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EXPERIENCE SO FAR

NORTHERN

# EXPOSURE





## STOPPING TO SMELL THE ROSES

*What a rollercoaster these past few months have been.*

From keeping up with almost daily changes to the way we live our lives, to staying extra vigilant with washing hands and sanitizing surfaces, to making sure I'm across the latest news developments without being totally overwhelmed, to checking in on relatives...the list is endless. And I don't even have any patients to look after!

I feel like this is a good time to take a breath and be thankful for our amazing health system and the great people I work with, both in clinical roles and behind the scenes. It's very comforting to know that whatever happens, there are dedicated people ready to step up and help us overcome the challenges.

I know so many people who make it their daily goal to look after our community and strive to do better, no matter what area of health they work in. They may have a direct patient care role, or they excel at mapping data on a spreadsheet, or in following up appointments, or keeping our spaces germ-free.

If this virus has brought us any positives, it's that people all over Australia are reaching out to show how much they appreciate our health system. If you haven't had a chance to let that sink in on a personal level, I hope you get a quiet moment soon.

## NORTHERN EXPOSURE

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Northern Exposure is published 8 times a year by the Northern NSW Local Health District. We welcome your contributions, suggestions and feedback.



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Front cover: Lismore Base Hospital fever clinic and hospital staff.  
Back cover: Lismore at night. Image: Brett Payne.

# Executive Update



**Wayne Jones**  
Chief Executive

**WOW! This is the only word that comes to mind to reflect how amazing our staff and clinicians have been in reacting so quickly to the onset of COVID-19.**

The rapid need for changes to our models of care, the way we work, and even the way we enter our places of work; our staff have dealt with all these changes in a professional, understanding and caring way.

COVID will continue to alter our working

lives for a long time to come as we manage the impacts the worst pandemic in our lifetimes will bring. I ask that you all continue to support each other and look after yourselves. As a team we will get through this, and together we can support our communities to tackle the health, economic and social impacts COVID has brought to our lives.

Every day I am asked 'how long will this last?', and 'have we beaten the pandemic?'

There is no quick answer to this, since there are so many variables that determine the outcome.

What I do know, is that we have been given time as a health system to plan, prepare and implement changes that will allow us to manage increased case numbers when a second wave of patients present to our hospitals.

This planning includes many aspects of care, but central to this is being ready to double our ICU capacity across our LHD right now, should the need arise, and

to treble our capacity should demand dictate. That is only possible when key stakeholders work through the logistics and challenges together to come up with innovative solutions.

In answer to the second question: no, we have not beaten the pandemic, but we have suppressed the initial impact as well as any country in the world has been able to do.

We are still at the early stages of this race and we must not let complacency seep into our work and our social distancing practices, or we risk the tragedies that have befallen other countries. Whilst we may not have beaten the pandemic, we can continue to significantly reduce the damage COVID-19 can cause.

I want to take a minute to also acknowledge the other agencies who are working in partnership with us. The Police, Ambulance NSW, North Coast Primary Health Network, Communities & Justice, and Education are playing key roles in keeping our communities safe.

## From the Board Chair



**Brian Pezzutti**  
Board Chair

**The coronavirus COVID-19 global pandemic is without doubt the most significant public health crisis I have experienced in more than 40 years working in health.**

As the virus has swept across the world, the restrictions implemented to try and slow its spread have disrupted society on a scale that most of us have never experienced.

Rapid planning and collaboration across our LHD, and with other agencies and community organisations, has helped to ensure we are well prepared. I am proud

of the hard work of our management team and staff and marvel at their dedication in these difficult circumstances.

I think the entire Australian health system has responded impressively to ensure we are able to deal with any escalation of the disease. The community has also risen to the challenge by complying with restrictions and implementing social distancing and good hygiene to keep the pandemic under control. It's meant that we have not followed the path of other countries whose health systems have been overwhelmed due to COVID-19.

I have also observed a greater appreciation and acknowledgement of the important role that healthcare workers play in our community. The gratitude and respect from the public towards health workers around the world has been truly heart-warming.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank all staff for your extraordinary hard work and dedication in dealing with the unprecedented and ongoing nature of the coronavirus outbreak.

I would also like to commend our Chief Executive, Wayne Jones, who has been committed to keeping staff and our community well informed during this public health crisis.

Without wishing to downplay the horrific loss of life and the significant social, economic and mental health impacts of COVID-19, the disease may inadvertently leave its mark on the health system in positive ways.

We have seen a number changes to the way we deliver care, such as increased use of telehealth in antenatal and postnatal care, aged care and radiation oncology. Some Emergency Departments have seen fewer attendances, which could be partly the result of better hygiene and reduced social interaction leading to a reduction in transmission of other viruses generally.

Once we are in the recovery phase we'll review our LHD's response and learnings to determine which should be adopted long term to help deliver quality healthcare for our community.



## COVID-19: How we've responded

*In just a few short months, staff, clinicians and managers in Northern NSW Local Health District have done a huge amount of work to make sure our health services are ready and able to deal with the coronavirus. Here's a brief run-down of the actions we've taken so far.*

- **Opened the Emergency Operations Centre** – regular meetings bringing together various aspects of our organisation, plus external partners like Police and Ambulance, to coordinate our emergency response.

- **Fever clinics** – dedicated testing clinics established at The Tweed Hospital, Lismore Base Hospital, Byron Central Hospital and Grafton Base Hospital.

- **Staff training and upskilling** – ICU training for nursing, anaesthetic and allied health staff, Personal Protection Equipment education for all clinical and relevant non-clinical staff, dedicated intubation teams implemented at Tweed, Lismore and Grafton.

- **Staff reassigned** – staff from services including Dental, Health Promotion and BreastScreen reassigned to work in different areas across the District. Their tasks have included hospital switchboard operator, staff recruitment support, clinical assistants, patient support on wards, staff and visitor screening, and patient experience officers.

- **Forums** – held 9 all-staff forums over Skype, with attendance ranging from 130-500 people. Chief Executive hosted four COVID-19 forums for Community Advisory Group members with over 50 people attending via Skype each time.

- **Communications** - over 420 questions sent and answered through the central COVID-19 staff email address, daily Chief Executive email updates, dedicated COVID-19 intranet and website pages, regular media releases and case updates.

- **Staff recruitment** – employed more than 115 new casual staff including Registered Nurses, Assistants in Nursing (AIN), Undergraduate AINs, New Graduate Nurses, Allied Health Assistants, Wards persons and Hospital Assistants. Implemented a medical staff surge strategy. Recruited additional Patient Experience Officers at emergency departments in Grafton, Ballina, Lismore and Tweed.

