

# GCPHN

The difference we made







Gold Coast Primary Health Network acknowledges and pays respects to the land and traditional practices of the families of the Yugambeh Language region of South East Queensland, and their Elders, past, present, and emerging.

**ARTWORK BY NARELLE  
URQUHART, A PROUD  
WIRADJURI WOMAN**

GCPHN gratefully acknowledges the financial and other support from the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. While the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care has contributed to the funding of this material, the information contained in it does not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government and is not advice that is provided, or information that is endorsed, by the Australian Government. The Australian Government is not responsible in negligence or otherwise for any injury, loss, or damage however rising from the use or reliance on the information provided herein.





# Contents

CEO REPORT	04
BOARD CHAIR REPORT	05
AVERAGE DAY ON THE GOLD COAST	06
GOLD COAST HEALTH PROFILE	07
PRIMARY SENSE	08
MEDICARE URGENT CARE CLINIC	09
IMMUNISATION & COVID-19	10
CHRONIC PAIN	12
ENDOMETRIOSIS & PELVIC PAIN CLINIC	16
EARLY INTERVENTION	18
RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE	26
PALLIATIVE CARE	29
CANCER SCREENING	30
SUICIDE PREVENTION	36
DISASTER RECOVERY & RESILIENCE	40
CLINICAL PLACEMENTS	46
ABOUT US	48
OUR BOARD & ADVISORY GROUPS	49





## From the CEO

Reflecting on the past year, I am optimistic about the impact of Gold Coast Primary Health Network's work on the Gold Coast community. This report showcases stories from our community about the difference our work has made, but first, I'd like to highlight some key achievements.

The New Year saw the official opening of the Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic by Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care, The Hon Ged Kearney MP. Since then, 760 clients have received specialist care at this one-stop clinic for diagnosis, treatment, and ongoing education about women's health and wellbeing.

Our Psychological Services in Residential Aged Care Homes exceeded targets, with clients and their families reporting improved emotional wellbeing, increased social engagement, and enhanced quality of life. The Turning Pain into Gain program for chronic pain was also a success, with 98.5 percent of the 141 participants reporting significant improvement in pain management.

In General Practice, we've seen a significant boost in the number of medical students completing clinical placements. This year, 913 medical students participated, marking a 44 percent increase from last year. Additionally, 145 nursing students were placed, which is a 5 percent increase. This growth represents our ongoing relationships with Bond, Griffith and Southern Cross Universities, and is a vital indicator of our commitment to developing foundations for a dedicated future primary care workforce on the Gold Coast.

Our wide range of mental health commissioned services have really made a difference this year. Of note, The Way Back Support Service and new Out of Hospital Pathway provided much needed suicide prevention and support, with consumers reporting high levels of satisfaction well above the Qld average for similar programs. Our low-intensity mental health coaching program, New Access, also saw a boost in client numbers and an impressive 97 percent client satisfaction rate.

While these stats are great, the real impact is in the personal stories of those whose lives have been touched by our work. It's these individual successes, included in this report, that truly highlight the value of what we do.

**MATT CARRODUS**



# From the Board Chair



Serving as Chair of the Gold Coast Primary Health Network (GCPHN) Board over the past two years has been a fulfilling and rewarding experience as the GCPHN funded services and high level of practice support initiatives positively impacted the health of the Gold Coast community.

One of the standout achievements has been the increased interest in MyMedicare initiatives and ongoing quality improvement. This year, our primary care workforce education and training events nearly doubled, with the GCPHN team organising 94 events that saw strong participation across the sector. These events have been crucial in keeping our primary care workforce informed and skilled, ensuring they can provide the best care possible to patients.

Additionally, we distributed more than \$5.5 million in 186 Strengthening Medicare grants, to expand patient access and support safe, quality primary care. These grants enabled practices to enhance their services, making healthcare more accessible and effective for everyone in our region.

In the past year, our Primary Sense software continued to take significant strides. The system generated 13,505 medication safety alerts and 22 percent of those alerts resulted in behaviour change that conservatively saved the health system \$17.9 million in avoidable hospitalisations. This is important for general practice sustainability as well as delivering quality outcomes. As a regular user of Primary Sense, I can say this software has been a game-changer, providing real-time alerts that help prevent medication errors and improve patient outcomes. Interestingly, across the board, these interventions also represented an estimated \$715,000 in extra revenue for general practices through MBS billing.

Primary Sense has also supported the identification of patients due or overdue for immunisations. GCPHN has been proactive in efforts to improve immunisation rates for all ages and boosting the uptake of COVID-19 boosters. Initiatives included immunisation training for general practice nurses, quality improvement efforts in targeted suburbs, in-home immunisations for residential aged care homes, and Primary Sense prompts to notify GPs and nurses of due or overdue immunisations. Along with public health promotion, these efforts have been essential in ensuring our community remains protected against preventable diseases.

It's been an incredible journey, and I'm proud of the progress we've made together. The dedication and hard work of the GCPHN team, our commissioned service providers, and healthcare partners is making a difference in our community.



