

South West Hospital and Health Service

PULSE

MARCH 2026 EDITION



Welcome graduate nurses & midwives!

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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** (You-wal-a-ray)
- Eromanga – Boonthamurra** (Boon-tha-murra)
- Eulo – Budjiti** (Bud-ji-ti)
- Injune – Bidjara / Iman** (Bid-jara)
- Mitchell – Gunggari** (Gon-gari)
- Morven – Gunggari** (Gon-gari)
- Mungindi – Kamilaroi** (Car-milla-roy)
- Quilpie – Boonthamurra, Mardigan, Wongkumara** with other interests
- Roma – Mandandanji** (Mand-an-dand-gee)
- St George – Kamilaroi, Mandandanji, Bigambul and Gungarri** interests
- Surat – Mandandanji** (Mand-an-dand-gee)
- Thargomindah – Kullilli** (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.

Contact: SWHHS_Communications@health.qld.gov.au

Cover Image: New South West HHS nurse grads February 2026
Inset: Graduates Jayli Carroll, Hayley Evans and Ashleigh Wharton



QUALITY



COMPASSION



ACCOUNTABILITY



ENGAGEMENT



ADAPTABILITY

“ Together, we aim to continue addressing inequities and progress towards achieving genuine health parity across South West Queensland by 2031. ”

Page 5: First Nations Health Equity Strategy 2025 – 2028



From the Board Chair

The Board has been proud to support the HHS in launching our new South West HHS *First Nations Health Equity Strategy 2025 – 2028*. This strategy outlines our shared commitment to working with a variety of partners to deliver improvements in First Nations health outcomes. We must, and can, and will do better in ensuring every First Nations person has an opportunity to live a long, healthy and fulfilling life, right here in South West Queensland.

Appropriately, the strategy centres on a commitment that is about... *Our Way – Together* and was developed after listening to the voices, the values and the stories of the lived experiences of First Nations people. Sincere thanks goes to the 60 plus people who attended and willingly shared their thoughts at community consultations in nine locations, as well as the 127 staff who provided input to online virtual consultations. Incidentally, this represents 14% of the HHS staff. Additionally, 25 online submissions were received from community partners.

Our key Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation partners – Cunnamulla Aboriginal Corporation for Health (CACH), Goondir Health Services and Charleville and Western Areas Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health (CWAATSICH) have shown us for many years now, that when you listen to First Nations people, you can deliver healthcare that is culturally grounded, that is valued by community and that can make a real impact in closing the gap in health outcomes. In the coming years, we will work shoulder to shoulder with our partners to eliminate racism and discrimination; we will continue to develop a skilled First Nations workforce and increase access to health services that delivers culturally safe and responsive care. And we will do this... *Our Way – Together*.



Alison Zappala, Ethan Capewell, Ray Chandler,
Dr Mark Waters, Jan Chambers, Karen Tully,
Robyn Brumpton and Bruce Scott



At the March Board meeting, we farewelled two of our Board members, who have chosen not to seek reappointment to the Board for another term of service. Furthermore, we have three more members (including myself) who are seeking to be granted another term of service by the Minister for Health. Moreover, the Minister will also be appointing a clinician who works in the HHS to serve on the Board. New appointments will be announced in late March.

After 11 years of solid governance support, Claire Alexander is stepping down from the Board. Claire is a former resident of Thargomindah, and her small town lived experiences along with her sharp eye for risk management and sound financial knowledge has seen her contribute to rigorous governance oversight. Claire has served as Chair of the Finance Committee and most recently, Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee. As a thoughtful and wise governance leader, Claire's contributions have truly made a difference to the HHS.

Jan Chambers from Mungallala joined the Board in 2019 and has brought to the Board table a solid background in governance, community leadership and rural wisdom. Jan was appointed Deputy Chair in 2020 and has worked loyally and capably in this role. Jan's contributions have always been grounded through a solid rural and remote lens, and she never let her fellow board colleagues forget that we were here to strategically guide healthcare access to all people who live and work rurally, no matter their location. Jan has a deep sense of what truly matters in rural and remote healthcare provision and poses an awesome eye for governance detail, which has enhanced the decision-making work from the Board.

Jan and Claire, we thank you sincerely for your service to the South West HHS.

Our March Board meeting was to have been in Mungindi, however reverted to a virtual meeting after the HHS decided to cease all non-essential / non-clinical travel. Should travel be on the cards for April, the new Board team will meet in Roma for the monthly board meeting and induction of new Board members.

Karen Tully, Board Chair
South West Hospital and Health Board

Board out and about



Ethan Capewell, Karen Tully and Jan Chambers



Alison Zappala, Jan Chambers and Karen Tully



Ethan Capewell, Dr Mark Waters, Ray Chandler, Karen Tully, Bruce Scott and Jan Chambers



Every day, across our facilities, it is our staff who make the difference. The commitment you show, the relationships you build, and the compassion and professionalism you bring to your work are what enable us to continue to deliver safe, sustainable and high-quality care.

From the Health Service Chief Executive

As we approach the end of March, it's hard to believe how quickly the year is already moving. While this is our first edition of Pulse for 2026, a great deal has already been achieved across our health service, and it's wonderful to be able to take a moment to reflect on the strong start our teams have made across the region.

We have now launched our next three year (2025-28) *Our Way – Together First Nations Health Equity Strategy*; celebrating a significant milestone and our renewed commitment to improving the health and wellbeing outcomes of First Nations people, our communities and staff. I would like to thank the many staff and community members who contributed their time, insight and experience to shaping this important work.

Another highlight of the year so far has been welcoming 29 new graduate nurses and midwives who have commenced with us. Embarking on a career in healthcare is both exciting and challenging, and I am delighted this cohort has chosen to begin their journey in rural and remote healthcare in the South West. This strong intake shows how attractive a career here has become for emerging clinicians. Thank you to the teams who support and mentor our graduates as they build their confidence and skills.

We would also like to welcome and congratulate a record number of seven new registrars who have joined us this year – six at Roma Hospital and one at Charleville Hospital. Your decision to specialise in general practice at South West is a testament to your shared commitment to mastering the broad, high-stakes scope of practice that our remote communities rely on. Thank you to all those who enabled the recruitment of the registrars and who support them during their time with South West Health.

We also welcome a new Director of Nursing at Westhaven Aged Care Facility, a new Nurse Practitioner at Morven Community Clinic, and all our new staff. We hope you are inspired by your colleagues and the community to make the South West your home for the years ahead.

At the same time, we are pleased to congratulate several staff who have achieved impressive long service achievements and career progression with us.

Every day, across our facilities, it is our staff who make the difference. The commitment you show, the relationships you build, and the compassion and professionalism you bring to your work are what enable us to continue to deliver safe, sustainable and high-quality care.

This year also marks a very significant milestone for one of our facilities, with Wallumbilla Community Clinic celebrating its 100-year anniversary. A special event was held on-site to mark the occasion, with many community members proudly sharing stories of the amazing healthcare they had received over the past 100 years. We too are immensely proud of the Wallumbilla clinic, and team, who continue to provide an exceptional service to the community despite the building's age and limitations. Reaching a century of service speaks volumes to the long-standing relationship we share with the communities we serve.

We have also enjoyed coming together to celebrate International Women's Week, recognising the extraordinary contribution of women across our workforce and communities. This year's theme, Give to Gain, invited us to reflect on the power of generosity and collaboration in helping advance gender equality – *When we give, we gain. When women thrive, we all rise.*

Alongside these achievements and milestones there are many more people to recognise; health initiatives that have been underway; and important updates we need to share.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Pulse and the opportunity to see some of the great work happening across our health service.

Dr Anthony Brown
Health Service Chief Executive



OUR WAY – TOGETHER: ADVANCING HEALTH EQUITY



Karen Tully, Sheryl Lawton, Bruce Scott OAM, Dr Anthony Brown, Ethan Capewell and Shelley Lawton

South West HHS has proudly launched the next three-year tranche of Our Way – Together, reaffirming our long-term commitment to achieving health equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across South West Queensland.

The formal launch, held on Monday 23 February, was an inspiring moment of reflection and renewal – bringing together staff, partners and community leaders to acknowledge how far we have come, and to recommit to the work ahead.

It was a timely launch given we celebrated National Close the Gap Day not long after on 20 March.

“Close the Gap Day is a powerful reminder that health equity is not only possible – it is our shared responsibility,” Shelley Lawton, Executive Director Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Engagement (EDATSIHE) said.

“This year’s theme, Community Voices: The Pathway to Justice, Equality and Healing, speaks directly to the heart of Our Way – Together and how we work in the South West.”

Shelley said the first three years of Our Way – Together laid strong foundations through relationship building, truth telling and deep listening. Extensive consultation and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, staff and partners have further clarified what is needed to advance health equity in meaningful and lasting ways.

The refreshed strategy strengthens our momentum – guided by legislation, shaped by community leadership, and grounded in respect and shared responsibility. It sets clear priorities for the next three years that are both ambitious and achievable.

“Our priorities reflect what communities have told us matters most,” Shelley said.

“They challenge us to eliminate racism, improve culturally safe access to care, and address the broader determinants of health that shape wellbeing long before someone enters our services.”

As we move into this next tranche, South West HHS remains focused on:

- ✓ Eliminating racism in all its forms
- ✓ Improving access to culturally safe and responsive services
- ✓ Influencing the social and cultural determinants of health
- ✓ Co-designing services with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, ensuring community voices lead the way
- ✓ Growing and supporting a strong First Nations workforce that is valued, empowered and leading change

“These commitments are not new—but this strategy strengthens how we deliver on them, together,” Shelley said.

With the strategy now launched, work is underway to develop a detailed action plan that will guide implementation and maintain momentum across the service.

“Progress will continue to be overseen through the First Nations Health Equity Committee, which includes the Chief Executives of our valued Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations. Through this partnership, South West HHS will continue to share progress, celebrate achievements as milestones are reached, and collectively address challenges as they arise,” she said.

Why Close the Gap still matters

Close the Gap Day reminds us why this work cannot slow. Despite national efforts, only four of the 19 Closing the Gap targets are currently on track, and the persistent 10–11-year life expectancy gap remains unacceptable.

“These realities reinforce that progress requires sustained action, accountability and genuine partnership,” Shelley said.