- **Procedures and processes** – developed guidelines across various areas of the health service including fever clinics, COVID inpatients, patient flow charts, short term accommodation, staff and visitor screening, working from home, vulnerable workers, and re-assigned staff orientation.

- **New committees and operational changes** – weekly meetings with North Coast Primary Health Network



Top, Tweed Hospital Registered Nurses Jessica Benard and Jessica Carr

Middle, Medical Student Kanita Chongvathanakij  
Bottom, Radiographer Madeline Smith

and Residential Aged Care (RAC) facilities, weekly meetings with ICU and ED, residential in-reach program to all local RAC facilities, clinical advisory panels, planning meetings with clinicians, PPE governance committee, reduced non-urgent elective surgery, increased telehealth for service delivery and procured additional medical equipment.

- **New Models of Care:** A variety of new models of care have been established including a range of virtual health models of care in lieu of face to face services, plus development of an in-reach support program for our RACF, and much more.

# All hands on deck at Public Health

*At the Lismore office of the North Coast Public Health Unit (NCPHU), Assistant Director Greg Bell and his team of public health staff are helping our communities manage and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

For every person who tests positive with COVID-19, there's a team of staff working behind the scenes to trace and manage their close contacts, provide advice and guidance, and make sure any risks to the community are kept to a minimum.

It starts with the Clinical Response Team, a group of Communicable Disease nurses who follow up positive cases to obtain important details about the person's health, where they've been and who they may have been in contact with while infectious. Details are entered into a central reporting system, where the information is stored for all cases across NSW.

*"The Public Health Unit doesn't treat people, but we follow up cases and make sure they're being managed," Greg Bell, Assistant Director NCPHU, said.*

Health officers make regular phone calls to people who've tested positive and are self-isolating at home, as well as their close contacts.

"Our staff are trained in checking up on people's condition as well as their welfare," Greg said.

The Public Health Unit also works with other groups to ensure people are adhering to the quarantine period, and this can include Police, other health staff, local councils and the general public.

COVID-19 is a notifiable disease under the NSW Health Public Health Act, and the Public Health team follow the Series of National Guidelines which sets out the regulations for contact tracing and managing the public health response. At the state level, NSW Health is the lead agency for the pandemic response.



Staff involved with the Public Health team COVID response including Assistant Director, Greg Bell, bottom right

As well as following up COVID-positive cases, the Public Health Unit provides advice to the general public through their 1300 enquiry line, which at its peak in late April was receiving up to 250 calls a day.

"We have a team of five or six staff who triage the calls and put people in the right direction, whether that's directing them to other agencies, or providing the latest advice on social distancing regulations."

Away from the central hub of the office, Senior Environmental Health Officers are often out in the field, helping communities to implement solutions and changes to stay safe from COVID-19. This can include working with Aboriginal communities, local councils or businesses to put social distancing measures in place, or advising on signage or access issues to public spaces.

To be able to respond effectively to a public health issue of this magnitude, the

Public Health Unit is continually refining their pandemic response planning, with the help of epidemiologists, Janet Terry and Kazi Rahman. Their role involves looking at the health trends for the whole population, which takes in modelling and statistical analysis to help prepare for future events, as well as this current event.

*"Our team has risen to the challenge over the last few months, and they've done an amazing job. This has been one of the busiest periods our unit has experienced. They've worked extremely hard and I am very proud of them," Greg said.*

The Lismore-based team works with colleagues in Mid North Coast Local Health District who are based in Port Macquarie, and together they cover the region from Johns River south of Port Macquarie up to the Queensland border.

# Julie Cadet: My Nursing Story

**Kyogle Memorial Health Nurse Manager,  
Julie Cadet shares her nursing journey.**

In the last week of school prior to my Higher School Certificate, I injured myself falling from a horse.

Since I wasn't able to complete the HSC or sit my exams, I thought I wouldn't get into university, so I undertook a traineeship as a Travel Consultant with a local travel firm.

In the first few months of my traineeship I received notification from the University of New England, Armidale, that I had been accepted for a Bachelor of Nursing degree... I dropped the travel consultancy job like a hot potato!

*It was a difficult degree but very thorough. There was no doubt in my mind that I had chosen the right career pathway.*

Finishing my degree in June 1996, I had two weeks to pack up my life and head 1350kms from home to a place where I knew no-one, and start my career as a Registered Nurse at Griffith Base Hospital.

At Griffith, I worked in surgical, medical, paediatrics, ICU, emergency, maternity, operating theatres and on-call for emergency Operating Theatre. This gave me a holistic knowledge of what it was to be a nurse, and what speciality I enjoyed most.

Following this, I was employed as the 'floating nurse' where I moved to different departments as required, and not long after this I started working as In-Charge of the ward, and even In-Charge of the hospital afterhours. As a second year, this was probably a little ambitious, but this was the expectation. I also started a Graduate Certificate in Rural and Remote Nursing (Advanced Nursing) which gave me the qualifications to be able to work in the Emergency Department.

In 2000 I flew to London and joined an agency, next thing I was working in a



Julie Cadet, centre, with partner Lee and son Tom

hospital with 1500 beds. The hospital had its own supermarket and post office.... even had its own pub!

I found myself looking after patients having procedures I'd never heard of. Nurse Practitioners were doing the endoscopies, I was looking after patients who'd had massive operations, patients were dying on the ward from overload as they had no infusion pumps available, and the beds were from the post war era.

The ratio of nurse to patient was approximately one nurse to 15 patients. I will never forget how hard I had to work to provide care for my patients. I worked at a few facilities in the UK, but the main purpose of my work was to save money to travel, which I did.

After about 18 months I was broke from travelling and thought it might be time to grow up and become an adult with a mortgage. I went to live with my parents and I was lucky enough to score a permanent position at the Campbell Hospital Coraki or 'the Royal Campbell' as we would fondly refer to it. I went from a 1500 bed hospital to a 12 bed hospital...

I went onto become a First Line Emergency Care Course (FLECC) assessor and acted as the site Nurse Manager, gaining my adult and paediatric trauma certification. It was a wonderful place to work with a great team.

I then moved to the Casino Memorial Hospital ED. I recall one shift where we had 65 presentations with only two nurses and one doctor in a 4-bed unit. We got through the shift but I have never experienced anything like it before, not even in the giant hospital in the UK.

Shift work was becoming difficult with a small child, and, looking for a new adventure, I applied and was successful in becoming the NUM of Kyogle ED and General Ward. When the LHD undertook a re-structure, I was asked to act in the Nurse Manager role, which was a steep learning curve in Human Resources and Awards. In 2015 I became Change Manager for Health Infrastructure, building the Bonalbo MPS. I never thought that my nursing degree would lead me to a position in the construction industry! I have since returned to Kyogle Memorial Health as the Nurse Manager.