# An average day on the Gold Coast

19

People are born  
12 people die



12,872

Medicare Benefits Schedule  
(MBS) GP attendances

12

People are diagnosed with cancer

4

People die of cancer

80

People participate in the national  
bowel cancer screening program  
(aged 50 - 74)

63

People participate in BreastScreen  
Australia (aged 50-74)

76

People participate in the national  
cervical screening program  
(aged 25 -74)

522

People present to Gold Coast  
University and Robina Hospital  
Emergency Department



74



People are hospitalised at  
Gold Coast University and  
Robina Hospitals which  
potentially could have been  
prevented by timely adequate  
healthcare in the community





# Gold Coast health profile

**880**

General Practitioners

**212**

General Practices

**87.9%**

of adults saw a GP

**39**

is the median age  
of residents

**84**

is the average  
life expectancy

**69.3%**

of people over 45 assessed  
their health as excellent,  
very good or good

**30.8%**

of adults reported having  
one or more long-term health  
conditions

**29.4%**

of adults had a non-hospital  
Medicare-subsidised specialist  
attendance

**682,488**

residents live in our region

Males 333,447

Females 349,041

Aged 0-14 116,829

Aged 15-24 86,386

Aged 25-44 191,637

Aged 45-64 167,163

Aged 65+ 120,473

**13,901**

residents identify as  
Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander people

**88,076**

residents use a  
language other than  
English at home

**4,698,338**

number of GP Services provided to Gold Coast residents



# Primary Sense

Primary Sense software, originally developed by GCPHN, is Australia's most widely used, non-commercial, point-of-care clinical support tool. The software uses de-identified general practice data with evidence-based population health algorithms to provide GPs with real time medication alerts, reports, and patient care prompts. Primary Sense software triggered 13,505 medication alerts to Gold Coast GPs this year. This equated to a saving of \$17.9 million to the local health system.

**12 PHNs** (plus Adelaide PHN onboarding in 2024/25)



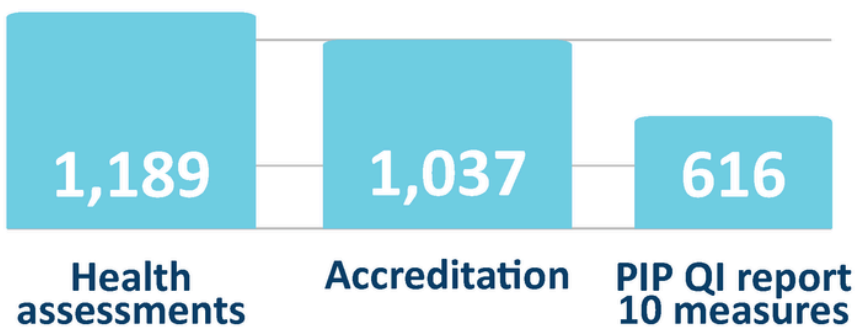
 **23**  
Reports available

 **13**  
Prompts available

 **12**  
Medication alerts available

## 164 PRACTICES ON THE GOLD COAST

### Top 3 reports downloaded



 **2,371**  
Total users

 **696**  
GP users

 **571**  
Nurse users

**23% increase** in reports downloaded from January to June 2024 (n=2,634) compared to July to December 2023 (n=2,147)



# Urgent Care Clinic opens

The Gold Coast's first Medicare Urgent Care Clinic opened at Oxenford in November 2023. The Clinic provides walk-in, bulk-billed medical attention for urgent but not life-threatening injuries and illnesses so local hospital emergency departments can prioritise higher priority emergency care.



My daughter twisted her ankle playing netball, and instead of heading to the hospital emergency department and waiting for hours, we chose the Medicare Urgent Care Clinic at Oxenford. She was seen immediately and even got an X-ray on the spot. The service was fantastic, and the staff were so friendly. We were able to get on with our day instead of being stuck in the hospital ED. It was such a relief to have a quick and efficient option.

Before school one morning, my son was mucking about with his mates and ran into a pole while chasing a ball. The result was a very fat lip and a cut that went from the inside of his mouth to the outside. We went to the Medicare Urgent Care Clinic where there was virtually no waiting. Because it was a mouth injury, they did not put any stitches in and he was back at school in time for the first break.



A rough tackle at footy training resulted in my son hurting his shoulder. We were going to go to the hospital but then remembered about the Medicare Urgent Care Clinic and I'm so glad we did. We waited for about 10 minutes to see the doctor and then around 15 minutes to get an X-ray. After the X-ray, we went straight in to see the doctor again. It ended up that he had a broken collarbone, so he was given a sling and pain relief, and we followed up with our usual GP a week or so afterwards.

# Why immunisations matter for all ages

Immunisations are one of the simplest and most effective ways to protect yourself and those around you from serious diseases. Whether during pregnancy, childhood, while travelling, or to prevent the spread of common illnesses, staying up to date on immunisations plays a vital role in community health.

Recent Primary Health Network data reveals that the Gold Coast has some of the lowest child immunisation rates in Australia – a trend that puts the youngest and most vulnerable members of the community at risk.

For Nerang parents, Sarah and Matthew, choosing to immunise their two young children against highly infectious diseases such as influenza, measles, chickenpox, whooping cough, and more was an easy decision.

“Keeping our family up to date with immunisations is something we can do to protect our kids, especially while they’re at an age where they’re exposed to so many germs at childcare and school,” Sarah said.

“Knowing we’re all immunised gives us piece of mind that we’re reducing our risk of serious illness. Plus, it’s an important step to protect our kids’ grandparents and great-grandparents.”

GCPHN Board Chair Dr Lisa Beecham emphasises the importance of immunisation.

“Have a chat to your GP, pharmacist, or community child health nurse and discuss your immunisation questions with them. In Australia we are fortunate to have a robust, safe, and effective immunisation program with free immunisations for children and adults for things like the flu,” Dr Beecham said.

Through its important work in the community, GCPHN aims to highlight the importance of staying up to date on immunisations, improving access to immunisation services, and enhancing the public’s understanding of immunisation benefits so everyone can make informed choices.

### Community feedback:

“In August, our 80-year-old father, who suffers from advanced dementia and is bed-ridden, was diagnosed with COVID-19 in his Residential Aged Care Home. Our family feared the worst and thought he would become another statistic of people who died with COVID-19. To our relief, he experienced no severe symptoms and made a full

recovery, which we attribute to him being fully vaccinated. Although we could not visit him, we received regular updates from the nurses and were so grateful for the care given to him. The nurses were kept busy looking after multiple cases of COVID-19, and said that because everyone had been vaccinated, the outbreak was mild,” Marie Louise said.