“The voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—highlighted each year through the Close the Gap Campaign Report—must continue to guide every decision we make. Across the country, communities will gather in solidarity through events, conversations and advocacy, calling for justice, equality and healing.

“Here in the South West, *Our Way – Together* provides our local pathway to contribute to that national effort.”



OUR COMMUNITIES

MURWEH WOMEN'S WEEK 2026 CELEBRATES CONNECTION, STRENGTH AND "FILLING THE CUP"

Murweh Women's Week 2026 brought women from across the Shire together for a warm, uplifting and empowering series of events centred on this year's theme, "Filling the Cup."

The theme acknowledged the many roles women hold in families, workplaces and communities, and the importance of taking time to replenish their own wellbeing.

HOPE Program's Jen Peacock said the theme resonated strongly with women across the region.

"Women give so much of themselves every day. This week was about reminding each other that our own wellbeing matters too. When we take time to fill our cup, we're stronger, healthier and better able to support the people around us," Jen said.

The HOPE team partnered with Murweh Shire Council, the Charleville Neighbourhood Centre, and a wide range of local and regional service providers to deliver a rich program of activities.

Information stalls and support services were available from organisations including South West HHS, Wellness my Way, Far West Indigenous Family Violence Service, Anglicare, Acacia Country Practice, Services Australia, the World Wellness Group, and CWAATSICH, who also provided health checks.

"Staff from South West Queensland Rural Health (SQRH) added a practical health focus, offering informal health checks and running gym sessions in Augathella and Morven," Jen said.

"These sessions encouraged women to prioritise physical activity as part of their overall wellbeing. A crowd favourite across all events was the lively Bingo sessions hosted by Donna Mitchell from Far West Indigenous Family Violence Service. The games brought plenty of laughter, friendly competition and a sense of connection that set the tone for the week."

Jen said events in Augathella and Morven were guided by the warm and engaging presence of Councillor Teri Sommerfield, who MC'd the gatherings and helped create a welcoming atmosphere. Generous catering from the Queensland Country Women's Association (CWA) and the Morven Progress Association added a special touch, making each event feel inviting and community-driven.

The week also featured inspiring guest speakers from Women's Health and Equality Queensland, who shared insights into initiatives supporting women's mental health and wellbeing.

"Dr Lexie Prokopuk, Principal Project Coordinator of the MadeHER Study at the Australian Women and Girls' Health Research Centre, spoke about her research into improving health outcomes for women and girls – an important reminder of the broader work happening across Queensland to support women's health," Jen said.

"The success of Murweh Women's Week reflects the strength of collaboration across the Shire. When services come together with a shared purpose, we create something truly meaningful. This week gave women the chance to connect, learn, laugh and take a moment for themselves. That's the heart of 'Filling the Cup' – and it's something we're proud to support."

"By creating space for women to focus on their own wellbeing, the week reinforced the message that looking after ourselves is not a luxury – it's essential," Jen said.

Murweh Women's Week once again highlighted the power of community, connection and care.



Ang and Yaya



Dulcie at Morven



Aunty Rhonda and Aunty Barb



Maddy (SQRH) and Judy



Morven Gym



TACKLING REGIONAL ADVERSITY THROUGH CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

The strength of South West communities was on full display recently as our Tackling Regional Adversity through Connected Communities (TRACC) team continued its work across Thargomindah and Dirranbandi, delivering practical wellbeing activities, shared meals and meaningful conversations.

According to TRACC Program Support Officer Penny West, the visit reinforced the power of connection in supporting community wellbeing.

“When communities come together around food, creativity and shared experiences, it builds trust, resilience and a real sense of belonging. That’s what TRACC is all about,” Penny said.

Energy and enthusiasm at Thargomindah State School

Day 1 in Thargomindah was filled with energy and excitement at Thargomindah State School, where students enthusiastically embraced the Cook + Connect workshop. Burgers were a clear hit – with plenty of students returning for seconds – and every plate was proudly stacked with colourful vegetables.

A standout was Tegan’s special ‘Macca’s-style’ sauce, which quickly became a crowd favourite and sparked plenty of happy taste-testing and laughter.

“Seeing kids enjoy healthy food together – and ask for more – is a win for everyone. It shows how simple, fun experiences can have a lasting impact,” Penny said.

Connection across distance – and opal country

Day 2 was just as heartwarming, highlighting the commitment communities have to supporting one another despite vast distances. Janell Lobb and Nina Jordan travelled from Cunnamulla, catching the bus out to Yowah to collect residents before making the 162-kilometre journey to Thargomindah.

“It was a privilege to welcome community members from the dynamic opal town of Yowah and share a day focused on connection, creativity and open conversation,” Penny said.

“The effort people made just to be there speaks volumes about how much these opportunities matter. Connection doesn’t stop at town boundaries.”

Wellness Expo brings services together

The TRACC team also extended a huge thank you to Bulloo Shire Council and Thargomindah Community Clinic’s Yoko Abe, for leading and coordinating the Thargomindah Wellness Expo. The Expo brought services and community members together in meaningful and accessible ways, strengthening pathways to support across the region.

“The community spirit really shone bright during the week and we thank everyone for getting involved,” Penny said.

Thank you, Dirranbandi!

TRACC’s work in the region continued with the 2026–27 TRACC Co-Design Workshop in Dirranbandi, where community members came together to help shape future wellbeing initiatives.

An incredible range of local groups were represented, including the Rural Transaction Centre, Progress Association, Show Society, Hospital Auxiliary, Country University Centre, Arts Council, South West HHS Community Advisory Network and Mental Health Consumer Advocacy Group, alongside members from the Polocrosse, Pony, Swimming and Junior Rugby League clubs, and the Parents and Citizens Association.

“Having so many perspectives in the room – with just 18 people – shows how engaged and committed Dirranbandi is to its community wellbeing,” Penny said.

TRACC also thanks Balonne Shire Council for its engagement, along with service providers STRIDE, RHealth, and the South West HHS HOPE and Mental Health teams for contributing valuable insights. A special shout-out goes to the Dirran Servo and Bakery for keeping everyone well fed.

Looking ahead

TRACC is currently finalising the workshop Minutes and will share them with participants shortly. Upcoming priorities include outcomes from the 2026–27 TRACC Grant Co-Design Workshop and the rollout of the Just a South West Farmer project across the district.

“What we’re seeing across the South West is momentum,” Penny said. “Communities are leading the way, and TRACC is proud to walk alongside them.”



WELCOME TO OUR 2026 GRADUATE NURSES AND MIDWIVES

Twenty nine new graduates – 26 nurses and three midwives – began their careers with South West HHS this year.



After a week of orientation in Roma, they headed across the region to begin providing care in our hospitals, multipurpose health services and community settings. This strong intake shows how attractive a career in the South West has become for emerging clinicians.

The health service is especially proud of our locally trained graduates, including Jayli Carroll, Hayley Evans, Ashleigh Wharton and Katherine Murray (pictured) who all share a passion for rural nursing.

Jayli, a Roma local, said the graduate program offered by South West HHS was her number one preference following university.

“People think if you go rural and away from the metropolitan places there won’t be as much support or opportunities, but it’s actually so much better,” Jayli said.

“There are so many people who care about you, and they want to see you learn and grow, and to retain staff rurally, so we’re very well supported out here. With Roma’s graduate program, you get a very broad spectrum of things to learn and being a smaller facility there’s less staff, so you get opportunities more quickly. Having grown up here and being local, it’s nice to come to work and you already know everyone,” she said.

Hayley, who also grew up in Roma, completed her studies online through the University of Southern Queensland and said there’s a lot to love about rural nursing.

“Being able to study online and not having to leave home to go to the Toowoomba or Ipswich campuses made it so much more achievable,” Hayley said.

“There’s a lot of variety in rural nursing that you wouldn’t see at bigger hospitals. We get a taste for it all; from seeing little kids and bubs through to aged care. The friendships you make, and the community support you receive is just next level,” she said.

Ashleigh, who lives in Quilpie and will start her graduate year at Quilpie’s Multipurpose Health Service (MPHS), said being able to study and work locally was beneficial in many ways.

“Not having to leave my family for a number of days, and SQRH putting us up in accommodation in Charleville has been great,” Ashleigh said.

“I wanted to do nursing for a long time. I find myself a caring person and wanted to care for those who cared for me. With rural nursing, you’re not just caring for a patient, you’re caring for those you know, in a place that values what you do. The MPHS is a hospital-based ambulance as well, so you may be the nurse going out on the scene. That’s the more challenging part of working in a rural and remote area; we don’t have a paramedic, sometimes you don’t have a doctor, so we rely on our nurses,” she said.

Surat resident Katherine also completed her nursing degree externally with the University of Southern Queensland and said she loved rural nursing.

“I love the variety, no day is the same, from emergency, to acute, palliative, aged care, mental health and the list goes on. There are so many opportunities that you can embrace and extra skills you can learn,” Katherine said.

“I’ve lived in Surat for more than 14 years and working at the Surat MPHS has given me the chance to have a work life balance that allows me to grow within my career and still balance my personal life as a wife and mother to my three daughters,” she said.

South West HHS Executive Director of Nursing and Midwifery Services Chris Small said the new 2026 graduates also included two dual-degree nursing and paramedicine graduates.

“In many of our smaller, more isolated communities, our nurses are first responders to an incident, so it makes very good sense for them to have both nursing and paramedic skills,” Mr Small said.

Mr Small said the South West HHS was committed to providing training opportunities for our graduate nurses and midwives.

“There’s no denying how important nurses are in our community and to our health service. Nurses make up about 44 per cent of our entire health service workforce; they provide care at almost every stage of our lives across our GP clinics, our hospitals and in the community,” he said.

“I wish each and every one of our graduate nurses the best of luck as they embark on this next stage of their careers.”





CELEBRATING LEADERSHIP, SERVICE AND ADVOCACY FOR MITCHELL



The Mitchell community is incredibly proud to congratulate Sheryn Hanna, Chair of the Mitchell South West HHS Community Advisory Network (CAN), on her role as guest speaker at this year's Australia Day Awards and her continued leadership in community health advocacy.

In her Australia Day address, Sheryn shared a powerful personal story that reflects a lifetime of service to Mitchell and the surrounding communities. Born and raised in Mitchell, Sheryn spoke of her early ambitions to become a nurse and her time working as an Enrolled Nurse at the old Mitchell Hospital, when babies were delivered locally, minor operations were performed, and nurses were trained right here in town.