In 2019 I completed my Masters of Health Care Leadership which was a two year post graduate course. I was proud of myself for completing the course within the two years whilst also working full time. I could never have done that without the support of my family and some very special colleagues.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think that my nursing career would lead to the things I have achieved, but most of all, the friendships I have made.

# Our Nursing and Midwifery Stories

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared 2020 as the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife in honor of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing.

The International Year of the Nurse and Midwife presents us with a unique opportunity to recognise and showcase the dedication, contribution and vital work of our nurses and midwives within the health system.

In honour of this, Northern NSW Local Health District is creating a story book filled with personal accounts from individual nurses and midwives who currently work in Northern NSW, or who have previously worked in our services.

*The stories are written by the nurses and midwives, in their own words, showcasing their passion for the profession and highlighting experiences that have been special to them.*



Matt Hartley A/NUM Maclean Community Health and his Kingswood



Some highlights in the book include stories by a former Clinical Nurse Consultant who after retiring, worked extensively with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF); a retired nurse who commenced nursing training at Lismore in 1937 (now aged 104) who currently resides at Nimbin Multipurpose

Service; our own Chief Executive, Wayne Jones; and a beautiful poem written by one of our newly graduated nurses.

There's also a lovely story by Matt Hartley, current Acting Nursing Unit Manager at Maclean Community Health, featuring his beloved 1977 Kingswood.

We are really looking forward to seeing the final published version of the book and hope you will join with us in the launch and celebration of the inspiring stories provided by your colleagues and friends.

Details of the launch will be advertised in the near future.

## CELEBRATING NURSING AND MIDWIFERY EXCELLENCE

*The annual Excellence in Nursing and Midwifery Awards acknowledge the outstanding commitment and positive impact that Northern NSW Local Health District nurses are making every day.*

The awards have become an integral part of the District-wide nursing and midwifery calendar, but this year, the current pandemic has presented an opportunity to think differently.

We intend to continue to mark the occasion with a variation on the usual ceremony –



Excellence in Nursing and Midwifery Awards

stay tuned for more details.

So far we have already received over 40 nominations in all 12 categories. The closing date has been extended to 26 June to give you time to recognise your nursing and midwifery colleagues.

The awards identify and celebrate excellence in practice and the significant contribution that our nurses and midwives

make to their professions, their teams and the community through their clinical work and leadership endeavours.

Follow the link to the OurNAMS Events page on the intranet to nominate an outstanding nurse or midwife today:

<https://intranet.nnswlhd.health.nsw.gov.au/nursing-midwifery/nursing-midwifery-annual-excellence-awards/>

# Hospital care, from the comfort of home

*Diagnosed with a rare lung infection, Karen Troy-Smith thought she'd be stuck in hospital for months, but thanks to a special service, she's been able to continue treatment at home.*

Thanks to the Lismore Hospital in the Home (HITH) team, Karen, 52 is receiving treatment at her picturesque home just outside Lismore, with her family and home comforts close by.

Karen's diagnosis of mycobacterium, a non-tuberculosis bacterial lung infection, saw her admitted to Prince Charles Hospital, Brisbane on 2 March 2020 under the care of a specialist respiratory physician.

Two weeks later, Karen was back at home, having daily check-ups by the HITH nursing team, and daily case review by her Brisbane-based doctor.

"It's brilliant," Karen said.

"To be able to be home with my family and in my garden, and I can ring HITH at any time if I'm feeling unwell."

HITH have coordinated Karen's care through their small team based in Lismore, working with Lismore Base Hospital to secure the specialised testing Karen's physician has ordered.

*"The respiratory specialist has been able to see me through the HITH team, with the nurses consulting with him and organising all of my tests."*

With the current COVID-19 restrictions, being at home and close to family is even more important for Karen at present.

"My dad, who's 83, lives next door and he can come over and sit on the verandah and have a cuppa. That's been wonderful," Karen said.

The HITH service provides treatment and care for acute and post-acute patients outside the hospital setting, operating every day of the year.



Clinical Nurse Specialist 2, Bec Lyon and Karen Troy-Smith

Patients can access HITH either in their home or a Residential Aged Care Facility, or by returning to Lismore Base Hospital (LBH), or a community health service for treatment.

"HITH provides a comprehensive, patient centred service which includes the full involvement of the patient and carers," Acting Nurse Unit Manager, Lismore Community Health, Bronwyn Browne, said.

As part of the COVID-19 response, the HITH team are also monitoring COVID-positive and high-risk patients in their homes, with daily telehealth consultations and health screening to make sure they're recovering well.

*"In the height of the pandemic we were monitoring up to 10 patients per day for COVID-19, doubling our usual patient load," Bronwyn said.*

Being able to have expert medical care delivered in the comfort of their own home is one of the major benefits for patients using the HITH service.

"They are able to sleep in their own beds, eat their own food and go about their everyday lives," Bronwyn said.

"As our clients often say, there's no place like home."

The **COVIDSafe** app was launched by the federal government on **26 April** and has already seen an uptake by more than **5.5 million people**.

The **COVIDSafe** app is aimed at assisting with contract tracing, staff are encouraged to download the app – it's voluntary to use.

You can learn more about how to download and use the app through the federal health website.

[www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covidsafe-app](http://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covidsafe-app)

# 10,000th mission for rescue chopper

For almost 40 years the Westpac Life Saver Rescue helicopter has been saving lives in our local region, and the vital services has just notched up a major milestone.

In April, a routine patient transfer between hospitals in Northern NSW marked the 10,000th mission for the local rescue chopper.

Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter CEO Richard Jones OAM said the mission was no different to any other.

*"Our first priority was to ensure the patient and medical team were transported as safely and efficiently as possible," Mr Jones said.*

The first rescue helicopter was launched in Ballina in 1982. In partnership with NSW Ambulance, it now completes an average



of 400 missions per year out of its base at Lismore Airport.

The service operates 24-7 with a NSW Ambulance Critical Care Paramedic and Northern NSW Local Health District doctor on board providing advanced medical care on every mission.

"Right from the start, communities of the Far North Coast, New England and Mid North Coast have passionately supported the need for a rescue helicopter," Mr Jones said.

"I can't speak highly enough of our staff, volunteers, sponsors and donors, but the association reaches further than some might think when you consider the 10,000 patients, their families and friends and all of the frontline Emergency Service personnel who are on scene when our helicopter lands.