Six-year-old Daisy bravely rolling up her sleeve for the annual flu shot.





# Turning Pain into Gain

Living with persistent pain can feel like an endless battle, but the Turning Pain into Gain Persistent Pain Program is transforming lives and offering a beacon of relief.

This program is more than just a support system; it's a comprehensive self-managed approach to pain management.

Through education, personalised case management, and robust community support, participants are empowered to take control of their pain and learn to navigate it with confidence and resilience.

The program's holistic approach reduces medication dependency and emergency department visits.

The Turning Pain into Gain program is not just about managing pain – it's about reclaiming life.

For those living with persistent pain, this program offers a path to a brighter, more manageable future.





“

**Chronic pain is invisible and people who have lived with it for years are very good at masking it, and that's one of the reasons it's quite often misunderstood.”**







# Learning to walk again was just the first step

After several spinal surgeries, Jason Czypull had to relearn how to walk and part of his recovery inspiration came through First Nations painting, part of the PainWISE Turning Pain into Gain Persistent Pain Program.

“Physical recovery is only part of recovery,” Jason said. “This program also helps with mental health, which is just as important.”

“I’ve done physio, counselling, nutrition training to help with pain management, and art therapy classes are as much a social thing as anything,” Jason said.

“It’s comforting to be with others who are going through similar struggles.

“It’s a great distraction from the pain, and there’s comfort in knowing you’re not alone.

“This program has helped me get on with my life in the most fulfilling way,” he said.









# New clinic changes lives

The Gold Coast Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic, at the Medical Super Clinic in Benowa, was officially opened in January by Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care, Ged Kearney.

The GP-led service provides tailored and dedicated multidisciplinary service for women living with endometriosis or experiencing chronic pelvic pain.

Leticia Avila, a resilient endometriosis sufferer, initially dismissed her pain as postpartum normalcy, and faced misdiagnoses until a 7cm cyst revealed stage 4 endometriosis.

"I thought the pain was something you experience normally after having a child and that it was my new reality. In hindsight, I got the indication a lot earlier."

After laparoscopic surgery in 2020, Leticia found temporary relief, but a resurgence led her to the Pelvic Pain and Endometriosis Clinic.

The team helped craft a comprehensive care plan, overcoming financial hurdles through expedited public health system access.

Leticia's advocacy now focuses on breaking endometriosis stigma, especially within the Spanish-speaking community on the Gold Coast.

Her positive outcome fuels her mission to educate and inspire others to seek expert care.



Leticia Avila is a resilient endometriosis sufferer.



Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care, The Hon. Ged Kearney, MP, at the official opening in January.





*The new GP-led service provides tailored and dedicated multidisciplinary service for women living with endometriosis or experiencing chronic pelvic pain.*



Around 130 people  
participated in  
GCPHN's Healthy Ageing  
Programs in 2023-2024.







When you ask an older person to describe themselves, they will use many words – but frail is not usually one of them. Yet the data disagrees; around a quarter of Gold Coasters over the age of 70 are frail.

The *I am not Frail* campaign launched in early 2024 with three early intervention healthy ageing programs being fully subscribed in just weeks.



# Life is all about balance for Giulia

**Giulia Greenall from Tallai in the Gold Coast led a well-balanced life until a simple trip at home earlier this year threw her off kilter.**

"I'm an active 72-year-old and I feel as young as I ever have, but I knew I needed to get back to fitness after babysitting my four grandchildren.

Following a trip to her GP, Giulia learned about GCPHN's *I am not Frail* initiative. As fate would have it, shortly after her doctor's visit, she tripped over a quilt and fell on her knees. Despite applying ice packs, her bruised knees affected her balance.

"It was a bit of a wake-up call."

Giulia said it didn't take long to discover the holistic benefits of the Frailty Care in the Community Program, which provides access to physiotherapists, exercise physiologists, dietitians, pharmacists, and other healthcare professionals.

"They focus on specific exercises, diet and other things I can do to improve strength and balance, so I don't feel or act as old as my age suggests.

The programs are free for pensioners or people on a health care card.

People 65 years or older, or over 55 First Nations peoples simply need a referral from their doctor indicating that they show just one sign of frailty.

According to PainWISE Managing Director Joyce McSwan who is commissioned to run the Frailty Care in the Community Program, it's all about heading frailty off at the pass.

"The programs are designed to keep people in the community doing the things they want to do for as long as possible," Joyce said.



Joyce McSwan, Managing Director of the Frailty Care in the Community Program.





Giulia Greenall, participant in the Frailty Care in the Community Program.

**“I did not expect the whole-of-body-and mind health benefits from the Frailty Care in the Community Program.**

**As I got stronger, I found that the balance that I thought I’d lost can come back.”**

Giulia had never been in a structured exercise program before, but it didn’t take long before light weights, indoor rowing, and cycling started to improve her balance and stability.

“My bedroom tumble was certainly a blessing in disguise in that I have a much greater understanding of the importance of keeping both the mind and body active to keep frailty from creeping in, and I know it’s up to me to keep it going.

“I’m also encouraging a couple of my neighbours to get onboard for the exercise advantages and social interaction; I’d recommend it to anyone,” she said.



Edward says the Mungulli Yarn and Walk has transformed his life.



For Edward, a Pacific Pines resident on the Gold Coast, the Mungulli Yarn and Walk program has been transformative. After suffering a heart attack 10 weeks beforehand, he credits the program for getting him active again.