She reflected on the excitement of the early 1980s, when the new 24-bed Mitchell Hospital was built in Ann Street at a cost of around \$3 million – a significant investment in local health services at the time, and one that shaped the future of healthcare in the region. Sheryn was fortunate to work in the new facility and witness firsthand the importance of strong, local health infrastructure.

Her journey of service continued through decades of community involvement, from educational committees and parent advocacy to local government.

After being elected to Booringa Shire Council, she went on to represent Mitchell on the District Health Council, where her passion for ensuring access to quality health services truly took hold.

That advocacy led directly to the formation of the CAN when Mitchell Hospital became an MPHS in 2010. Sheryn was elected as the inaugural Chair, a position she has held ever since.

Under Sheryn's leadership, the Mitchell CAN has remained proactive and persistent, particularly during recent years marked by workforce shortages and funding pressures. In her speech, Sheryn highlighted the CAN's work advocating directly to the Health Board on key issues including:

- ✓ the ongoing push for a second permanent doctor
- ✓ improved internet access at the doctors' residence to support workforce retention and training
- ✓ the creation of Doctor Welcome Packs to help new clinicians feel part of the community
- ✓ practical improvements such as accessible parking, transport connections, and enhanced outreach services
- ✓ the successful advocacy for renal dialysis services in Roma, a life-changing outcome for families across the region.

Sheryn also shared a deeply personal story about community fundraising, highlighting the impact of local generosity and connection—values that sit at the heart of the CAN's work.

Through her Australia Day address, Sheryn not only celebrated volunteers and community champions, but also shone a spotlight on the critical role the Mitchell CAN plays in strengthening local health services and community wellbeing.

We thank Sheryn for her tireless commitment, steady leadership and unwavering advocacy. Mitchell is stronger because of her dedication.



A QUIET PRIVILEGE: FAREWELLING SARAH WILLIAMS

When Sarah Williams joined the Charleville Primary and Community Care team in early 2024, she brought with her a depth of clinical experience that spanned intensive care, infectious diseases, medical assessment and planning, endoscopy, and international Intensive Care Unit work in London.

But it was not only her skill set that made an immediate and lasting impact – it was her extraordinary kindness, compassion and humanity.

Melinda Brassington, Service Director Primary and Community Care in Charleville said Sarah and her husband Owen, a physiotherapist, made the move from Brisbane to Charleville seeking a rural experience.

“What followed was far more than a change of postcode. Sarah transitioned seamlessly into her role as Community Palliative Care Clinic Nurse, supporting clients and families across the western sector in community settings, hospitals and aged care facilities,” Melinda said.

From the outset, it was clear Sarah was an advocate in the truest sense of the word.

“She set a high standard of care, always grounded in dignity, humility and deep respect for the people she served,” Melinda said.

“In moments that mattered most, Sarah provided comfort, presence and reassurance – often quietly, always genuinely. Her care extended beyond clinical tasks to what cannot be taught or measured: the ability to truly see people, to listen, and to walk alongside them at the end of life.”

That essence of the work was beautifully captured in words Sarah shared upon leaving Charleville – reflections that speak not only to her own experience, but to the profound role of palliative care nurses in rural and remote communities.

“There is a quiet privilege in being a palliative care nurse in the outback, one that can’t be taught, measured, or fully explained,” Sarah shared.

Sarah wrote of care that is “never just clinical,” but deeply human – delivered in small homes under wide skies, where people are known not by bed numbers, but by their families, stories and lives. She described learning the strength and stoicism of outback people, the importance of silence, and the power of a hand held on a remote property – just as vital as medication.

“Her reflection reminds us that in places like Charleville, time moves differently. Communities rally. Love shows up in practical, unspoken ways. And nurses like Sarah are welcomed into the most intimate moments of people’s lives – not as strangers, but as trusted companions,” Melinda said.



Sarah Williams and her husband Owen Corby

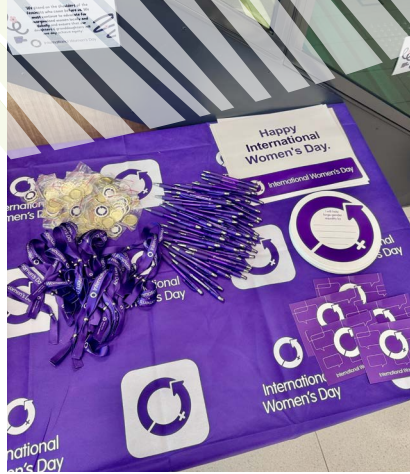
The image Sarah shared alongside her words – a quiet, everyday view of Charleville – speaks volumes. It reflects the stillness, warmth and groundedness of the place she came to know so well, and the communities she served with such care.

“Earlier this year, the team farewelled Sarah and Owen as they made the decision to move to cooler, greener and more hilly pastures in Tasmania,” Melinda said.

“While we are sad to see them go, we are deeply grateful for the time they shared with our service and our communities. Sarah’s contribution leaves a lasting imprint – not just in the care she provided, but in the way she reminded us what this work truly means.

“It has been a profound privilege to witness these moments and carry this trust. Work that asks a lot but gives back more than you could ever expect.”

Thank you, Sarah, for your professionalism, your advocacy, your compassion and your heart. You have honoured Charleville, our service, and the people of the western sector. We wish you and Owen every happiness in the next chapter – and know that your legacy here will endure.



GIVE TO GAIN: TOGETHER, WE FORGE GENDER EQUALITY

On 8 March, we joined millions around the world in celebrating International Women's Day (IWD) – a day that has stood for progress, solidarity, and hope for more than a century.

Achieving this vision requires all of us. The *Give to Gain* campaign encourages us to contribute in ways that strengthen opportunity and visibility for women and girls:

- ✓ sharing knowledge and expertise
- ✓ offering mentorship and encouragement
- ✓ advocating for fairness and inclusion
- ✓ challenging bias when we see it
- ✓ investing time, resources, and support.

Since 1911, this global movement has belonged to everyone who believes in a fairer, more inclusive world. It reminds us to celebrate women's achievements, raise awareness about discrimination, and take meaningful action to advance gender equality.

This year's theme, *Give to Gain*, invites us to reflect on the power of generosity and collaboration.

South West HHS Chief Executive Dr Anthony Brown said in health, we see every day how giving, whether through care, knowledge, or support, creates ripples of impact that extend far beyond the moment. The same is true for gender equality.

"When we give, we gain. When women thrive, we all rise," Anthony said.

A gender-equal world is one free from bias, stereotypes, and discrimination. It is diverse, equitable, and inclusive – a world where difference is valued and celebrated.

"Giving is not a subtraction – it is intentional multiplication. Every act of support helps build a more connected, compassionate, and equitable society," Anthony said.

"Within our health service, women are the backbone of our workforce and the heart of our care. Their leadership, resilience, and innovation shape the quality of the services we deliver every day.

"As we celebrate International Women's Day 2026, let's also recommit to creating workplaces where women feel safe, respected, and empowered to succeed. Let's make International Women's Day one of the biggest giving days of the year – and let's continue that spirit long after 8 March.

*"Together, we can forge gender equality.
Together, we can Give to Gain."*



From our staff: What International Women’s Day means to us

In the spirit of International Women’s Day, we’re proud to share reflections from some of our staff on what this day – and this year’s theme, *Give to Gain* – means to them.

HOPE program’s Jen Peacock reminds us of the strength of women in rural communities:

“Women give so much — as leaders, carers, volunteers and professionals. When we invest in women, we gain stronger families, healthier communities and a brighter future.”

For Katie Eckersley, Executive Director People and Culture, International Women’s Day is both personal and professional:

“Behind every role is a story — a woman balancing work and life, a graduate finding her confidence, a leader lifting others as she leads. When we give our time to mentor, advocate and truly listen, we create safe, respectful workplaces where people feel seen, heard and valued — and that benefits everyone.”

Mitch Rigby, Director of Pharmacy, highlights the power of collective action in healthcare:

“Give to Gain reflects what we value in our profession and our communities. When we share knowledge, offer opportunities and support early career clinicians, we build stronger teams, better care and a more equitable system. When women succeed, whole communities benefit.”

And Jennifer Armstrong, Manager Organisational Development, captures the heart of the theme:

“Empowering another woman never diminishes what I have – it multiplies what we all have. The more we invest in others, the more we gain in trust, connection and shared success.”

Together, these reflections remind us that giving is not a subtraction — it’s intentional multiplication. Across our health service, women are the backbone of our workforce and the heart of our care.



09 March 2025

There is one thing I would like the next generation of girls to know - Always be yourself never change your personality to be accepted by others.

Celebrating Progress, Empowering the Future



International Women’s Day



HOPE PROGRAM BRINGS BASKETBALL COACHING TO CHARLEVILLE STUDENTS

A burst of energy, teamwork and community spirit filled the courts recently as the HOPE Program welcomed basketball coach Travis from the Own The Rock (OTR) Academy to deliver two days of coaching sessions at the annual *Charleville School of Distance Education Kick Start Conference*. The initiative brought students together from across the region, giving them the chance to learn new skills, connect with peers and experience the joy of movement in a supportive environment.

Over the two-day program, students took part in a series of basketball drills, games and team-building activities designed to strengthen coordination, communication and confidence. The sessions were fast-paced, fun and full of encouragement—exactly the kind of environment the HOPE team aims to create through its sport-based engagement programs.

HOPE program spokesperson Jen Peacock said the event was a standout example of how sport can bring young people together in meaningful ways.

“We saw students step outside their comfort zones, try new skills and really support one another. Travis brought such positive energy, and the kids responded with enthusiasm, respect and a willingness to give everything a go. That’s what HOPE is all about—creating opportunities for young people to feel connected, confident and proud of themselves.”

The program extended beyond the conference, with Travis also visiting Year 5 and 6 students at Charleville State School, who eagerly joined in the coaching sessions. Their excitement and engagement added to the momentum of the week, reinforcing the value of bringing high-quality sporting experiences directly to local schools.

Feedback from students and teachers highlighted the strong sense of teamwork and the positive learning environment created throughout the sessions. Travis himself praised the students’ attitude and effort, noting how rewarding it was to work with such motivated young people.