"This includes lifeguards and volunteers in organisations like Surf Life Saving, the VRA, SES and Marine Rescue. Then it's all of the wonderful hospital medical staff that receive our patients and continue their care."

## CARDIAC REHAB GOES VIRTUAL

Like many face-to-face classes, Lismore's weekly cardiac rehabilitation group has had to innovate to make sure they still reach their clients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before coronavirus, you'd find Lismore Base Hospital physiotherapy gym full of people following their Cardiac Fitness instructor through movements to keep fit and healthy several times a week.

Now the room is empty, save for the instructors, Tiphanie Lloyd and Fiona Hassey.

One participant, Simon, who recently had open heart surgery, is following along with the exercises at home on Skype.

Simon said the strength building and

flexibility exercises are a major element in his recovery.

*"I was worried that with social distancing and other restrictions I would not be able to take part in the LBH Cardiac Rehab program," Simon said.*

"Thankfully, the cardiac rehab team was able to switch to Skype lessons, which I have found is just what I needed to keep me enthused to do my home exercise program."

The group still runs two days a week from the same gym, headed by Exercise Physiologist Tiphanie Lloyd and Clinical Nurse Specialists Fiona Hassey, Daniella Zanette and Kym Clements.

Tiphanie said It had been a highly rewarding venture to move the traditional delivery of cardiac rehab programs online.

"All our clients have been extremely



Fiona Hassey and Tiphanie Lloyd

grateful for the regular contact and boost to their motivation and confidence," Tiphanie said.

"It has been important for our team to continue to provide our client group with timely support, exercise and education to enable their best recovery."

Clients who aren't able to connect through Skype have not been left behind. They receive a weekly phone call from the cardiac rehab team to connect, progress their exercise and provide education sessions.



Wardie Graham Beattie and Registered Nurse Jessica Benard

## The COVID-19 experience so far

**Right across our health system, teams are working to keep our communities safe from COVID-19 through testing clinics, staff and visitor screening, cleaning and hygiene vigilance, contact tracing, upskilling in clinical areas, and much more!**

We asked some staff about their experience of preparing for, and dealing with, the effects of COVID-19.

**Name: Jenny Gill**

**Job title: Clinical Nurse Specialist - LBH**

**Worked in health for: 30 years**

My role is initial assessment and treatment of patients in the emergency department and facilitating patient flow. I am now involved in screening patients who come in and ensuring they are cared for in an appropriate place in the department.

I have been particularly inspired by the way all the hospital staff have pulled together to ensure we have the staff and environment we need to manage a COVID-19 surge.

All staff in the hospital are involved in our response, not only nursing and medical, but I feel like everyone is supporting us in this time from management to the frontline such as our admin, pathology staff and of course our heroes the cleaning staff.

Seeing how our colleagues around the world have been affected has made us all appreciate how high our standard of health care is in Australia and Northern NSW.

'Flattening the curve' that has occurred thanks to the efforts of the community is most inspiring of all.

This has given us time to put our pandemic plans into action and ensure we have the resources we need to manage COVID-19 in our district. This lets us provide the best care to every patient coming through our doors.

So far the main difficulty has been managing the anxiety of staff, patients and community, particularly in the early stages when we weren't sure what our infection trajectory would look like.

**Name: Dr Sarah Coghill**

**Job title: Infectious Diseases Specialist - LBH**

**Worked in health for: 12 years**

My role changed from spending 90 per cent of my time looking after patients directly, to now spending most of my time planning for COVID-19 across health service areas of Northern NSW.

The vast majority of patients have been very understanding and supportive of the changes we have had to make to normal service delivery while we plan for and deal with COVID-19.

Most inspiring is working with a fantastic group of dedicated health professionals who have gone over and above to ensure the highest standard of care for the Northern NSW community. Most difficult: lack of sleep!

**Name: Stacey Hatton**

**Job title: Endorsed Enrolled Nurse - LBH**

**Worked in health for: 24 years**

I have been working in the staff fever assessment clinic, and will be spending more time in the public fever assessment clinic. I am also managing supply of stores which was not previously part of my role.

People have been appreciative that this service is available for them at this stressful time.

It has been inspiring to be part of a service that is so important to our community. I have found it difficult not being able to comfort people in the way I normally would.

**Name: Josh Sauer**

**Job title: Nursing Unit Manager ICU - LBH**

**Worked in health for: 15 years in ICU**

My role has been very dynamic over the last few months with each new day bringing new challenges relating to COVID-19 and the growing need for ICU beds and staff.

We have always had positive feedback from patients who require ICU services, and over the last few weeks we have received donations of local free-range eggs, Indian food from local restaurants, and also donations of artwork for our new ICU - which is very humbling.

By far the most motivating is our ICU/hospital workforce team coming together for the need of our greater community. We are preparing, learning and equipping ourselves with appropriate education and resources that will not only help save lives but protect our vital hospital workforce in this challenging time. We work with some truly wonderful and highly skilled nurses and doctors.

**Name: Rose Turner**

**Job title: Acting NUM E10 - LBH**

**Worked in health for: 16 years**

I am still the NUM but our ward role has changed. As we get busier with COVID-19 patients, our ward would become the dedicated COVID-19 ward.

Our ward was fairly well prepared as last year we were the dedicated influenza A-B ward. We were basically quarantined for a three-month period which has given us a lot of experience with PPE and infection control.

We have had nothing but positive feedback

from our fellow peers, patients and family members. It has been very humbling for all of us.

What has amazed me most is the dedication and resilience of the staff on the ward. Even given the situations they have faced, they still laugh and smile and show enormous strength.

**Name: Dr Brian Hughes**

**Job title: VMO Physician (Senior Medical Support/Coordinator for Fever clinic and Hospital in the Home (HITH) for COVID-19 patients**

**Worked in health for: Over 30 years**

I was a Locum General Physician VMO, now I am in an Infectious Diseases-specific role, with responsibilities of screening populations for infectious diseases, and managing these patients in HITH.

The current Pandemic feels in some respects a bit like 1983-1985 before and around the time of developing a test for HIV. I was involved in the initial screening of the public for HIV and the first national strategy as a medical student.

I am inspired by the patience and support of the community in the Northern Rivers. The relentless exposure to all things COVID-19 can be difficult to escape from. Every sick or worried person I see could have been my parents, my sister, my nephew, my Husband.

Lismore has a great community and we all support each other.

**Name: Julie Sidhu**

**Job title: Domestic services - LBH**

**Worked in health for: 30 years**

Previously my role involved local discharge duties, but now there's a high awareness and vigilance in cleaning and PPE.