“It motivates me to go to the gym and swim,” he said. “The health professionals are fantastic, explaining everything in a way that’s easy to understand.”

Gold Coast Health’s Mungulli Chronic Disease and Post-Acute Programs team, Yarn and Walk encourages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to engage in outdoor activities while learning about managing chronic diseases.

# Transformative: Mungulli Yarn and Walk



**“It’s very informal, creating a sense of community and fostering relationships across different age groups.**

**There’s a strong social connection among the participants, which allows us to deliver health education in a relaxed setting.”**

***Myra Wilcock, Clinical Nurse***

The program’s holistic approach covers nutrition, exercise, and cardiovascular health. It is supported by a multidisciplinary team, including First Nations health workers, nurses, physios, and dieticians.

Clinical nurse Myra Wilcock said the yarning circle after a walk is so important.

“It creates a relaxed environment for learning and building community.”

Clinical nurse Amy Tooley says the program was designed based on community feedback.

“The community wanted an outdoor environment where they could combine physical activity with education, and a tie-in to other initiatives, like the Strong and Deadly Wellness and Deadly Tracks Education programs.”

---

**For many taking part, the mental health benefits are as vital as the physical ones with participant Ivan saying the program has helped him with depression.**

---





“

**One of the big things with ageing is that  
you need to get out of bed and have  
something to do, and this gave me that.”**





# Rock and roller here to stay

Gold Coast musician John McCartney\*, 73, spent decades in rock bands, but his lifestyle and health challenges, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), have taken their toll.

Now reliant on a walking stick and oxygen concentrator, John's health took a positive turn after discovering the Bond University Allied Health (BUnyAH) program on social media.

John joined a 12-week falls prevention program, which he found both enjoyable and effective.

“One of the big things with ageing is that you need to get out of bed and have something to do, and this gave me that,” he said.

Through the program, John has found a new focus on his health and wellbeing, improving his mobility and overall quality of life.

*\*Patient's name changed at his request.*





# Adjusting to life in a Residential Aged Care Home

**Glenda\* is a vibrant 76-year-old who grew up on the Gold Coast and raised her own family there.**

She spent many years managing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) at home until she needed full-time care in a Residential Aged Care Home (RACH).

Glenda's family noticed a decline in her mental health and worked with her care team to participate in the Psychology in Aged Care (PAC) program with 20 therapy sessions.

During her time in the program, Glenda worked on several key areas. She learned to manage her anxiety and COPD symptoms, cope with the grief of losing her mother, and improve her mobility through self-motivated exercises and physiotherapy.

She also received emotional support to cope with her daughter-in-law's illness and guidance on how to support her brother's declining health.

Throughout the program, Glenda reported significant improvements.

The anxiety related to living in a RACH reduced, she learned how to process grief and loss, and developed better strategies for addressing and managing COPD symptoms.

Glenda became more assertive in communicating her concerns and needs to her medical team, leading to more personalised and effective care.

Mindfulness practices played a big role in reducing her stress and anxiety, making a noticeable difference in her quality of life.

Glenda found relief in managing the emotional strain of her daughter-in-law's illness and hospitalisation, and the recommendations for services to support her brother eased her burden, providing her with resources to help him maintain his mental and physical wellbeing.

Her story highlights the importance of comprehensive support and personalised care in improving the quality of life for aged care residents.

*\*Patient's name changed at her request.  
The person pictured is not Glenda.*



# Jean's journey to wellbeing

**Eighty-nine year old Jean\* found herself in a tough spot, feeling like she was in a “dark place” when she reached out to the team at her Residential Aged Care Home for some professional help.**

The team referred Jean to the Psychology in Residential Aged Care Homes program.

Jean's therapy was a mixture of therapies to tackle challenges from past experiences and current family conflicts, which made her feel low, along with the transition of living in an aged care home.

Through this therapy, Jean started to identify these issues, recognise her strengths, and confront negative thoughts.

After five sessions, Jean said she was feeling much better and there were improved interactions with her family.

She also mentioned that she wasn't dwelling on negative thoughts as much, and the staff at the aged care home noticed these improvements too, seeing a brighter and more engaged Jean.

While Jean has finished most of psychology sessions, she continues to participate in talk therapy.

She's more socially active, her mood has improved, and she's better at managing her emotions. Her story shows the power of seeking help and the positive changes that come from it.



*\*Patient's name changed at her request.  
The person pictured is not Jean.*



## PALLIATIVE CARE

More older Australians are spending their final days in Residential Aged Care Homes, and their care needs are becoming more complex.

Research shows that having Specialist Palliative Care in Aged Care Homes can help manage symptoms and avoid residents being transferred to hospital to die. However, this option isn't yet a standard practice.

That's where the Commonwealth and State Palliative Care in Aged Care project comes in. With support from GCPHN, the *Palliative Care Needs Rounds*, offers proactive triaging and staff education resulting in better symptom management, effective case conferencing, and planning for current and future medication needs.



# GP Quality Improvement

In partnership with Queensland Health's Cancer Screening Unit, Gold Coast Primary Health Network conducted a quality improvement activity with Gold Coast general practices to increase cervical screening self-collection rates, focused on under-screened and never-screened groups.

This resulted in cervical screening self-collection rates more than doubling with the rate of 36.5%, surpassing both the national (33.8%) and Queensland (30.8%) averages.



The following stories about Gold Coast residents affected by cancer are a reminder that early detection and screening services save lives.

# Early cancer detection

**Tugun local, Marlis Dendy, has spent three years in the fight of her life battling bowel cancer.**

“I’d been experiencing pain in the rectal area and I started seeing a doctor who diagnosed me with digestive issues, haemorrhoids and constipation over a period of about 18 months,” Marlis said.

“My lower back pain started to get severe with something pushing against a nerve and that’s when I knew something was very wrong.”

