Queenslanders travelling for healthcare now have more access to support under the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme (PTSS).

Effective 1 August 2024, Queenslanders travelling to access healthcare under the PTSS no longer have to pay for accommodation in full, thanks to the removal of a ‘four-night’ rule.

Previously, people travelling under the scheme paid out-of-pocket costs for their first four nights of accommodation each financial year, unless they could access an exemption.

This change is a commitment to removing barriers for Queenslanders accessing healthcare, no matter where they live.



[Find out more →](#)



OUR SERVICES

THE CARE COLLECTIVE – South West Primary Care Pilot

Partnering with the local community to improve the health and wellbeing of those living with complex health conditions.

After extensive scoping and co-design with local stakeholders, the Care Collective – South West Primary Care Pilot has commenced phased implementation in Charleville and the Far South West region.

Funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, this initiative is based on collaboration between the South West Queensland Primary Care Alliance (the Alliance) partners and supported by the Reform Office, Queensland Health. The Alliance brings together representatives from the South West HHS, Western Queensland Primary Health Network (WQPHN), Queensland Department of Health, local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS), South West Private and HHS General Practices, Health Workforce Queensland (HWQ) and CheckUP to tackle the challenges of the provision of primary health care in the region.

The Care Collective – South West Primary Care Pilot aims to improve how Queenslanders in the South West region access care by health service providers working together to build on the strengths and address health service gaps in these communities.

When talking with health providers, consumers and other stakeholders, it was identified that many people living in far south western Queensland find it hard to access primary health care services and their care is not always coordinated. This pilot aims to work on this in:

- Charleville
- Quilpie
- Cunnamulla
- Thargomindah and surrounding areas.

The place-based co-design approach resulted in the development of models of care that meet the unique needs of the community and includes service and care coordination components.

Our project team members work and live in the areas they support, which means we can grow and change our workforce based on local needs. These team members work with local councils, primary care providers and First Nations health organisations. The dedicated Care Collective workforce may be different across areas depending on the local needs. There are three different options that each area picked from, with some areas prioritising multiple:

- **Community Service Coordinator** – These Coordinators provide administrative project support for all primary and community health care service providers to make sure health and wellbeing services in each area are coordinated.
- **Clinical Care Coordinator** – These qualified health professionals provide clinical care coordination to consumers in the primary care setting, in partnership with General Practitioners, community and acute health care providers.
- **Community Care Facilitator** – These professionals are based in the local community to work with consumers, as part of a multidisciplinary care team, to guide them on personalised services, information and supports to meet their needs.

This initiative will continue to build on the benefits for the community, including person-centred and culturally safe health care for consumers, closer to home where possible; improved communication between health care providers and services, better coordinated access to health, community and social support services for the community, stronger health literacy in the community and better management of health conditions, resulting in fewer avoidable hospitalisations and trips to the emergency department.

The pilot is an innovative approach to primary care in the community and will be evaluated in the middle of 2025 to see if it can be rolled out across other parts of South West Queensland and broader communities. For further information reach out to the team at Reform_Planning@health.qld.gov.au.



Sept 2024 #swSpirit

Celebrating excellence: Peta Hart

Peta Hart, Service Director of Primary Care and Programs, has been recognised as the #swSpirit recipient for September!

Peta exemplifies our core values of quality, adaptability, engagement, compassion, and accountability in her day-to-day leadership and overall dedication to her team.

Peta's colleague, Clinical Nurse Consultant in Surat, Ann-Maree Attwooll, shared how Peta's leadership shines through her unwavering support of her staff.

"Peta is an exemplary leader. She is a listener, a mentor, and an exceptional role model for what General Practice is all about," Ann-Maree said.

Michael Wilson, General Practice Manager for the Eastern Sector, added that nothing was ever too much trouble for Peta.

"She is a supportive leader who always thinks of her team before herself. She fosters great team culture and is an approachable role model. Nothing is ever too much trouble for Peta," Michael said.

Peta's passion for patient-centred, high-quality primary care was also highlighted by Dr Carl de Wet, Executive Director of Medical Services and Clinical Governance.

"Peta has a deep understanding of the service and the importance of respectful collaboration to drive continuous improvement," Carl said.

A/Health Service Chief Executive Rebecca Greenway also praised Peta – who was also subsequently celebrated as the Board Chair Award recipient at the South West Staff Awards 2024 – for consistently upholding the values of the organisation.

Congratulations Peta, and thank you for your unwavering commitment to excellence!



October 2024 #swSpirit

Mel Wakefield – departing DON/FM Roma Hospital is our October #swSpirit!

On 1 October 2024, we said farewell and best wishes to Roma Hospital Director of Nursing / Facility Manager Melissa Wakefield, who sadly moved on to Bundaberg Base Hospital as the Director of Nursing Patient Flow and Workforce effective 7 October.