The community has been very appreciative and thankful, putting ourselves at risk by staffing the fever clinic. Most difficult has been assuring my family that I am safe working in this infectious environment.

**Name: Glenn Firth**

**Job title: Grade 3 - High cleaner - GBH**

**Worked in health for: 4 years**

The dedicated nursing staff have greatly inspired me. It has been difficult worrying about taking it home to my family, and not seeing grandkids for 5 weeks.

**Name: Tania Clark**

**Job Title: Registered Nurse - GBH**

**Worked in health for: 31 years**

As well as being a Registered Nurse I am also a business owner. My Cosmetic Skin Clinic was one of the businesses directed to shut down on 25 March this year at the start of the pandemic. So yes, I have had significant changes.

It's been good to be able to use my nursing skills to help out during this time and being able to obtain casual work to help support me through this time.

With all this being so new I find it challenging to give patients up to date information (as it changes regularly).

**Name: Travis Armstrong**

**Job title: Acting Nurse Unit Manager – Emergency Department - GBH**

**Worked in health for: 10 years**

We have undertaken a great deal of training in preparation for a pandemic outbreak.

The feedback from the community is a great appreciation for all of the hard work done, and for nurses putting themselves at risk.

I have been inspired by everyone coming together to work as a team. The most difficult for me has been worrying about the shortage of personal protective equipment available.

**Name: Noela Walker**

**Job title: Administration Officer - GBH**

**Worked in health for: Almost 2 years**

I am now working in the COVID Clinic.

Our patients and community are grateful for the work the hospital is doing.

It's inspiring knowing that the test we are doing will alleviate people's anxiety. At times it is difficult knowing you are being exposed to COVID-19 all day.

**Name: Jackson Gregory**

**Job title: Registered Nurse - BCH**

**Worked in health for: I have just started my fourth year as a registered nurse.**

Having the fever clinic at Byron has been an interesting experience that I have enjoyed helping with. I think our role as nurses always changes depending on patient needs and COVID is no exception.

It has been really nice to see so many



GBH A/NUM Emergency Department  
Travis Armstrong

people from the community coming to get tested in order to keep their family and colleagues safe.

The feedback from the community has been really positive, everyone has been very thankful for the service provided.

I think the most inspiring thing for me has been the community's attitude, everybody is taking their health and the health of others into consideration.

**Name: Jessica Carr**

**Job title: Registered Nurse - TTH**

**Worked in health for: Over 16 years**

Since COVID, I have taken a role working as a fever clinic nurse, I have become a lot more aware about the disease and taken an active role in infection control.

The patients are very grateful for our role, and although at times they have a long wait for testing, they are thankful for the time and commitment us as nurses are putting in to helping the community get tested and stay safe.

Having to deal with unkind words when people are inpatient and don't want to wait and being the front line, can be draining and mentally exhausting.

The most inspiring thing is seeing people help each other and be kind, for example if an elderly patient does not have ability to make a call, having someone phone on their behalf.

# Hospital construction on track

The Tweed Valley Hospital construction site remains open and the project team are continuing to work in line with the latest COVID-19 advice from the NSW Government, with the safety and wellbeing of our people and communities being the number one priority.

Keeping the construction of the hospital progressing is important. It not only means we can continue delivering this important health facility for our community, but it is also helping a large number of subcontractors, contractors and consultants (including many Tweed-Byron locals) to stay employed during this challenging period.

The Tweed Valley Hospital project recently progressed to Detailed Design. This design stage includes looking at specific room and ward layouts, and developing a complete list of technology, furniture, fixtures and equipment required for the new hospital.

Early works on the hospital site are



Tweed Valley Hospital construction site

progressing well, with piling more than 75% complete and retaining walls on the hospital's ring road around 90% complete.

To prepare for re-planting of native species, vegetation clearing works were completed in April, involving the removal of non-native species as well as extensive weed management, particularly in the Coastal

Wetlands area to the north of the site.

Main works are scheduled to commence later this year following approval of the Stage 2 State Significant Development application by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. The hospital remains on track to open to patients in 2023.

## Strategic Plan: six months in

The first six-month Progress Report for the Northern NSW Local Health District Strategic Plan 2019-2024 (the Plan), was recently endorsed by the NNSWLHD Board.

Released in September 2019, The Strategic Plan defines the strategic objectives for the LHD for the next five-year period to 2024, focussing on six priorities aimed at delivering the LHD's purpose to 'Work Together to Deliver Quality Health Outcomes Across Our Communities'.

The priorities ranging from developing our workforce to patient safety, Aboriginal Health and workforce, Mental Health, eHealth, research and building community partnerships.

The Progress Report provided a summary of the actions and initiatives to date, highlighting those actions already completed, those that are ongoing, and

those that are still in the planning phase.

Completed actions include the development of the NNSWLHD Research Strategic Plan 2019-2024, and the establishment of the Community Advisory Groups and Community Partnership Advisory Council as a Board Subcommittee.

A range of actions are underway including programs aimed at improving the culture and safety of our staff, improved delivery of eHealth, improved Health Literacy through expanded training opportunities and development of consumer resources, and a focus on improved patient safety through the implementation of a new incident management system to monitor and report incidents, as well as looking at ways of reduce Hospital Acquired Complications (HACs).

The Strategic Plan is a comprehensive roadmap for the LHD over the coming years. To learn more, view the Strategic Plan on the NNSWLHD Intranet.



<https://nnschlhd.health.nsw.gov.au/about/northern-nsw-local-health-district/northern-nsw-strategic-plan-2019-2024/>

# Quit smoking to boost immunity

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role of health workers around the world, and how important it is for health workers to protect their own health.

Here in Northern NSW Local Health District, there are temperature checks at the start of every shift and we are all monitoring ourselves for any flu-like symptoms as we can't come to work if we are unwell.

This is a cue to do what we can to boost our immunity to infection and this comes back to the basic messages for healthy living – eat plenty of fruit and vegetables, get daily exercise, drink plenty of water, moderate your alcohol consumption and if you're a smoker – it's a great time to quit.

## COVID-19 and smoking

COVID-19 is a new and evolving health crisis, but there is already evidence that smokers who contract the disease are more likely to need intensive care and have higher mortality rates.

As well as causing direct lung damage, smoking damages the system of mucous and tiny hairs called cilia that help keep lungs clear of inhaled particles and viruses.

## Are smokers at greater risk of contracting Covid19?

It is too early to be sure. But we do know that people who smoke generally experience higher rates and more severe symptoms of respiratory illnesses like colds, influenza and bacterial pneumonia.