A colonoscopy revealed a tumour in the bowel that had spread to her lungs and liver. A fitness enthusiast and successful business owner, Marlis was training for CrossFit competitions, she surfed most days and did plenty of walking and running.

Despite her active lifestyle, she relied on her instincts when something felt wrong with her body. Today she is an advocate for early detection, welcoming the Australian Government’s decision to lower the age for bowel screening from 50 to 45.

“If I had tested from 45, and had that early diagnosis, I might be living a very different story right now,” she reflects.

Marlis’s treatment has been extensive, including nine rounds of chemotherapy, 25 radiation sessions, an immunotherapy trial, and a trip to Mexico for alternative treatments.



Tugun’s Marlis Dendy, 51, has spent the past three years fighting advanced bowel cancer.

Currently, her cancer is stable in her bowel and liver, though it has returned to her lungs. Throughout her journey, Marlis has been buoyed by the support of her family, friends, and her children, Jackson (12) and Ruby (14).

Marlis’s message is clear.

**“Take control of your health and listen to your body. Early detection can save lives.”**





# My husband felt it first

At 36, Robina's Heather Gillard's life was changed when her husband noticed a lump in her breast.

Initially, brushing it off, Heather only mentioned the lump in passing to her GP during an unrelated visit with her son. This led to an ultrasound that confirmed she had breast cancer.

Heather underwent a lumpectomy, chemotherapy, and radiation, only to face a more aggressive recurrence a decade later. This time, she had a double mastectomy. Now 61, Heather reflects on her journey and the importance of early detection, which she believes saved her life.

She is a staunch advocate for breast self-examination, noting that a partner's involvement can be crucial.

"If self-examination means getting a helping hand from a special someone, that's never a bad thing," she said.

Today, Heather is a successful designer and continues to raise awareness and support fundraisers, encouraging others to prioritise their health.

Her story is a powerful reminder of the importance of regular self-checks and early detection.

# Nagging wife saves husband



Tony McCormack with  
his wife Tanya.

Former Currumbin crane operator Tony McCormack (60) never imagined a dubious birthday gift could save his life.

After years of avoiding the free bowel cancer screening test mailed to him, his wife Tanya insisted he complete it when a kit arrived on his 58th birthday – an insistence that proved life-saving.

The test detected blood in Tony's faeces, leading to a referral for a colonoscopy at Tugun's John Flynn Hospital. The result was bowel cancer at the base of his colon.

In March, Tony began nine months of intensive chemotherapy and radiation, which thankfully stopped the cancer without surgery.

Now, he's clinically clear and improving every day.

Tony's experience has changed his mindset, fostering newfound empathy and a deep appreciation for the support of his wife, sons, and friends.

"The treatment worked, but it was the support network around me that really got me through," he said.

Tony's message is simple: "Do the test. It's quick, free, and could save your life. If you won't do it for yourself, do it for your family."



# Catching a silent killer

A little over a year ago, Broadbeach mum Elle Howard was feeling burnt out.

The then-32-year-old lawyer put it all down to sleep deprivation, some post-partum blues, the weight gain from pregnancies and the stress of returning to work with two children under the age of two at home.

So, she decided to do something about it.

“At the beginning of last year I committed to my new year’s resolution and went on a diet because I wanted to see a change, and it was working for a while,” Elle said.

“But in the middle of April I started getting stomach pains every time I ate; I felt gassy, my stomach was very acidic, and I was getting a lot of reflux.

“I was put on gastritis medication sent for an ultrasound and blood tests. One night after dinner, while waiting for test results, I had excruciating stomach pains.

“I thought it was food poisoning, but by morning it was so bad that I went to the hospital emergency department, and that’s when they found it,” she said.

The ‘it’ was a bowel obstruction and an aggressive stage 4 tumour that had already spread from Elle’s spleen to her liver.

“I’ll never forget the emergency doctor’s face when she had to tell me that I had bowel cancer; I think about her often and what a horrible job that must have been for her that day,” she said.

“For me, from feeling not right to diagnosis was two and a half weeks,” Elle said.

“I think being a young mum could have masked some of the symptoms – the tiredness, the exhaustion, all those things that could be put down to the life of a mother with two young children,” she said.

Fast forward to right before last Christmas when Elle received the best present ever in the news her cancer was 95% gone.

Today her treatment is still going well, and she lives each day with a smile and the confidence her story is far from over as she enjoys the love and support of her husband of eight years Marc, and her children Harper (4) and Pax (2).

“My message to everyone is to listen to your body and don’t shy away from getting things checked out properly.

“I know I am too young for this, I haven’t lived my full life and done everything I need to yet, but I’m doing absolutely everything to make sure I am here for as long as I can be.

“My one piece of advice for others, for any mother reading this who has had a symptom or two but may be swimming upstream in postpartum life, I see and hear you.

“Ask your GP if they think you need a colonoscopy referral.

“Even if they find nothing, you’ll have peace of mind for your family, and a well-deserved nap during the colonoscopy,” she smiled.



Ellie Howard with her husband of eight years, Mare, and children Harper and Pax.



# Lived experience key to regional suicide prevention

**George Firman is a 'Goldie' lad at heart. Born and raised on the Gold Coast, he feels most at home in the ocean and his spirit for community rings loud. But beneath the surface, George carries a story few would know – one shaped by his lived experience.**

"My brother has experienced suicidal ideation and caring for him has been a big part of my life," George said.

It's this deeply personal experience that led him to a crucial role as a lived experience representative for Gold Coast Primary Health Network (GCPHN) and the Suicide Prevention Implementation Group (SPIG).

"This is an important role to me. I really wanted to help make a difference on a wider community level," he said.