The initiative reflects the HOPE program’s commitment to supporting youth wellbeing through active, community-driven experiences. By partnering with organisations like OTR Academy, the program continues to show how sport can be a powerful tool for building resilience, strengthening social connections and promoting healthy lifestyles.

As Jen explained, “When young people feel supported and have opportunities to shine, it strengthens not just their wellbeing, but the wellbeing of the whole community.”

The HOPE team looks forward to continuing these partnerships and creating more moments where young people can learn, grow and thrive—both on and off the court.



BRINGING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER THROUGH FOOD, SKILLS AND CONNECTION

Cook + Connect continues to bring people together across the South West, using food as a powerful way to build practical skills, confidence and meaningful connection.

So far in 2026, Cook + Connect has been delivered to more than 158 participants across 11 different locations, in partnership with 17 local organisations. The program has also supported the training of 14 new facilitators, strengthening local capacity to continue delivering Cook + Connect within communities.

Alex McKenna, Community Nutritionist, who has supported Cook + Connect activities in Surat and Quilpie, said the program's strength lies in its simple, practical and inclusive approach.

"Cook + Connect is built on three core messages," Alex said.

"We focus on including a variety of foods across the day, connecting with others through the power of food, and enjoying balanced, practical meals using what people already have available. These messages really resonate in rural communities. They're realistic, flexible and centred on building confidence rather than perfection."

A proven prevention-focused program

Throughout 2025, the prevention-focused program was delivered across the region in partnership with 25 local organisations, supported by 19 trained facilitators, and engaging more than 357 participants. Activities ranged from school holiday programs and workplace wellbeing events to community cook-ups – each one strengthening healthy habits and social connection, one meal at a time.

Jenny Peacock from the South West HHS HOPE team said Cook + Connect was about much more than learning recipes.

"It creates a welcoming space where people can learn practical skills, share knowledge, and connect with others in a way that feels relaxed, inclusive and fun," Jenny said.

Learning through hands-on experience

During the school holidays, the HOPE team partnered with Emma and Christie from SQRH to deliver a hands-on Cook + Connect session for local children. Participants cooked vegetable-packed noodle fritters, experimenting with fresh, frozen and tinned vegetables and learning that all options can be healthy choices.

Dietitian Emma shared tips on balanced eating and encouraged children to aim for five serves of vegetables and two serves of fruit each day.

"It was fantastic to see the kids so engaged and confident in the kitchen," Jenny said.

"They were learning skills they can use at home, while having fun and trying new foods."





Supporting community wellbeing in Surat and Quilpie

Cook + Connect also played a key role in launching Wellness Wednesday at Surat Library, the first session of a new monthly community wellbeing series. Alongside a hands-on cooking activity, participants were invited to complete the Wellness my Way health check, helping them reflect on their wellbeing and connect with local supports.

“It’s been wonderful to see such strong community interest,” Alex said. “Programs like this show how food can be a gateway to conversations about health, wellbeing and connection.”

In Quilpie, Cook + Connect formed part of Quilpie Shire Council’s Wellbeing Week, with two sessions delivered for council staff.

Participants cooked together, learning how to create balanced, colourful meals, and many also completed the Wellness my Way health check to connect with free or low-cost local prevention programs.

“Nothing brings people together like food. These sessions are a great reminder that wellbeing can be practical, social and enjoyable,” Alex said.



Growing local capability

In Roma, the HOPE team trained new Cook + Connect facilitators before hosting a community cook-up with Maranoa Country University Centre. Participants worked together to prepare a hearty one-pot lasagne, packed with colourful vegetables.

“The more colour and variety on your plate, the more nutrients your body gets. This lasagne definitely passed the rainbow test,” Alex said.

The team extended a sincere thank you to Roma State College, South West Indigenous Network, TRACC and the Country Universities Centre Maranoa for their ongoing support.



Looking ahead

Alex said the continued success of Cook + Connect reflects the strength of local partnerships and the enthusiasm of communities across the South West.

“Thank you to every community, partner and participant who has been part of Cook + Connect,” she added.

“Your energy, teamwork and commitment to wellbeing are what make this program possible. We look forward to continuing to cook, learn and connect alongside communities throughout 2026.”





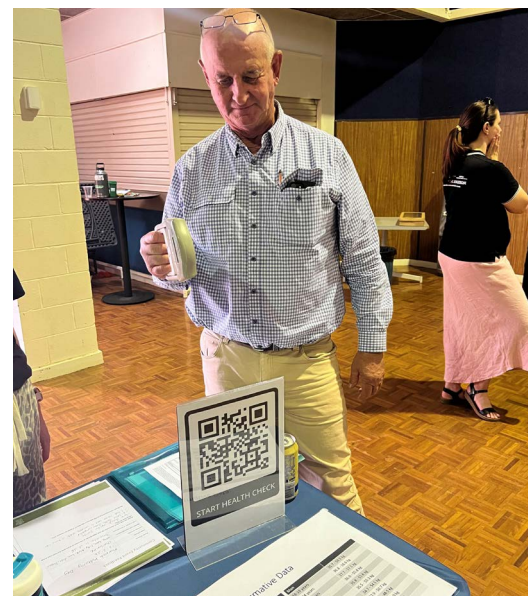
MURWEH SHIRE STAFF WELLBEING WEEK STRENGTHENS WORKPLACE HEALTH AND CONNECTION

Murweh Shire Staff Wellbeing Week marked its third successful year in 2026, continuing to grow as a valued initiative supporting a healthier, more resilient workforce. The week brought together staff from across the region for practical health activities, engaging presentations and a vibrant Health Expo, with more than 100 staff participating across the program.

Coordinated through a strong partnership between the HOPE program, the Primary and Community Care team, and SQRH, this year's event showcased the power of collaboration in delivering meaningful, preventative health initiatives locally. Student nurses played an important role, offering free health checks including blood pressure, heart rate and general health screening—giving staff immediate insight into their wellbeing.

HOPE spokesperson Jen Peacock said the week reflects the region's commitment to supporting staff in a holistic and accessible way.

“Wellbeing Week is about giving our staff the tools, knowledge and confidence to look after their health. The level of engagement this year shows how much our workforce values these opportunities. It’s a reminder that when we invest in our people, we strengthen our whole community.”





The Health Expo featured a wide range of interactive stalls and activities. Tegan from TRAAC led the Alcohol and Other Drugs (AODS) stall, where staff sampled non-alcoholic drinks and tested their coordination using “beer goggles”—a memorable demonstration of how alcohol affects reaction time and judgement.

Preventative health remained a central focus. The Sun Safe stall reinforced the importance of sun protection in the South West climate, while Quitline and Gambling Help provided confidential support and resources for behaviour change. Wellness my Way information encouraged staff to explore evidence-based self-management programs tailored to individual needs.

Exercise Physiologist Sam added a competitive edge with grip strength testing, sparking friendly rivalry while highlighting the importance of muscle strength for long-term health and functional independence. One of the most talked-about activities was the “Sugar in Drinks” challenge, where staff guessed the sugar content of common beverages. The visual display of sugar quantities prompted lively discussions about hidden sugars and everyday choices.

Throughout the week, the Allied Health team delivered practical workplace health presentations.

- **Jess (Physiotherapist) and Sam (Exercise Physiologist)** shared strategies to prevent workplace injuries and manage musculoskeletal strain.
- **Leo (Podiatrist)** highlighted the importance of foot health for mobility and overall wellbeing.
- **Student Dietitians Emma and Sophie** provided practical nutrition tips to support energy and focus at work.
- **Health Promotion Officer Tilly** delivered an informative session on Quitline services and smoking cessation supports.

Jen said the success of the week demonstrates the value of bringing services together to support staff wellbeing in a proactive and engaging way.

“When our teams collaborate, we create something far more impactful than any one service could deliver alone. The enthusiasm from staff shows how important these initiatives are, and we’re proud to be part of a program that continues to grow each year.”

Murweh Shire Staff Wellbeing Week stands as a strong example of how local partnerships can create healthier workplaces and empower staff to take positive steps toward their own wellbeing.





A BIG-PICTURE APPROACH TO HEALTH IN REMOTE QUEENSLAND

Penny, 56, joined the Wellness my Way program earlier this year after wanting a clearer, more holistic view of her health while living and working in South West Queensland.

A Program Support Officer with Queensland Health’s TRACC program, Penny supports Regional Adversity Clinicians across the South West HHS district to deliver initiatives that promote resilience and connectedness in local communities.

Despite working in health, Penny said accessing services while living remotely can be challenging.

“I wanted a big-picture look at my health – especially around fatigue, strength...all the changes that are a part of my stage of life.”

Wellness my Way is a joint initiative of Health and Wellbeing Queensland, South West HHS, Queensland Health’s Health Contact Centre and The Health and Wellbeing Centre for Research Innovation at The University of Queensland.

The free program starts with an online or phone health assessment that looks at risk factors for chronic disease such as diet, physical activity, alcohol, smoking and mental health. Participants then receive follow-up support from a telephone health coach to develop a personalised plan and connect to local programs. Penny said she had been interested in the program for some time, but it was a recommendation from a colleague that prompted her to sign up.

“The assessment was straightforward, and the coaching conversation was excellent,” she said.

Penny was referred to services available in her local area to support her ongoing health goals. She has been meeting regularly with a health coach through the My Health for life program.

“Meeting regularly with my (My health for life) coach has helped me clarify my goals and take them seriously. It’s felt supportive and practical – not overwhelming.”

Living rurally presents unique health challenges, and Penny said that local health services are often under significant pressure. Penny said having an option to receive support outside the health system made it easier for her to take action.

“Wellness my Way gives people like me a chance to take control of our health without those barriers.”

Since joining the program, Penny said she has noticed improved energy levels, better routines around diet and exercise, and a greater sense of control over her health.

“I feel clearer about what I need to do and why. For my mental health especially, it’s confirmed that I’m on the right track,” she said.

As a mother and hopeful future grandmother, Penny said her motivation to stay healthy is about living well for the long-term.

“I want to live long and well – to get strong now so I’m not weighed down by preventable diseases later in life. And if I’m lucky enough to become a grandmother one day, I want to be up to the job,” she said.

Penny said Wellness my Way’s preventive, holistic approach made it a valuable resource for people living in regional and remote communities.