Plus, the hand to mouth action of smoking means smokers are touching their face more often which could make them more vulnerable to COVID-19.

## Why is this a good time to quit?

It's always a good time to quit, but social distancing/home isolation offers a particular opportunity:

- it can be easier to break a habit when your usual routine is changed,



- many of the usual social triggers for smoking may be missing at the moment,
- this is a time to build up immunity to infection – smoking affects the immune system, making it harder to fight infection.

## Support for health staff wanting to quit smoking

It is not easy to quit, especially during difficult times – so take advantage of expert support.

NNSWLHD staff who smoke and wish to quit can get one month's FREE supply of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT)

through their hospital's pharmacy. After one month the NRT is available at cost.

There are many services on hand to support you – by phone, app, or online community. For assistance and more information regarding quitting, call the Quitline on 13 78 48 (Aboriginal Quitline Counsellors are also available on this number).

There is online support through the ICanQuit website ([www.icanquit.com.au](http://www.icanquit.com.au)) and with the Myquitbuddy app:



[www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/my-quitbuddy-app](http://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/my-quitbuddy-app)



# PROFILE: Kathryn Watson

In this edition we catch up with the District's new Associate Director Planning, Kathryn Watson, to chat about her long connection with the area and what led her to Lismore.

While Kathryn mostly grew up living in Brisbane, her family has had a long connection with the Northern Rivers.

Kathryn's grandfather's great-grandfather (that's five greats!), came from Scotland and started the Mallanganee Timber Mill, her Dad was born at Lismore Base Hospital, and her mum did her nurses training at the Base while living at Crawford House.

Around 20 years ago, Kathryn almost made the move south of the border, but it wasn't quite her time.

*"One of the first jobs I ever applied for was in Health Promotion at Lismore and I actually had my interview right here at 31 Uralba Street where I am now working," Kathryn said.*

Instead, Kathryn ended up working as a research assistant at both Queensland University of Technology and Griffith University, before landing her first gig in population health with Queensland Health's Tropical Population Health Unit in Mackay - as one of the state's first Physical Activity Health Promotion Officers.

Later Kathryn took a gig out west in a rural mining area, implementing a workplace and community physical activity program in partnership with BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance.

After moving back to Brisbane to have her first baby, Kathryn started working in health service planning.

Originally studying exercise science and nutrition, Kathryn says her move into Population Health was a bit of a random choice.



"I was choosing between a few different Master degree programs," she said.

"But Population Health was the degree where I'd have the least debt, so I picked that! And I also ended up doing a Graduate Certificate in Health Services Planning."

Kathryn says this ended up being one of the best decisions she has ever made, after so far having a successful and enjoyable career.

*"I very much enjoy all aspects of planning, including excel spreadsheets and the fancier programs we use," Kathryn said.*

"Going from population health to planning, there were a lot of transferable skills and content areas, particularly in epidemiology, data analysis and consultation."

Kathryn has also worked developing statewide and clinical service plans for Queensland Health, and led the development of the health service and point of care projection methods for the Department of Health.

When the Planning position came up with Northern NSW Local Health District, Kathryn knew that this time, the timing was right.

"I'd been holidaying down this way to see family for so long and I had always loved it," she said.

"Especially for bringing the kids down to grow up in the country. We've got the best of both worlds being in the country, but not too far from the beach."

"I've always joked that my three wild boys belong on a farm, so I'm glad we're finally doing it."

In her spare time, Kathryn's four kids keep her very busy, but when she gets a chance she's a keen tennis player, and doesn't mind a book and loves to cook.

Once the current pandemic eases, Kathryn says there are big plans – for planning – including an LHD-wide planning framework, numerous clinical service plans and a strong focus on clinician engagement, including a new committee.

# HealthPathways COVID-19

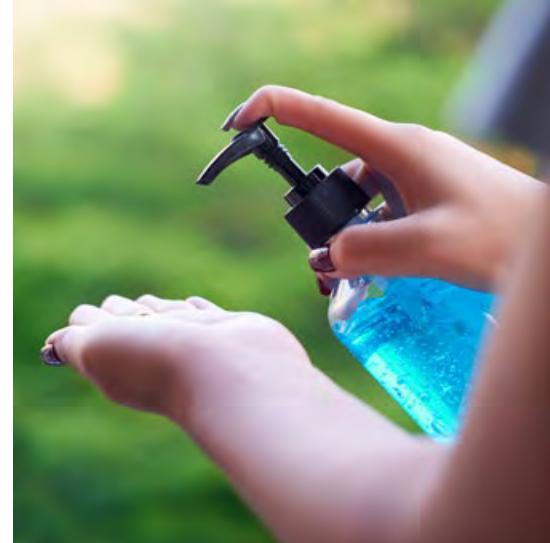
In March 2020, the Mid and North Coast HealthPathways team rapidly developed a suite of COVID-19 HealthPathways for our region, suitable for use by all health professionals.

The team continues to monitor and review these HealthPathways on a daily basis, to ensure that you are receiving the most up-to-date and accurate information.

Please note source: Local content is maintained by the Mid & North Coast HealthPathways team, and pages relating to general COVID-19 information are maintained by a statewide HealthPathways collaboration, in line with the Ministry of Health.

Below is a summary of the COVID-19 HealthPathways:

- COVID-19 Impact on Local Services: local changes to services within our health system



You can help us to keep information up to date by using the Send Feedback button if anything is incorrect or missing. For a list all localised pathways see Mid and North Coast Localised HealthPathways

Username: manchealth  
Password: conn3ct3d

For further information about HealthPathways email [kkeyte@ncphn.org.au](mailto:kkeyte@ncphn.org.au)



<https://manc.healthpathways.org.au>

## CASINO GETS PATHOLOGY COLLECTION ON SITE

*NSW Health Pathology opened a pathology collection centre at Casino and District Memorial Hospital on 10 February 2020.*

Having a collection centre available at the local public hospital is an asset for the Casino community. We previously had people travelling from Casino to Lismore to have their bloods collected.

Patients attend for many different reasons including pre-operative, antenatal and chemotherapy treatment blood tests. The collection room is easily accessible from the two different hospital entrances. The receptionist, located at the main entrance, is happy to give directions as are the ladies working at the kiosk, located at the second hospital entrance. The collection centre is open from 7.30am to 4pm Monday to Friday. Phone 02 6660 0516 or 0436 836 841.



Rachael McCabe

In 2016 Rachael relocated to five acres in the Northern Rivers area as she has always loved the area. Rachael has worked as a pathology collector for 10 years. She enjoys working in an environment where she is able to learn something new every day. Learning is not limited to pathology collection, as Rachael loves gathering tips on a variety of subjects from the local community patients. Through home visits, Rachael can help patients that are often unable to access services. Rachael has been told she is gentle with her collections, especially difficult blood collections.