In 2022, the SPIG was formed to drive meaningful action in preventing suicide across the Gold Coast. This group plays a vital role in advancing the Gold Coast Suicide Prevention Community Action Plan, launched in 2021 by GCPHN and Gold Coast Health, with support from networks, community groups and individuals with lived experience.

GCPHN Executive Director of Commissioning Jacqui Greig said the integration of lived experience representatives is a critical component to regional suicide prevention activities.

"A key role of GCPHN is to better understand the community's individual and regional needs around suicide prevention, with a particular focus on responding to individuals at risk of suicide and supporting those bereaved by suicide," she said.

"Personal experiences of suicide provide opportunity to hear perspectives, explore the needs, obtain feedback, and identify suicide prevention activities to improve mental healthcare and suicide prevention in the region."



George Firman is a lived experience representative.

Gold Coast PHN

# In 2023-24, GCPHN's commissioned mental health services helped more than 4000 clients.



GCPHN, through its Targeted Regional Initiatives for Suicide Prevention (TRISP) program, has made significant progress in addressing community needs during 2023-24. All activities are guided by the Gold Coast Suicide Prevention Community Action Plan and the LifeSpan framework. Some of the program's achievements include:

- Three Men's Tables were commissioned across the region, providing men with a safe space to connect, talk and support each other. The Community Suicide Prevention Program (CSP) also continued its vital work.
- Training opportunities were rolled out for service providers and community members, including Mindframe Plus, Suicide Prevention for Seniors, and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST).
- Over six months, 20 key stakeholders completed the Black Dog Institute (BDI) Capacity Building Program, equipping them with tools to support suicide prevention initiatives.
- The World Suicide Prevention Day event in September 2023 brought the community together to raise awareness and inspire action.
- The Gold Coast Suicide Prevention Collaborative was established as a community-led group focused on fostering local partnerships and initiatives.
- Progress was made on projects addressing suicide prevention in alternative schools and the veterinary industry – both areas of heightened risk.
- Participation in the South-East Queensland First Nations Health Equity Mental Health Working Group strengthened connections to the Culture Care Connect Program.
- Sponsorships for the National Suicide Prevention Conference and initiatives like Roses in the Ocean training empowered individuals with lived experience to shape meaningful, impactful programs.

By integrating lived experience and fostering collaboration, these initiatives are creating safer, more connected communities for all Gold Coast residents.



# Rebuilding young lives

Lives Lived Well is making a significant difference in the Gold Coast community from its Burleigh Heads base with treatment and rehabilitation services for both young people and adults dealing with alcohol and other drugs (AOD) issues, as well as mental health concerns.

Their services are a lifeline for many, including adults, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, young people aged 12-29, and families supporting loved ones in treatment.

The Mirikai AOD rehabilitation centre provides evidence-based care for residents aged 18-35 in six-week cycles.

Jake is a 24-year-old who struggled with substance abuse for years. After joining the Mirikai program, Jake received comprehensive support that addressed his physical health, mental health, and substance use.

Jake turned his life around. Today, he's back at work, reconnecting with his family, and even mentoring others in the program.

Vicky Raabe, the Clinical Services Manager for the Gold Coast, said Lives Well Lived has services that offer one-on-one counselling, group sessions, psychotherapy, after-hours support, family visits, and a school clinic.

"We have psychologists, psychiatrists, GPs, dieticians, and physiotherapists and are expanding to establish AOD community hub in the Northern Corridor.

As the lead agency for headspace Southport and headspace Upper Coomera, Lives Lived Well continues to support the mental health of young people.

"The funding we receive from GCPHN is crucial," says Vicky.

"It helps us continue our services, expand our reach, and ensure we provide high-quality care. This support allows us to enhance our programs and integrate additional services to meet our clients' diverse needs."





# Suicide Prevention Community Action Plan

*“It is really important to work collaboratively across our different organisations; to come together with a shared vision to work towards the same goals and outcomes to reduce suicide in our community.”*

Justine Looney – Ed-Linq Coordinator, Child and Youth Mental Health Services and member of the Suicide Prevention Implementation Group

*“Being involved in the SPIG is important because it gives us a platform to come together with our community partners to deliver crisis reform services to the Gold Coast. This hasn’t previously been an option for us and now we are truly seeing some difference being made across our community.”*

Heidy Van Engelen – Nursing Director Acute Community Mental Health



# Disaster recovery and resilience

After disaster hit the Gold Coast on Christmas night of 2023, GCPHN provided recovery and resilience assistance to not only help rebuild communities but to make them stronger. The *Reconnection for Resilience Community Grants Program* provided 15 community grants of up to \$5,000 for local not-for-profit organisations, healthcare organisations, sporting clubs, and primary care providers in the storm areas.

Through programs that foster ongoing resilience, we helped to empower people with the resources and support necessary to complete their recovery journeys.

Funded activities included programs aimed at improving mental health and wellbeing through support embedded in addressing social isolation, sport and exercise classes, art therapy, skills development initiatives, community BBQs, and more.

- Cottonwood Learning Currumbin – Connecting families through nature
- Palm Beach Neighbourhood Centre – Wellbeing Wednesdays
- Studio Village Community Centre – Bags on the Go
- Fierce Females Helensvale – Personal safety program
- Sheila's Shack Nerang – Weaving workshops
- Noledge House Oxenford – Emergency mental health action plan
- Storm Birds Tamborine Mountain – Recovery and resilience programs for children
- Orange Elephants Creative Minds Elanora – Autistic person responder packs
- Tamborine Mountain Library – First Nations artist stories and songs
- Knoll Studio Tamborine Mountain – Men's socials
- Varsity Lakes Community Centre – Strengthening mind and body programs
- Tamborine Mountain Presbyterian Church – Installation of community centre generator
- Walk and Talk for Wellness Paradise Point – One-on-one mental health services
- Leadership Under the Stars – Community Christmas in July

The following pages highlight how some of these amazing organisations are cleverly using their grants funding to build better local communities.