Mel has been an inspiring, empowering, and supportive leader to the Roma Hospital Team and Eastern Hub for four years. This included supporting the seamless transition from the 'old' to 'new' Roma Hospital site and always ensuring a professional and collegiate environment at work, supporting the wider Roma communities through the COVID period, as well as always being a visible and committed senior leader for the South West HHS.

She's demonstrated the very best of our values in action through trials and tribulations over recent years – and as well of course through the good times – whilst remaining a keen advocate for her team and colleagues and ensuring active social presence both at the hospital and wider community.

"On behalf of all of us at South West HHS, I'd like to thank you Mel and wish you all the best in your next chapter" Catherine Ole, A/Executive Director Nursing and Midwifery Services said.

"We know that wherever your path leads, you will continue to make a difference, just as you have here. While we are sad to see you go, we are so incredibly proud of all that you have accomplished and excited for all that lies ahead for you. You have left an indelible mark on South West."

South West HHS A/Health Service Chief Executive Rebecca Greenway also reflected on her time working alongside with Mel.

"It has been a privilege having Mel as a trusted colleague and leader for several years in our organisation. I have enjoyed working with Mel and wish her well in her future endeavours," Rebecca said.

"The patients and communities she has served are the lucky ones. Mel's knowledge, passion, and commitment to delivering excellent healthcare to our communities has been exemplary to all those who have been fortunate enough to work alongside her. Thank you, Mel, for all your hard work and dedication in your time with the South West and we wish you all the very best in your next adventure."

To mark her time Roma Hospital staff gifted Mel an old RN uniform with farewell messages written all over it which will no doubt be a treasured memory.

Mel, we would like to wish you all the very best for your future endeavours and will always be welcome at the South West!



November 2024 #swSpirit

We are thrilled to announce the recipient of the November #swSpirit award is the Dirranbandi Multipurpose Health Service (MPHS) team.

This recognition is in honour of their exceptional demonstration of our South West HHS values—Quality, Adaptability, Accountability, Compassion, and Engagement—during the recent bushfires that threatened their community.

South West HHS Executive Director Governance Strategy and Performance, Leigh Burton, said the team at Dirranbandi faced extraordinary challenges, including the evacuation of the hospital, yet rose to the occasion with professionalism, courage, and unwavering dedication.

“In a disaster situation, both teamwork and communication are critical to delivering the best outcome, and despite the adversity the amazing team at Dirranbandi faced – they delivered when their residents, patients and community needed them most,” Leigh said.

“I have witnessed and admired the team spirit first-hand on multiple occasions, and for this critical incident it again served them well.

“All of the staff should be immensely proud of the care-centred way in which they responded, putting their community and resident’s safety and wellbeing first.

“Congratulations to the entire team, who all contributed to an amazing response. You should all be very proud, as the HHS is most definitely proud of you.”

Dirranbandi MPHS Acting Director of Nursing, Jessica Jackson, shared her heartfelt appreciation for the team.

“I would like to acknowledge and take a moment to express my deepest admiration and gratitude for the courage, professionalism, and unwavering dedication the Dirranbandi MPHS staff displayed in the face of such a challenging and unexpected situation,” Jessica said.

“The recent bushfire disaster and evacuation of the hospital tested the team in ways they could never have anticipated, yet they faced it with extraordinary bravery and unity.

“The team’s leadership, compassion, and determination to support one another and those around them were nothing short of inspiring.

“Long after the town had been advised to evacuate, staff remained on the ground in the hospital to ensure the acute patients and MPHS residents were transported safely to St George.

“You all performed and delivered a standard of care beyond the call of duty. We are extremely grateful for you all.

“Thank you for your unwavering dedication to each other, the community, and the South West HHS.

“Your actions made a profound difference, and I am incredibly proud to be part of a team that demonstrates such remarkable humanity and resilience in the most difficult of times.”

St George Hospital Group Director of Nursing Jeff Potter also thanked everyone from the Dirranbandi Campus.

“Each of you performed an amazing job during the fires to which you can be really proud,” Jeff said.

“I witnessed first-hand some of the nursing staff who had relocated themselves to St George to care for your residents and patients. What I saw was total professionalism and dedication.”

Congratulations to the entire Dirranbandi MPHS team for this well-deserved recognition. Your efforts embody the spirit of #swSpirit and the heart of our mission to care for and support our communities!



December 2024 #swSpirit

Congratulations to Jo Turnbull, our December #swSpirit award recipient!

As one of the South West HHS's Indigenous Liaison Officers, Jo truly embodies our values of quality, adaptability, accountability, engagement and compassion in everything she does.

Jo's passion for equitable and culturally safe healthcare is evident in her work. As Elyssa Hamad Mkali, Allied Health Team Leader for Roma Primary and Community Care, shared:

"Jo is such a passionate, professional, and persistent advocate for and facilitator of access to equitable and culturally safe health care for people in the South West.