Selina Hancock

Selina has worked as a pathology collector for 10 years. She was born in Lismore Base Hospital, and many of her family members live in the Casino area.

Selina enjoys the community interaction and the relationship she builds with the regular patients.

It is not always pleasant to have blood collected, so it is important to make everyone feel welcome on arrival and to ensure they leave feeling happy.



The Tweed Hospital Clinical Trials team

## Tweed team playing a part in critical research

**From prostate cancer, to melanoma, to solid tumour and haematology studies, The Tweed Hospital Clinical Trials team is one of many centres around the world participating in clinical research to deliver better outcomes for patients.**

"Our aim is to improve patient treatment options, decrease treatment toxicities, find safer treatments and improve the quality of life for our patients and their families," Sharon Clark, Manager Clinical Trials, Medical Oncology, The Tweed Hospital said.

"I am extremely proud of my team, and their achievements."

A current study is looking at treatments to reduce cancer recurrence during the post-surgery period in patients with Stage 3 melanoma. The study involves a new course of treatment with two cancer-targeting agents taken for 12 weeks after surgery, compared with the standard care of no treatment agents post-surgery.

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in Australia, with estimates of 13,280 for new cases of melanoma (representing 10% of all cancers diagnosed) and 1,770 deaths in 2016.

The latest results from the study published

in the New England Journal of Medicine in December 2019, show that an estimated 54% of patients in the randomised combination therapy group were likely to remain cancer-free, compared to only 37 percent in the placebo group.

Over the longer term, data shows the combination therapy reduces the risk of patients developing distant metastases (cancer spreading elsewhere) or death when compared to placebo by an estimated 47%.

The two medications are now funded on the PBS for patients who meet specified criteria.

*"It's an exciting prospect, being part of the work which will bring more effective and earlier treatment to patients with metastatic cancer who are at a high risk of relapse," said Professor Ehtesham Abdi.*

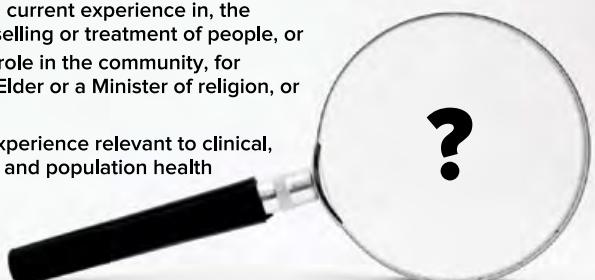
"The study is ongoing, we're waiting to see the data from overseas participants, but we're already using this new therapy to treat patients with melanoma post-surgery at The Tweed Hospital, a much improved course of action compared to the old wait and see method."

### Research Committee Vacancies

Seeking expressions of interest for the North Coast NSW Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). We're looking for individuals who:

- Have knowledge of, and current experience in, the professional care, counselling or treatment of people, or
- perform a pastoral care role in the community, for example, an Aboriginal Elder or a Minister of religion, or
- practice Law, or
- have current research experience relevant to clinical, medical, health services and population health

**Submissions close Friday 29 May, 2020.**



**For more information, please contact Rebecca Lavery, on (02) 6672 0269 or email [rebecca.lavery@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:rebecca.lavery@health.nsw.gov.au).**

# Vale Ian Fielding

*It is with great sadness that we relay news of the unexpected passing of Dr Ian Fielding on 22 April 2020.*

Born and raised in Orange, Dr Fielding was a much loved and respected surgeon, medical educator, and member of the Kyogle community. Dr Fielding and his wife, Maggie, moved to Northern NSW in 2003 to run cattle properties in Lynchs Creek and Afterlee (Maggie's family property).

Dr Fielding graduated from the University of Sydney in 1965 and later worked in the United Kingdom and the USA as a gastro-intestinal surgeon before returning to Sydney in 1975.

Dr Fielding specialised in gastro-intestinal and colo-rectal surgery at Mater Hospital North Sydney and Royal North Shore Hospital.

Between 1980 and 1995 Dr Fielding held Board positions with the Royal North Shore Hospital, Northern Sydney Area Health District, Mater Hospital North Sydney and was Chair of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.

After moving to Northern NSW, Dr Fielding was highly sought after as a medical



Dr Ian Fielding at his retirement in June 2017

professional, and continued clinical work as well as becoming involved in quality assurance activities at Lismore Base Hospital.

Between 2008-2017 Dr. Fielding was appointed to the part-time positions of Director of Hospital Skills Program and the Executive Director Medical Services for Northern NSW Local Health District.

Dr Fielding was highly regarded as a health professional and was very well liked by his colleagues for his warm, caring and friendly manner.

In addition to his professional roles, Dr Fielding was an active member of the

Kyogle community and was often asked to be the medical officer in attendance at local sporting events. Dr Fielding was Chair of the Richmond River Beef Producers Group from 2005 to 2011.

*Dr Fielding leaves behind a legacy of having made a great difference in our organisation by improving medical education, health service delivery and health outcomes for patients living in our community.*

Our sincere condolences go to his wife, Maggie, his four children, extended family and friends.

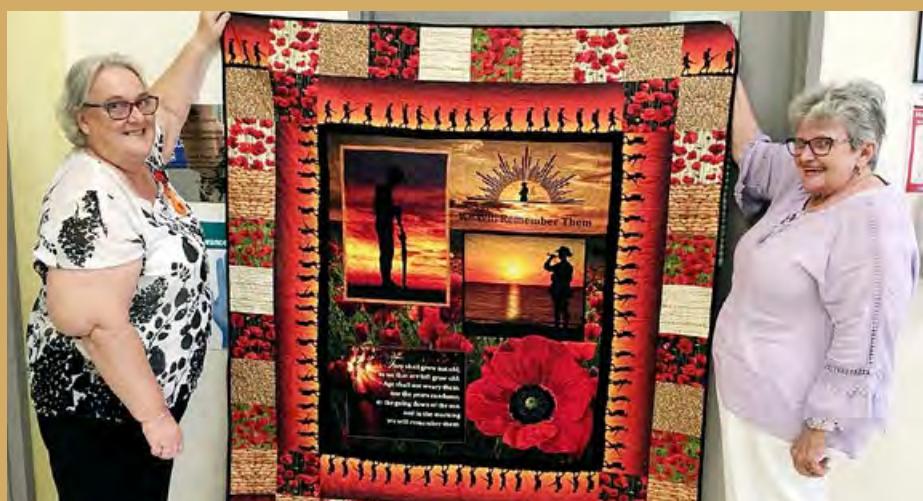
## CASINO HONOURS THE ANZAC TRADITION

*It was a different Anzac Day at Casino and District Memorial Hospital this year. Instead of holding a service for the community, the team lined the entrance with lights made from recycled plastic milk containers and tea lights.*

A special thanks to St Mary's School in Casino who came up with the simple idea.