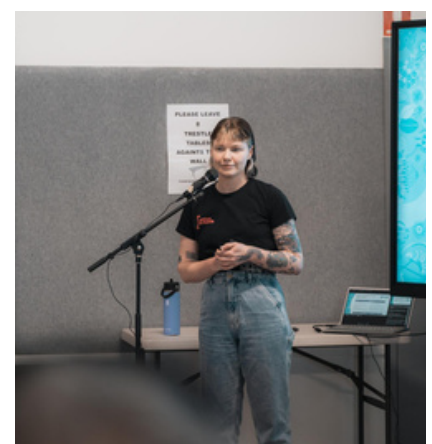
# Feel Good Mini-Fest



The Feel Good Mini Fest was a special day of community connection at the Varsity Lakes Community Centre, allowing 300 people affected by the Christmas night storm to explore healing through creative expression.

Through art, dance, and music therapy, they were able to process emotions, foster resilience, and connect with others in a supportive environment. According to Varsity Lakes Community Resource Centre CEO, Elli Gardner, the event received great feedback for its powerful take on self-care and mental wellbeing.

"The feedback underscores the growing demand for events like this, where mental health struggles are openly addressed, reminding all that it's okay not to be okay," Elli said. "Together, let's keep breaking down barriers and supporting one another."





# Not a pub or a men's circle



Tamborine Mountain was arguably hardest hit by the Christmas night storm that came out of nowhere.

We all saw the confronting images of houses unroofed, powerlines and trees down and of locals toiling alongside emergency services to restore some sort of order to their suddenly shattered lives. It's a proud mountain community and, as the bricks and mortar rebuild continues, it's also one still coming to grips with its collective mental health recovery.

Cue the Men's Social at The Knoll Studio at North Tamborine which was established with recovery grant funds to bring the men of the mountain together to heal. Founder, local muso Ryan Gittoes, said there was plenty of incentive to make it happen.

"After the disaster, the mental health of a lot of local men was affected, which highlighted the undeniable importance of blokes who have shared an experience like this getting together socially," Ryan said. "I knew of a couple of guys that had sadly ended their own lives and that was the catalyst for me to say: 'OK we need to do something'.

"The idea was if we can create connections through social gatherings and support men who might be struggling, there would be immense power in that. And that's exactly what we found by providing a supportive space for men to openly share their experiences and challenges without judgement," he said.



# Into the wild

Spending time in nature is proven to improve mental health, Cottonwood Learning founder Bec Burch has made it her mission to get children and their parents out into the wild as much as possible.

Cottonwood's outdoor nature play program is based on self-directed play and inquisitive learning that fosters growth in body, mind, and spirit.

With the impact of disasters being particularly pronounced for children, weekly 2-3-hour playgroups, hosted in the Tallebudgera Valley, provided invaluable support to those living in the Christmas night storm zone.

Moreover, the presence of a mental health facilitator at the playgroup sessions has offered much-needed counsel for many families.

Bec said members of the community who were struggling with their mental health expressed gratitude for the moment of peace the playgroup provided.

"Getting people into nature was great for both children and adults as it gave community members the opportunity to connect with other mothers, fathers, and grandparents."









# Fierce Females

Created by women for women, Fierce Females gave participants the skills and knowledge to live life without harm.

Women over the age of 15, many mothers and daughters, took part in a 10-week program to learn how to improve and maintain personal safety during and after stressful events.

The unique program fostered resilience and community connection by blending psychology, conflict resolution, and mixed martial arts techniques.

Trainer, Jade Hurley said the workshops provided a safe and supportive space for women to rebuild their confidence, learn practical safety skills, and resilience.



“By focusing on both physical and emotional wellbeing, the workshops helped participants navigate the challenges, both physical and emotional, brought on by the storms.

“This empowered them to move forward with newfound strength and a greater sense of community connection,” she said.

# Wellbeing Wednesdays

Wellbeing Wednesdays, an initiative of the Palm Beach Neighbourhood Centre, made significant impact on the Southern Gold Coast community.

“They’re life-changing,” said Suzanne Favaloro, the Centre’s Flood and Natural Disaster Support lead.

“Following the Christmas night storm, many community members struggled to return to their normal lives. We wanted to create a safe space for people to share their stories and begin healing,” she said.

The Centre staff designed Wellbeing Wednesdays based on community needs, focusing on relaxation and recovery. The program offers holistic support through activities like meditation, yoga, tai chi, gardening, Pilates, creative workshops, and social BBQs.

One unique feature is the cold-water dips, which encourage participants to challenge themselves.

“Even just dipping their toes helps build confidence,” Suzanne said.

“The program has fostered a strong sense of community, with participants connecting deeply and supporting each other beyond the Centre.

“People are forming friendships, exchanging phone numbers, and making plans together. It’s exactly what we hoped would happen.”





# Enabling future workforces

Dr Praveen Veeramachineni from Robina Medical Centre has been actively involved in this initiative since 2015, also serving as a clinical tutor at Bond University.

“I’ve had the unique experience of guiding students from both ends of the spectrum – in the classroom and in the practical setting,” says Dr Veeramachineni.

“My role during their clinical placement is to encourage students to be as independent as possible in making clinical decisions and diagnoses.”

Dr Veeramachineni emphasises the importance of lateral thinking and broadening differential diagnoses for final-year medical students.

“This prepares them to become better interns,” he explains.

With patient consent, students are given a consultation room to see patients, take detailed histories, and determine necessary investigations.