"She is calm, kind, and compassionate and, along with her colleagues in the liaison officer team, is pivotal in connecting colleagues and community alike. We are so grateful to have her as part of our team."

Currently, Jo is going above and beyond her substantive role, remotely supporting the Charleville team while continuing her work in Roma. She visits Charleville face-to-face every few weeks, ensuring the community receives the best possible care during this transitional period.

Melinda Brassington, Service Director Primary and Community Care, commends Jo's tireless efforts:

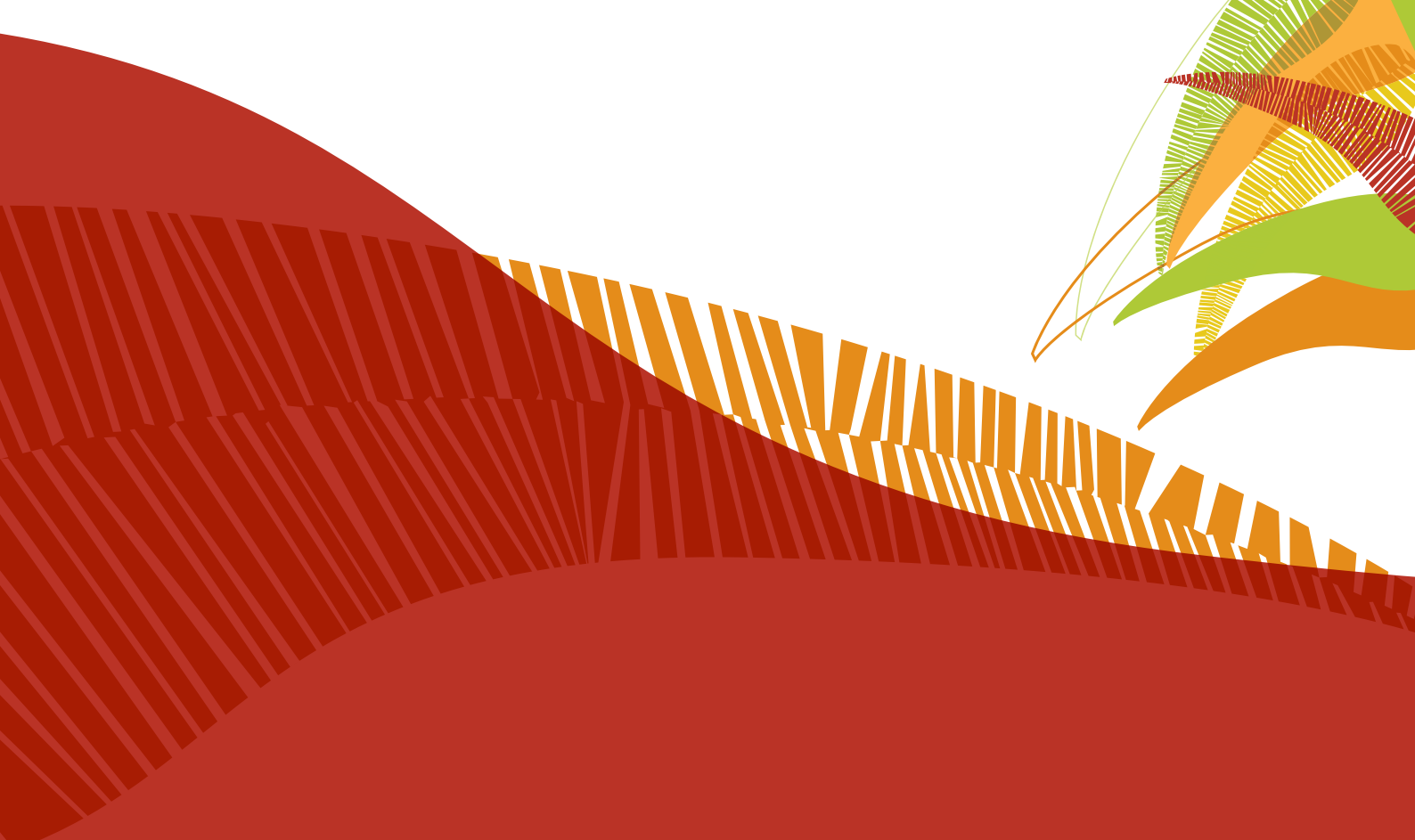
"Jo is certainly going above and beyond to ensure Charleville is covered whilst we work through recruitment challenges.

"It's a big job, yet Jo approaches it with a big smile and unwavering dedication. She has built strong connections with clients and the local team, and we greatly appreciate her efforts and willingness to help. Jo is incredibly deserving of this recognition."



Jo, thank you for exemplifying the #swSpirit and being a shining example of our values in action. Your dedication to your colleagues, clients, and community is truly inspiring.

Congratulations on your well-deserved recognition!



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