The day was also marked by a special donation from patient, Maree Flanagan, who gifted a spectacular hand-made ANZAC themed quilt to the hospital.

Lest we forget.



Casino District Memorial Hospital EO/DON Ellen Palmer and Maree Flanagan

# School kids say thanks

Children from St John's Primary School, Mullumbimby share their well wishes with our staff.

Dear Hospital Staff,

I hope you are staying safe and avoiding the Coronavirus that's going around. We appreciate you helping patients in your hospital with the virus. We are hoping you stay safe. Thank you and wishing the best of luck. Lots of love

Oscar



Thank you signs outside the Tweed Hospital

Dear Hospital Staff,

I've heard about your long hours in the hospital and how you only have a day off each fortnight. My teachers sent me a task on my computer since we are not allowed at school, but this task was for someone who has lost their job or someone who has to work all night and all day like you. You must be tired every day like I've never imagined.

I feel really bad for you and that I can't help you but since this virus came along nearly everyone is sick so they need you. I hope you're saving people from this virus because the more it spreads the more rules for isolation and it will also get longer by time. I actually don't want anyone to get it. I want this airborne virus to go but words won't help only this isolation will help and put a stop to it.

Hope you're well and safe.

Blake

Dear healthcare heroes,

Most people would choose not to work in a setting where they are exposed to daily risks and dangers the way you are but you choose to help the world and not stand by to watch it crumble to pieces. The Earth wouldn't be the same without you all. Thank you for your persistent commitment and courage. Everyone is extremely grateful for your care and professionalism. I really appreciate your everyday efforts to keep us safe. Thank you

Caitlyn

Dear hospital workers,

Thank you for taking care of patients even with the virus going around you do so much you should be appreciated more than you are. You are amazing.

Thank you for taking care of our community and Australia.

Emilia



Dear Doctors and Nurses,

Thank you for supporting everyone through these difficult times. I believe the medical industry is one of the most important jobs right now, everyone is doing an amazing job. On behalf of our community I would love to say thank you so much. You are doing a fantastic and amazing job.

By Jada

Dear doctors and nurses who have been affected by COVID-19,

Thank you for helping people and caring for people with the virus instead of staying home quarantined.

Romany

Dear Hospital Staff and Doctors,

Thank you for keeping people safe with coronavirus. I know you're working hard and keep it up! Thank you!

From Darcy

Dear Hospital Hero,

Hello, my name is Ali from St John's Primary School in Mullum. I hope everyone you face you can help them if needed. Everyone appreciates the work that you have put in to help people. You are helping people that are sick even though you could get sick too. You are sacrifice precious time with your family to help our community

From Ali, Stay safe!

Dear staff,

I think it's very good what you are doing. You're doing a good job. Hopefully, it won't be too overcrowded at the hospital I heard that the hospital may be overcrowded.

You're very resilient because you still go to work to help people also in these times.

Marlo

# Our community sharing the love

*So many people and businesses have reached out to offer support to our health staff during this current period. Every single gesture is appreciated; whether it's a hot drink, a message of thanks, or an offer of assistance.*

Here's a list of some of those individuals and businesses who have generously supported us over the last few months. Of course, there will be others who we may not have included here, as well as our amazing volunteers and auxiliary members who provide invaluable support in so many ways to our patients and our health services day after day. Thank you!

## Tweed

- Big W
- Seagulls Club
- TTH Auxiliary
- Jamaica Blue Coffee Café
- Event Cinemas
- Dominos Pizza
- Oncology Patient's sister "Annie"
- Tweed Shire Council
- Tweed Bowls Club
- Our Kids Board and Platinum partners
- Frontliners

## Murwillumbah

- Serena Dolinska - visual artist, designer and Illustrator

## Kyogle

- Easter treats from anonymous donor
- Heartland Magazine



Tweed Hospital Business Manager Linda Goodwin, A/DON Myra Drummond and Manager of Fresh + Kirsty Olsen with donated coffees

## Byron

- Dominos Byron Bay
- The Hoft Brothers - Get Trucked Byron
- Health Bowls Byron

## Ballina

- Domino's Pizza Ballina
- Main Street Café
- Cherry Street Sports Club
- The Cove Restaurant
- Sonnies Thai
- Hongs Kitchen
- Swish café
- Chicken Mania
- Baballino's Bakery
- Mr Mozzarella
- Table Grayce

## Lismore

- Lismore Cinemas
- Sally Sullivan
- Amici Italian food
- Cafe Cappello
- Half Gallon Milk
- Norco
- Bottero Coffee

- Henry's Café
- Lismore embroidery
- Farmer Charlie's
- Southern Cross University
- McDonalds Lismore
- Aldi Lismore
- Flavour of India
- Body Shop consultant
- Sally Flannery
- Eltham Valley Pantry
- Our Kids Board and Platinum partners
- Frontliners

## Maclean

- Private donation
- Maclean Bowling Club
- SPAR supermarket

## Grafton

- Domino's pizza
- Elders real estate
- Hospital shop
- Kristy Johnston – Consultant with Sentsy and The Body Shop
- Grafton Woolworths
- Farmer Lou's

# MYSTERY QUILTS BRING SMILES

*Grafton Base Hospital Maternity Ward received a delivery of beautiful quilts from a mystery donor who only signed the note she left as 'Lyn C'.*

To Grafton Maternity Ward, just a small gift for you to give out to anyone who would like a little extra love. I am a grandmother and have had much pleasure in making these. They are not perfect, but they are

made with love. I don't know when I can hug my grandchildren, much the same as everyone else.

Think of it as a little warm hug from mums, nannas, aunties, family.

Thank you, Lyn C.

P.S. I started making these before this crisis. We have no sickness in the home. Stay well & sleep safe. You all do a wonderful job X.

Thanks Lyn! The team gratefully accepted the quilts, and have started giving them out to mothers and babies in the unit.



Keltie Foster holding one of the donated quilts



NORTHERN NSW LOCAL HEALTH DISTRICT NEWS

ISSUE 3 - 2020 MAY / JUNE

LISMORE BASE HOSPITAL

LISMORE  
BASE  
HOSPITAL

Main  
Entrance  
Carpark ↑

NORTHERN

# EXPOSURE