“We then discuss this information along with the student’s recommendations for condition management.”

Hands-on experience is a key component of the program.

Dr Veeramachineni encourages students to practice procedures such as suturing in the GP setting.

“There are many advantages for medical students to pursue a GP clinical placement over one in a hospital setting,” he notes.

“The one-on-one interactions that are often lacking in hospitals are more accessible in general practice.

“This hands-on experience, of seeing patients in their own space, along with the opportunity to perform procedures such as suturing, is crucial for their development.”

Being a GP supervisor is incredibly rewarding for Dr Veeramachineni.

“It’s motivating to watch students broaden their skills, especially when I see them researching unfamiliar topics that aren’t covered in the classroom.

“It is common for patients to have done their own internet research before they see us and have ideas about alternative medical treatment, for example, querying natural products for pain management. The students can then apply an evidence-based approach to giving that patient appropriate advice.”

Dr Veeramachineni encourages other GPs to become supervisors.

“When we offer students new perspectives on learning and show them how they can adapt to the ever-changing medical landscape, we are contributing to a sustainable workforce of quality GPs.”



“

**When we offer students new perspectives on learning and show them how they can adapt to the ever-changing medical landscape, we are contributing to a sustainable workforce of quality GPs”**





# About us

GCPHN is an independent, not-for-profit company established by the Australian Government. Our mission is to assess and address local health needs, working with diverse partners to create a cohesive healthcare system for the Gold Coast.



We aim to improve health services for residents by:

- **Needs Assessment and Solutions** – We identify local health needs and design solutions, from planning to establishing new services.
- **Funding Services** – We fund organisations across areas like mental health, aged care, and immunisation, enhancing access and support for the community.
- **System Support and Improvement** – We foster collaboration among healthcare professionals, improving patient care quality.

## Our strategic goals

- **Improve coordination of care** to ensure people receive the right care in the right place, at the right time, by the right person.
- **Increase efficiency and effectiveness** of primary care services, particularly for those at risk of poor health outcomes.
- **Actively engage and advocate** for the primary care sector to facilitate improvement in our local health system.
- **Operate as a high performing, efficient, and accountable organisation.**

# Our board and advisory groups



**Top row, left to right:** Dr Lisa Beecham (*Board Chair*), Dr Ka-Kiu Cheung (*Deputy Board Chair*), Grant Dearlove (*Director*), Damian Green (*Director*).

**Bottom row, left to right:** Alison Ewens (*Director*), Dr Tammra Warby (*Director*), Laurence West (*Director*), Dr Luke Ward (*Director*).

## Community Advisory Council

The Gold Coast Primary Health Network Community Advisory Council (pictured right) is an influential body that ensures the decisions, investments, and innovations of GCPHN are person-centred, cost-effective, locally relevant, and aligned to local care experiences and expectations. Its membership reflects the broader Gold Coast community and includes people from different backgrounds, education levels, experiences, and areas of the Gold Coast.

## Clinical Council

The Gold Coast Primary Health Network Clinical Council plays a critical role by providing clinical advice to the Board, to assist in future decision making. The Council meets quarterly, and its membership includes experienced local health professionals of general practices, specialists, and allied health providers.

## Collaboration

Our long-standing contribution to health on the Gold Coast, has fostered strong partnerships with hospitals, the health sector, universities, health consumers, general practices, and local residents. These collaborations ensure that we constantly strive to meet the health needs of the community; delivering the right care, in the right place, at the right time, and by the right person.



# Final word: GCPHN Community Advisory Council Member



During my tenure on the GCPHN Community Advisory Council (CAC), I had the distinct privilege of advocating for my grandmother during some of the most challenging moments of both our lives.

Throughout this time, the unwavering dedication and resilience of my fellow council members provided me with strength and inspiration. Their personal journeys and commitment to never giving up, despite significant challenges, have left a lasting impression on me.

The collective effort of the GCPHN staff, along with the Board and Community Advisory Council, exemplifies true selflessness, working tirelessly towards a healthier, more supportive community. In a world where accessible healthcare is not guaranteed for everyone, we are fortunate to have such dedicated individuals ensuring that this fundamental right is upheld in our beautiful country.

Each member's contribution is a vital part of a greater mission, which GCPHN executes with commendable dedication. It has been profoundly inspiring to witness and be a part of this mission, and I am incredibly grateful for the strength and perspective this role has offered me, especially during isolating and testing times.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve alongside such remarkable individuals and for the support provided by the organisation throughout my time on the CAC. The experiences I have gained are invaluable, and I cannot wait to see the continued success and impact of GCPHN's efforts.

Please accept my sincerest thanks and appreciation for all that you and the council do. It has been an absolute honour to contribute to our community's well-being in this capacity.

I dedicate my time on the council to my beloved grandmother. She lived a life of service to others and taught me the importance of fighting for those who can't fight for themselves. She was my reason to keep fighting. Everyone like my Nan deserves an advocate, and GCPHN is that advocate for our community.







## The difference we made | 2023 - 2024



### Gold Coast Primary Health Network

Level 1, 14 Edgewater Court Robina, QLD 4226  
PO Box 3576, Robina Town Centre, QLD 4230  
t: 07 5635 2445 | f: 07 5635 2466 |  
info@gcphn.com.au | www.gcphn.org.au

Gold Coast Primary Health Network (GCPHN) gratefully acknowledges the financial and other support from the Australian Government Department of Health. While the Australian Government Department of Health has contributed to the funding of this material, the information contained in it does not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government and is not advice that is provided, or information that is endorsed by the Australian Government. The Australian Government is not responsible in negligence or otherwise for any injury, loss or damage however arising from the use or reliance on the information provided herein.



Australian Government



An Australian Government Initiative