“It’s fantastic to have someone take a whole-of-me view of my health,” she said.

The connection to programs and support has helped Penny stay accountable and motivated. “It’s a great resource for our region.”

Wellness my Way is open to residents of South West Queensland, including Charleville, Roma, Cunnamulla and St George.

BACKGROUND

One in four Queenslanders live with a chronic condition – many of which are preventable through healthy lifestyle changes.

South West Queensland experiences a higher rate of preventable chronic conditions, making prevention-focused services even more vital. In South West Queensland, like many regional communities, preventable chronic conditions are more common.

People can take the health check over the phone by calling 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84) and asking for the ‘Way to Wellness’ service MONDAY–FRIDAY, 8AM–8PM

OR complete the free online health check and get connected to support near you.

[FREE Health Check →](#)



WALLUMBILLA EXERCISE CLASS PUTS WELLNESS MY WAY FRONT AND CENTRE

Front row (L–R): Dell Price, Tony Bate, Dawn Irwin Back row (L–R): Lyn York, Lyn Bates, Ian Houston

The Wallumbilla group exercise class recently came together for their monthly meet-up at the CWA Hall, proudly showcasing their Wellness my Way merchandise and their shared commitment to staying active, connected and healthy.

The regular gathering provides participants with an opportunity to check in with an Exercise Physiologist, helping them stay motivated, supported and on track with their individual fitness goals. The session combined movement, encouragement and plenty of laughs, reinforcing the strong sense of community that has become a hallmark of the group.

Following their group workout, members completed a Wellness my Way health check – a simple screening that looks at key areas of wellbeing, including physical activity, diet, mental health, smoking and alcohol habits. The check-in is designed to support participants to better understand their health and identify areas where additional support may be helpful.

Pauline Kehl, Director of Nursing and Facility Manager at Wallumbilla Community Clinic, said the program is about much more than exercise.

“Wellness my Way is about meeting people where they are and supporting them to take small, positive steps toward better health,” Pauline said.

“The group exercise class creates a welcoming space where people feel encouraged, connected and confident to focus on their wellbeing.”

Each participant will soon receive a follow-up call from a health coach, who will talk through their results and help connect them with free or low-cost local services tailored to their individual needs. This ongoing support helps participants continue their journey toward a healthier, more confident lifestyle – long after the workout ends.

Pauline said the success of the Wallumbilla group reflects the power of community-led wellbeing initiatives.

“When people feel supported and empowered, real change happens,” she said. “We’re incredibly proud of this group and the way they’re embracing their health together.”





OUR TEAMS

QUILPIE COMMUNITY LUCKY TO HAVE AIMEE



After more than a decade working in an operational role at Quilpie MPHS, Aimee Judd is taking the next exciting step in her career, graduating as a Registered Nurse.

Originally moving to Australia 20 years ago, Aimee later settled in Warwick before making Quilpie home 11 years ago. It was here that she met her husband and quickly became part of the local community.

“Quilpie is just so nice – the community is so welcoming and lovely,” Aimee said.

Aimee began her career locally as a casual administrative team member, before moving into a permanent full-time operational role in May 2019. Along the way, she was given the opportunity to expand her skills, including driving the hospital-based ambulance service, an experience that helped shape her passion for patient care.

Her journey into nursing began while working operationally, where she witnessed firsthand the importance of skilled, compassionate care – particularly for the ageing population.

“I’ve always loved nursing,” Aimee said.

“It’s about taking care of everyone, but especially our older community members. They are so appreciative of the care they receive.”

Aimee completed the majority of her nursing placements across the South West, with only one placement outside the region. In February 2026, she officially completed her studies and is now keen to continue her career locally, embracing the variety and challenge of rural and remote nursing.

“No two days are ever the same,” she said. “That’s what makes it so rewarding. It’s also pretty cool that I can continue to upskill through graduate certificates and professional development.”

Director of Nursing and Facility Manager at Quilpie MPHS, Jenna Nunn, said it was always exciting to see staff grow and develop within the community.

“It’s always so exciting when staff come and stay, and then decide to upskill or even change professions to help our community,” Jenna said.

“Aimee is a wonderful member of our Quilpie family. She is always willing to learn and adapt, and it’s been incredibly rewarding to see her transition into her nursing role.

“I am very proud of her achievements. Having been part of the South West family for 11 years now, she is truly embedded in our community. We are very lucky to have her.”

Aimee’s story is a wonderful example of how regional pathways, supportive teams, and strong community connections can shape fulfilling careers – and strengthen healthcare in rural Queensland.



WALLUMBILLA COMMUNITY CLINIC 100TH BIRTHDAY EVENT

The South West Hospital and Health Board congratulated the Wallumbilla Community Clinic and the Hospital Auxiliary as they marked the clinic’s 100th anniversary at a formal ceremony on 28 February.

Following the celebration, from 3 pm until late, a skin cancer awareness session and a rural wellbeing information event were held at the Wallumbilla Showgrounds. The family event included market stalls, raffles, cooking demonstrations and live entertainment, headlined by special guest Sam Kekovich and guided by Master of Ceremonies and Royal Flying Doctor Service registered nurse Courtney Bylett.

South West Hospital and Health Board Chair Karen Tully said the Wallumbilla Community Clinic and the Hospital Auxiliary had delivered dedicated service to the communities of Wallumbilla, Jackson and Yuleba.

“It was fitting that we recognised this long history of continuous service during the clinic’s 100th year,” Karen said.

“I took the opportunity to pay tribute to the Hospital Auxiliary and the Wallumbilla Community Advisory Network, headed by Chair Melissa Wathen, for their ongoing support of their communities and our health service.

“Our dedicated staff work hard to deliver vital healthcare services to South West residents, and we appreciate the support we receive from our communities through our various hospital auxiliaries and CANs, such as those here in Wallumbilla.”

Wallumbilla CAN Chair Melissa Wathen said the local hospital was proof of what a small community could achieve when working together for a common goal.

Melissa said it had worked out well that the Wallumbilla Clinic was turning 100 years old at the same time the community had expressed interest in learning more about skin cancer and the services available locally.

“That’s why the Hospital Auxiliary and CAN decided on a combined event – to celebrate 100 years and raise money for the auxiliary to assist the clinic with the purchase of equipment and training,” she said.

“We also received a very generous donation from the Noonga Community Association Inc after their highly successful 6th Annual Sheryl Sinnamon Memorial Cricket Day held in January.

“The family and committee chose the Wallumbilla Hospital Auxiliary to receive the proceeds this year, totalling \$18,000. An official ceremony was held on the evening of 28 February to accept this very generous gift.



Wallumbilla CAN Chair Melissa Wathen (centre) with Health Service Chief Executive Dr Anthony Brown and Board Chair Karen Tully.

“Our event would not have been possible without acknowledging our sponsors: Australia Pacific LNG/Origin, Santos, Maranoa Regional Council, MIS Insurance Brokers Qld, the Royal Flying Doctor Service and Billaroo Working Dogs. We also had many local individuals and businesses donate raffle items.

“We also needed to acknowledge the volunteers within our CAN group and auxiliary, while Queensland Health and the South West HHS Board provided us with guidance and encouragement and formally acknowledged their support and thanks for the efforts put into the event.”



Brooke Lander, Leona Lander, Rebecca Murtha and Shane Randall

CELEBRATING THE HIDDEN HEROES OF HEALTHCARE

South West HHS proudly joined organisations across Australia on 6 March to celebrate Hospitality Workers in Healthcare Day, a national day recognising the vital contributions of the non-clinical staff who keep hospitals and health services safe, welcoming and functioning smoothly.

While nurses, doctors and allied health teams are often the visible faces of healthcare, the dedicated teams behind the scenes play an equally essential role in patient comfort, safety and wellbeing.

From environmental services and catering to laundry, reception and patient support, these staff members ensure patients and residents experience clean, comfortable, and caring environments every day.

South West HHS Coordinator Operational Services Kylie Keegan said the day was an important reminder of the breadth and impact of hospitality and support roles across the health service.

“Our hospitality and support services teams are the heart of our facilities,” Kylie said.

“They are the first to greet patients, the ones preparing nourishing meals, the people who keep our spaces clean and safe, and the staff ensuring beds are made, equipment is ready, and families feel welcomed. Their work is essential to every aspect of patient care—even if it’s not always seen.”

Facilities across the region recognised their hospitality workers with morning teas, thankyou boards, small appreciation events, and shout-outs from clinical and non-clinical colleagues alike. Staff shared stories of the positive moments and daily acts of kindness that often go unnoticed but have a big impact on patient experience.

“The feedback we receive from patients regularly mentions the friendly cleaner who brightened their morning, the cook who went the extra mile to accommodate their meal preferences, or the support staff who helped them feel safe during a difficult moment,” Kylie said.

“These stories show how deeply our hospitality workers shape the patient experience. Support services teams contribute directly to models of safe, high-quality care.

“Clean facilities reduce infection risk. Nutritious meals support recovery. Friendly faces at reception provide reassurance. Fresh linens and well-maintained equipment help clinical staff perform their jobs effectively.”

Kylie said across Australia, Hospitality Workers in Healthcare Day – supported by organisations such as the Institute of Hospitality in HealthCare (IHHC) – highlighted these “hidden heroes” whose work is foundational to patient outcomes and organisational safety.

“Though often working behind the scenes, their efforts are central to the comfort, dignity, and recovery of patients and residents,” she said.

Kylie said she hoped the day encouraged all staff and community members to recognise the essential nature of these roles.

“To every member of our hospitality, cleaning, catering, laundry, and support teams – thank you,” she said.

“Your work matters. Your care matters. And our hospitals simply couldn’t operate without you.”

South West HHS extends its deepest appreciation to all hospitality workers for their commitment, compassion, and professionalism – not just on 6 March, but every day of the year.



NEW DIRECTOR OF NURSING APPOINTED AT WESTHAVEN

South West HHS has welcomed Lucy Sargent as the new Director of Nursing at Westhaven Aged Care Facility.

Lucy brings with her a wealth of experience, a great passion and a clear vision for the future at Westhaven, having worked in health since she was 16 years old.

“I’ve worked in South Africa, Europe, the UK, and the Middle East. I’ve been in aged care for the last 10 years, although I had a break in the middle when I went back to university to do further study,” Lucy said.

In her new role, Lucy is focused on cultivating a passionate and driven workforce, with a true emphasis on delivering person-centred care.

“The vision here would be to garner excitement and a sense of gratitude, that together we have this opportunity to make such a huge difference to people’s lives. Here in Roma, because we’re a small community everyone knows everyone, we’re all connected somehow. Very often when someone is coming through the door, there’s a crisis. No one wants to come into aged care.

“By helping someone in their hour of need, you know it’s not just the person in front of you being impacted. The impact extends to the family at home, those involved in the decision making, the family who lives next door to them, there’s a wider community you’re a part of.

“That spirit of being involved in each other’s lives and problems, and solutions, and progression, you really feel that here in a place like Roma. For me professionally, I love the fact that it’s never a dull day in aged care. It’s a very challenging, fast-paced and driven space. It’s about being able to problem solve and think quickly on your feet. There’s a lot of diversity and the ability to progress because there’s so much change.

“I’d love to see more passionate people involved in aged care; people really driving the agenda, raising the profile – that aged care is sexy and it’s not boring.

“Looking ahead, we’ve got a lot of quality improvements to implement, a lot of goals we need to meet and a lot of change we need to support. I can’t do it all on my own and so I need that sense of excitement – for every staff member to be passionate and to share in that vision.

“I have a great team behind me and hopefully we’re going to do it all, here at Westhaven,” Lucy said.

NEW NURSE PRACTITIONER JOINS THE TEAM AT MORVEN COMMUNITY CLINIC

South West HHS is delighted to welcome Nurse Practitioner Jason Moloney to the Morven Community Clinic.

Jason brings more than 26 years of nursing experience, including 13 years as a Nurse Practitioner, with a strong background in emergency and primary healthcare.

Prior to joining South West HHS, Jason worked in Camooweal with North West HHS and has spent much of his career supporting regional and rural communities.

Jason is passionate about advanced nursing practice and strongly believes in unlocking the potential of nursing to meet the health needs of communities.

He also enjoys mentoring students and supporting other nurses to grow their clinical skills and confidence.



CELEBRATING 35 YEARS OF DEDICATED SERVICE

South West HHS is proud to celebrate Robin Tully's remarkable 35 years of service to Queensland Health — a career defined by dedication, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to rural and remote communities.

Robin's nursing journey began in 1984, when she commenced her Enrolled Nursing training at Holy Spirit Hospital in Brisbane. After completing her course in 1985, she gained valuable experience at St Andrew's Hospital before answering the call to rural Queensland — a decision that would shape the next three and a half decades of her career.

In 1990, Robin joined Queensland Health as a full-time Enrolled Nurse at Cunnamulla District Hospital, beginning a long and varied journey across the state. Quilpie MPHS Director of Nursing and Facility Manager Jenna Nunn said over the years, Robin served communities including Quilpie, Injune, Roma, Richmond, Mount Isa, and Cloncurry, building trusted relationships and delivering high-quality care where it is needed most.

"Her career progression reflects a strong commitment to lifelong learning and professional growth," Jenna said.

In 2000, Robin became a Medication Endorsed Enrolled Nurse, and later worked as an Advanced Practice Enrolled Nurse at Richmond Health Centre. In 2013, while continuing to work, she commenced a Bachelor of Nursing Science through James Cook University, graduating in 2015.

She went on to work as a Registered Nurse in community and multipurpose health services, including roles with BlueCare and Cloncurry MPHS, before returning home to Quilpie. Since April 2021, she has worked full-time as a Community Clinical Nurse at Quilpie MPHS, supporting people across the community on their health journeys.

Originally from Quilpie, Robin has strong family and community ties to South West and North West Queensland. With nine siblings and generations connected to the region, her work is deeply personal.

"This is the best community to work in — and I've worked in a few. From the outstanding nursing and operational staff at Quilpie Hospital, our incredibly supportive Director of Nursing, the brilliant medical and GP clinic teams, visiting health professionals, the South West HHS Executive team, and the fantastic support from Quilpie Shire Council — why would you live anywhere else?" Robin said.

Jenna congratulated Robin on her milestone and acknowledged the impact of her contribution.

"Robin's 35 years of service is an extraordinary achievement and a reflection of her dedication to both her profession and the communities she serves," she said.

"She brings a depth of experience, compassion, and professionalism to her role every day. Robin is deeply respected by her colleagues and trusted by the community, and she exemplifies what rural nursing is all about."

Jenna said Robin's commitment to community-based care continued to make a lasting difference.

"Robin has an incredible ability to connect with people and support them



South West HHS sincerely congratulates Robin on 35 years of outstanding service and thanks her for the lasting contribution she continues to make to our communities.

on their health journey. Her knowledge, leadership, and willingness to go above and beyond make her a valued member of our team, and we are incredibly fortunate to have her at Quilpie MPHS," she said.

Reflecting on her 35-year career, Robin says the highlight has always been doing what she loves.

"Starting as an Enrolled Nurse in 1984 and working through to my current role as a Community Clinical Nurse has been incredibly rewarding," she said.

"I feel privileged to work with such a great team here in Quilpie. Supporting people in the community and knowing we make a real difference to their lives is something I'm very proud of."

Robin Tully's career stands as a powerful example of commitment, resilience, and service to rural Queensland.



Breanna Conway Senior Social Worker at the World Social Work Day Display



Kamal Mustafayev (St George) and Heather Scriven (Domestic and Family Violence Specialist Health Workforce Program)

WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY 2026

On Tuesday 17 March 2026, South West HHS joined the global community in recognising World Social Work Day – a day dedicated to celebrating the vital role social workers play in supporting patients, families and communities.

This year's theme, "Co-Building Hope and Harmony: A Harambee Call to Unite a Divided Society," reflects the core of social work practice. Harambee, an African philosophy meaning "pulling together," calls on collective action, solidarity and collaboration to build a more inclusive and sustainable future.

At our facilities across the South West, social workers stand at the intersection of healthcare and community – supporting patients not only medically, but holistically.

Their work helps bridge gaps, strengthen connections, and ensure people feel heard, supported and empowered during some of life's most challenging moments.

To help raise awareness of the role of hospital social workers, a small interactive display was set up near the front reception. Staff were invited to stop by and take part in activities including:

- ➔ an "Ask a Social Worker..." question wall, encouraging curiosity and reflection
- ➔ a staff appreciation wall, sharing messages of thanks and recognition
- ➔ a mini resource table with information about social work services and community supports.

South West HHS Social Worker Breanna Conway said the display sparked conversations and highlighted the many ways social workers contribute to patient care beyond the bedside.

"I am deeply passionate about rural social work because it allows me to make a tangible and meaningful difference in the lives of people and communities that often have limited resources and support," Breanna said.

"Working in a rural setting enables genuine connections and a deep understanding of people's strengths and challenges."

After nearly two years working in Roma, Breanna reflected on feeling increasingly embedded in the community, describing rural life as fostering a strong sense of belonging and purpose – values that carry into their work every day.

"This year's theme speaks directly to why I chose this profession and this place," she said.

"Hope, dignity and inclusion grow strongest when we work in unity with others, across differences and divisions."

World Social Work Day is a timely reminder of the essential role social workers play in shaping compassionate, connected and resilient healthcare experiences.

South West HHS thanks all social workers for the care, advocacy and collaboration they bring to our communities every day.

Together, we continue to pull towards hope, harmony and a more just and supportive health system.



OUR RESOURCES

ROMA HOSPITAL CAMPUS UPDATE

Significant progress continues on the new administration building and car park at the Roma Hospital campus, marking an exciting step forward for our service and our people.

Leigh Burton, Executive Director Governance, Strategy and Performance, said the recent milestones reflect months of planning and collaboration and will deliver long-term benefits for staff, patients and the wider community.

“This project represents an important investment in our workforce and the future of South West HHS,” Leigh said.

“We’re pleased to see works reaching completion and to be moving closer to occupation. Construction of the new car park is now complete and accessible, with staff able to begin parking in the new section. Staff are asked to utilise the new car park and cease roadside parking, helping improve safety and traffic flow around the campus.”

Leigh said South West HHS would shortly be working with Council partners to further enhance safety for staff and community members along McDowall Street and Currey Street.

In the coming weeks, changes will also be made to the existing adjacent car park, including:

- Additional accessible (disabled) parking spaces
- Designated parents with pram parking
- Updates to traffic direction and signage.

“These improvements are about making the campus safer, more accessible and easier to navigate for everyone,” he said.

“It is with great pride that South West HHS can now reveal the name of the new Administration Building – the Bowra Building.

“The name was developed through collaboration between the EDATSIHE team, local Traditional Owners and staff. Bowra is the tribal totem of the Mandandanji people, meaning Red Kangaroo.

“This naming reflects our respect for Country and the importance of working alongside Traditional Owners. It’s a meaningful and lasting way to recognise local cultural connections.”

An official opening and naming ceremony will be held at an appropriate time once occupancy is granted.

Leigh said while the building was largely complete, final handover is pending the completion of minor works.

“This is expected to occur shortly. Additional ICT equipment has been ordered, with installations scheduled over the coming weeks to ensure the building operates at full capacity,” he said.

Quotes are also being finalised for turfing and basic landscaping between the Bowra Building and McDowall Street, further enhancing the surrounding environment.

Executive teams are currently finalising allocations and seating plans with their teams. With only minor adjustments required, planning is progressing well. Subject to occupancy approval, it is anticipated that teams will begin moving into the new building by early April.

South West HHS will continue to provide updates as timelines are confirmed and planning progresses.

“We recognise this has been a long-awaited project, and we thank everyone for their patience and cooperation,” Leigh said.

“We’re excited about what this new space will enable and look forward to welcoming teams into the Bowra Building very soon.”



STAFF RALLY FOR THIS YEAR'S CULTURE COMPASS

“It’s more than a survey”: Michelle Cabrera on why Culture Compass matters

South West HHS is preparing to launch its refreshed Culture Compass survey – and according to project lead Michelle Cabrera, this year’s approach is all about making it easier for staff to have their say and see real change.

“This is more than a survey. It’s how we understand what life at work really feels like for our people – and how we turn that into meaningful action,” Michelle said.

A simpler survey with bigger impact

The 2026 Culture Compass survey has been redesigned to be shorter and more accessible, with just 12 questions taking around five minutes to complete.

“We’ve listened to feedback that previous surveys felt too long. This new format makes it easier for everyone to participate, while still giving leaders clear insights to improve team culture and support staff,” Michelle explained.

Michelle said the value of Culture Compass goes beyond engagement scores.

“When staff feel supported, heard and connected, it directly impacts the care we provide. Better workplace culture leads to stronger teams, improved wellbeing and ultimately better outcomes for our patients and communities,” she said.

The role of Culture Compass Champions

A key part of this year’s approach is the introduction of Culture Compass Champions – staff who will help bring the survey to life across teams.

“Champions play a really important role,” Michelle said.

“They help their colleagues understand why the survey matters, encourage participation and most importantly, help connect feedback to action.”

Champions are not required to be in leadership roles.

“We’re looking for people who are passionate about their teams and want to make a difference. Sometimes the most powerful voices come from those on the ground, supporting their colleagues every day,” she said.

What’s in it for a champion?

For staff considering becoming a Culture Compass Champion, Michelle says the benefits go both ways.

“It’s a great opportunity to build leadership skills, be recognised across the health service and be part of shaping positive change,” she said.

“You’re not just supporting a survey – you’re helping improve the place we all work in.”

GET INVOLVED

With the survey opening soon, Michelle is encouraging staff to get involved.

“If you’ve ever wanted to have a voice in shaping our workplace, this is your opportunity,” she said.

“Becoming a Culture Compass Champion is a simple but powerful way to support your team and help us keep improving together.”

Staff interested in becoming a Culture Compass Champion can express their interest by contacting the Culture Compass team for more information.



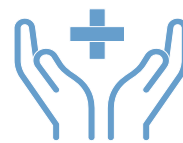
Your voice helps shape our workplace.



Visit the People and Culture site



Injune Hospital staff (from left) Ashlea Debnam, Donna Lamberth, Kirsty Doonan and Leanne Schmidt



OUR SERVICES

CLINICIAN AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY PROGRESS REPORT

In addition to our Consumer and Community Engagement Strategy, we also have a Clinician Engagement Strategy in place to outline our approach towards maintaining valued collaboration and input with our clinicians and employees in the planning, design and delivery of healthcare.

- ✓ Continuing opportunities to engage staff in key strategic priorities – including proposals to progress organisational wide realignment of our operational portfolios, and our next round of three year *Our Way – Together* First Nations Health Equity commitments. During our initial consultation phase, more than 100 staff participated in dedicated engagement sessions to inform the draft Strategy which was released for wider community consultation at the end of December.
- ✓ Formal launch of our zero-tolerance statement for racial discrimination and / or institutional racism, including supporting communications and staff awareness activities.
- ✓ Continuation of our internal Leaders Connect, Administration Network Forum, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Advisory Council, Peak First Nations Health Equity Committee and our South West HHS Clinical Council meetings.
- ✓ Celebrating the achievements of almost 175 colleagues and teams at our annual Staff Awards celebration, hosted in Charleville during October. New categories included Operational Services and Administrative Professional recognition.
- ✓ Further staff achievement and recognition via monthly *#swSpirit* staff recognition, *Pulse* articles and regular social media posting – alongside internal weekly *eNews*, monthly Virtual Town Hall meetings, and promotion of our 24/7 *Ask Executive* account.

Clinician and Employee Engagement Strategy

Our vision
To be a trusted and valued leader in the delivery of health services to rural and remote communities

Our purpose
To provide safe, effective, responsible and sustainable rural and remote health services that people trust and value

OUR VALUES

- Quality**: Striving for excellence and the highest standards of care
- Compassion**: Treating people with kindness, respect and dignity
- Accountability**: Showing reliability and taking ownership
- Engagement**: Consulting with others to work effectively and inclusively
- Adaptability**: Constantly learning, changing and growing

Why do we engage?
The provision of safe, high-quality, person-centred healthcare depends first foremost on the skill and dedication of clinicians. However, the health outcomes of a community are inextricably linked to the expertise and support of the broader health workforce and organisational context. Therefore, genuine, proactive engagement with all employees is essential. Through effective engagement and collaboration, we aim to ensure our entire workforce has the support and resources needed to deliver integrated, responsive, high-quality healthcare across the South West.

Purpose
This strategy outlines our plan to guide effective engagement with our clinicians and employees through communicating appropriately and effectively, and partnering in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of our health services.

Scope
The strategy outlines how South West Hospital and Health Service (SWHHS) will engage and collaborate with clinicians and employees in the planning, design and delivery of healthcare for the 2022-2026 period. It demonstrates our commitment to continuously improving engagement with our workforce, and actively partnering in areas including safety and quality, service planning and design, service delivery and service evaluation.

The strategy applies to all South West Hospital and Health Service employees who work together as a team to care for our communities. This includes clinicians, non-clinicians, visiting medical specialists, administrative staff, contractors and volunteers. The scope of our service includes acute care, primary and community care, residential aged care, telehealth services, allied health, and hospital in the home services.

Levels of engagement

- Individual**: Strengthens individual participation by providing our employees and clinicians with accurate and impartial information to help them understand problems, find alternatives and seek solutions.
- Work Unit**: Partners with our clinicians and employees for service planning, delivery, evaluation and improvement.
- Organisational**: Supports how we will engage with our overall workforce to plan and design safe, high-quality, high-value and effective care.
- System**: Focuses on how our employees engage with, contribute to and influence health policy, reform and legislation, and the availability of best practice evidence across all levels of government and internationally.

SWHHS Clinician and Employee Engagement Strategy 2022-2026 - Final. Board approved 23 May 2022

The next six months will also be a busy time as we look to working closely with leaders, teams and all staff across all locations to:

- ➔ Additional co-design and partnership working opportunities in accordance with Operational Plan commitments and other key initiatives – including the development of a new four-year Strategic Plan, for implementation from 1 July 2026.
- ➔ Driving forward opportunities to further develop our future clinical and non-clinical workforce, across all workteams, positions and locations.
- ➔ Launching our next three year round of First Nations Health Equity commitments, through our updated *Our Way – Together* strategy.

[Read Report →](#)



CONSUMER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

Effective 1 July 2022, the *South West HHS Consumer and Community Engagement Strategy 2022-2026* sets our strategy for meaningful consumer and community engagement.

Through our rolling Consumer and Community Engagement Strategy, we aim to ensure people and communities are supported wherever they are across the South West, ensuring the same quality of care is available to all and that everyone can be actively involved and engaged in their health and wellbeing journey.

Recent key highlights, demonstrating our continuing commitment to partnership working and engagement, include:

- ✓ We undertook extensive engagement across our communities – and with staff and partners – to discuss key achievements from our first three years of the *Our Way – Together* First Nations Health Equity program, and to hear from people about what matters most for them to inform our next three year schedule of priorities.
 - In total, we travelled to nine communities across the South West and received almost 150 virtual engagement responses.
- ✓ We also reviewed resident handbook and admission information to align with the new Aged Care Act.
- ✓ We continue to host and participate alongside our partners in a wide range of health promotion and community focused activities across the South West:
 - Approximately 155 events, engaging 7,950 participants, were hosted over the six-month period.
 - Broadly, we continued to host at least one event every 1.5 days – and a trend of delivering at least 5% growth of events year on year.
- ✓ Year to date complaints management continued to be met within key target measures:
 - Overall, 100% of complaints were resolved within 30 days in the six months to 31 December 2025 – well above the statewide target of 80%.
 - In total, 98 formal compliments were welcomed over the six months to 31 December 2025, most of which related to our levels of caring.
- ✓ We also received 76 complaints, providing valuable feedback informing service improvements – including measures to support dementia care and continence services, updating our consent procedure and enhancing our discharge management processes for mental health clients.
- ✓ We also continued to grow our online presence:
 - [South West HHS website](#), including our [careers page](#).
 - Continuing to welcome new subscribers to our Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram accounts – so if you are not a following us, join today!

Looking forward to the months ahead we will be busy progressing:

- ➔ Keeping in touch with our CANs across the South West, and also online, during CAN Link-In sessions, in addition to other local engagement opportunities and scheduled Board and other meetings around the South West.
- ➔ Progressing our next three year round of First Nations Health Equity commitments, through our updated *Our Way – Together* strategy.
- ➔ Finalising a new Strategic Plan and other supporting documents to commence from 1 July.
- ➔ Alongside our CAN and wider valued partners, continuing to advocate on behalf of South West communities to ensure safe, effective, responsible and sustainable health services that people trust and value.

[Read Report →](#)

Consumer and Community Engagement Strategy

Our vision
To be a trusted and valued leader in the delivery of health services to rural and remote communities.

Our purpose
To provide safe, effective, responsible and sustainable rural and remote health services that people trust and value.

OUR VALUES

- Quality** Striving for excellence and the highest standards of care
- Compassion** Treating people with kindness, respect and dignity
- Accountability** Showing reliability and taking ownership
- Engagement** Connecting with others to work effectively and inclusively
- Adaptability** Constantly learning, changing and growing

Why do we engage?
Put simply, we engage so we can understand how best to meet the healthcare needs of the people we serve. By actively listening, understanding and responding to those who use our services, we can form the foundation of safe, responsive, person-centred healthcare that our consumers and communities need and expect.

Who are our consumers and community?
South West Hospital and Health Service consumers and communities include the people and groups living within our catchment area who use our health services. They include patients and clients as well as their families, friends and carers.

- Our catchment is a geographical area of 359,000 square kilometres (10 per cent of Queensland)
- Our 3 hospitals, 8 multipurpose health services, 4 community clinics, 9 general practices services and 2 residential aged care facilities serve a population of 26,000 across 4 local government areas
- 13.4 per cent of our community members are First Nations people.

How can consumers and community members engage with us?

- Talk to us – at the patient's bedside, in the hallway, or anywhere within our facilities
- Join our Community Partner and Community Volunteer programs
- Submit feedback and ideas on to our patient and Consumer Feedback Service on SWHS-Consumer_Feedback@health.qld.gov.au
- Complete surveys or patient experience questionnaires
- Participate in our Community Advisory Network (CAN)
- Join us on social media by searching South West Hospital and Health Service
- Register your interest on our Consumer Interests Register.

Our challenges

- Community uncertainty around local health service availability and capability
- High levels of chronic disease and poor mental health, and social disadvantage
- Low levels of health literacy
- Significant numbers of people who rarely engage with the health service.

Our opportunities

- Partnering with patients, their families and carers, and with our communities to identify and act on ways to improve health service delivery
- Collaborating and learning from our staff and consumers to deliver better health outcomes
- Evaluating what we do to ensure improvements are fully embedded
- Connecting with community groups to integrate and celebrate the diversity of our workforce and communities.

SWHS Consumer and Community Engagement Strategy 2022-2026 - Final. Board approved 23 May 2022

#swSpirits

January 2026 recipient Teneille de Jong

We proudly recognise Teneille de Jong for her outstanding contribution as Acting Director of Nursing at Quilpie MPHS over the past 12 months. Teneille will soon take on the role of Acting Nurse Unit Manager at Charleville Hospital.

South West HHS Executive Director Nursing and Midwifery Chris Small said Teneille has exemplified the South West values of quality, accountability, adaptability, compassion, and engagement in everything she does.

“Her calm and engaging leadership style, combined with advanced clinical expertise, has guided the team through some challenging times – most notably leading the Quilpie MPHS Flood Response in March–April 2025. The HHS couldn’t be more grateful for the leadership and dedication she has shown during her time in Quilpie,” Chris said.

Charleville Hospital Director of Nursing & Midwifery Facility Manager Leanne Patton said Teneille’s solution-focused approach was to be applauded.

“She has been exceptional in her role at Quilpie. Her leadership, adaptability, and commitment to quality care have made a real difference,” Leanne said.

“She doesn’t just keep things ticking over – she drives action and solutions. She never simply escalates problems, instead, she brings practical solutions or interim measures to the table, often already implemented.

“Teneille is action-oriented, ensuring outstanding and new matters are followed up promptly and thoroughly. Her ability to communicate effectively and put people at ease has made her an excellent advocate for patients, families, and residents. She consistently goes above and beyond for Quilpie MPHS residents and community care recipients, ensuring they receive the highest standard of care.

“Under her leadership, all disciplines at Quilpie MPHS have felt supported, and she has been an active participant in Local Disaster Management Group meetings, earning respect as a trusted voice in the community. We are thrilled to welcome her to Charleville in the coming weeks.”

Leanne said beyond her professional role, Teneille and her mother are passionate animal carers, rehabilitating injured or abandoned wildlife and finding them safe homes or registered carers.



Thank you, Teneille, for your incredible work and dedication. You truly embody the spirit of South West!



February 2026 recipient Donnie Sun

We proudly recognise Donnie Sun, Senior Financial Accountant, for embodying the very best of our South West values – compassion, accountability, engagement, quality, and adaptability.

Donnie consistently goes above and beyond in his role, uplifting those around him and strengthening the culture we strive for across South West HHS. Executive Director Finance, Infrastructure and Corporate Services, Linda Patmore, shared her appreciation for all that Donnie does.

“He stretches himself in his work and does everything he can to support the team -nothing appears too much trouble for him. I always know that when I see Donnie, whether online or face to face, I will be greeted by a smile, even during the busiest times,” Linda said.

“He demonstrates our values in every task he does and every interaction he has. We are fortunate to have Donnie in our team doing the best for South West.”

Director Finance and Corporate Services, Jon Green, echoed this sentiment.

“Donnie demonstrates the South West HHS values in everyday tasks that he performs. Whether it’s the high standard of his work, his care for the people he deals with, doing what he says he will do, solving problems with colleagues, or his constant learning and self-development, Donnie is everything that we aspire to be in the finance team,” Jon said.

“He is a constant pleasure to have on our team.”

Donnie’s line manager, Courtney Power, highlighted his exceptional contribution to the South West.

“We would like to nominate Donnie Sun for the #swSpirit award in recognition of his outstanding accountability, helpfulness, and consistently friendly approach,” Courtney said.

“Donnie takes ownership of his work, follows through on commitments, and can always be relied upon to deliver high quality outcomes. Beyond his own responsibilities, he willingly supports colleagues, shares knowledge, and steps in whenever assistance is needed – often going above and beyond.

“Donnie creates a welcoming environment, communicates with kindness, and contributes to a positive workplace culture. For his dedication, teamwork, and positive impact, Donnie is highly deserving of the #swSpirit award.”

Donnie, thank you for the energy, professionalism, and warmth you bring to South West HHS. Your commitment inspires those around you, and your contribution strengthens our organisation every day.



#swSpirits

March 2026 recipient Yoko Abe

We are proud to recognise Yoko Abe as a South West Spirit Award recipient for her outstanding commitment to improving health access, quality and engagement for the Thargomindah community.

In her recently established role as Community Services Coordinator at the Thargomindah Community Clinic, Yoko has gone above and beyond to ensure local residents have improved access to vital health services.

Working within the Care Collective trial, Yoko has demonstrated what is possible through determination, collaboration and an unwavering focus on community needs.

Byron Richardson, Director of Nursing – Thargomindah Community Clinic said Yoko consistently exemplifies the South West HHS values of Quality, Adaptability, Accountability, Engagement and Compassion.

“Through her deep understanding of the unique challenges faced by remote communities, she has delivered realistic and sustainable improvements to health service access in Thargomindah,” Byron said.

“With compassion and strong advocacy for increased health service engagement, Yoko has achieved tangible outcomes for the community, including:

- A 300% increase in monthly physiotherapy availability,
- A 150% increase in mammogram screening appointments,
- The introduction of sleep study clinics delivered through Vital Health Physiotherapy,
- The reintroduction of visiting optometry services via a private provider.

“These improvements represent significant progress in addressing the access barriers often experienced in remote Queensland.

“Most recently, Yoko coordinated and hosted a four-day Health Expo in Thargomindah, showcasing a range of South West HHS allied health service programs.



“The event attracted visitors from neighbouring towns and was overwhelmingly well received by the community, with strong calls for the expo to become an annual event.”

Byron said Yoko’s dedication, adaptability and compassion truly set her apart.

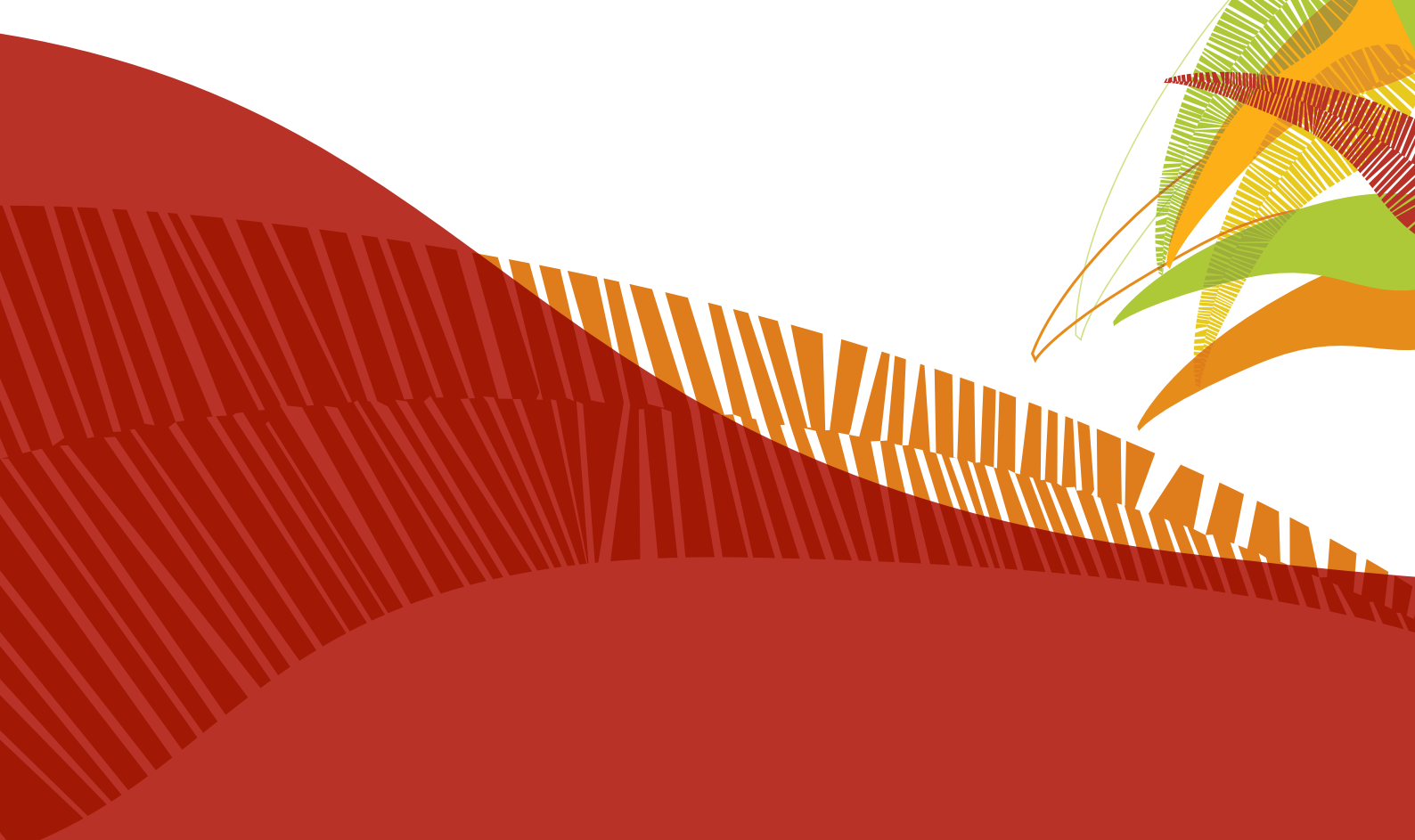
“She has worked tirelessly to improve health access for our community, often navigating complex challenges with professionalism and determination,” he said.

“The outcomes she has achieved speak for themselves, and the positive feedback from the community is a testament to her impact.”

Yoko’s ongoing tenacity, innovation and advocacy demonstrate how health barriers in remote Queensland can be overcome through strong relationships, local leadership and a genuine commitment to community wellbeing.

South West HHS congratulates Yoko on this well-deserved recognition and thanks her for the extraordinary difference she continues to make for Thargomindah and the broader South West community.





southwest.health.qld.gov.au

