

THEROUNDS

2025 - A YEAR IN REVIEW



Mackay Base Hospital
expansion update | 6

Guard of honour farewells
long-time patient | 14

Fisherman thanks Bowen team's
response to emergency | 21



www.mackay.health.qld.gov.au

Connect with us





This beautiful garden of native plants at Sarina Hospital is helping traditional custodians teach the community about bush medicine, healing and reconciliation. The traditional medicine garden, called Yinha Gurubila Ganya, which means 'here medicine place', was officially opened during NAIDOC Week and serves as a living space for teaching, cultural preservation and connection across generations.



Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians

We respect and honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and future.

We acknowledge the stories, traditions and living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on this land and commit to building a brighter future together.

Bowen – Juru People | Cannonvale – Ngaro People | Clermont – Wangan Jagalingou People | Collinsville – Birriah People | Dysart – Barada Barna People | Glenden – Wiri/Widi People | Mackay – Yuwi People | Middlemount – Barada Barna People | Moranbah – Barada Barna People | Proserpine – Gia People | Sarina – Yuwi People

We also recognise Australian South Sea Islander people, their historical relationship with First Nations peoples and the contributions they have made in our community.

Table of contents

Page 6

Mackay Base Hospital expansion update



Page 7

Facility provides First Nations family care in the community



Page 8

Lifesaving transplant gifts Kerryn more time with family



Page 9

Fully digital health service improves delivery of care

Page 10

Post-op service celebrates first anniversary



Page 11

Attitude of gratitude supports physical recovery after stroke



Page 12

Family grateful to team for care which saved preemie bub

Page 16

Missed appointment cost prompts HHS call for action

Page 20

Base adopts world-leading surgical improvement program

Page 24

Health minister tours Sarina Hospital sites

Page 28

Moranbah Hospital celebrates first year of care

Page 13

Versatility of rural role appeals to midwife

Page 17

Let's Celebrate MHHS People Awards

Page 21

Fisherman thanks Bowen team's response to emergency

Page 25

Emergency medicine specialists' certification a milestone for ED

Page 29

Clancy falls in love with rural medicine in Moranbah

Page 14

Guard of honour farewells long-time patient

Page 18

Golden Boot a fitting recognition for three decades of dedication

Page 22

Trainees graduate with big dreams for healthcare careers

Page 26

Donna's dedication leads to wishes fulfilled

Page 30

Dignity the first step in healing on patient journey

Page 15

Cruise ship patient's survival an "absolute miracle"

Page 19

Five decades of service to nursing and community

Page 23

Blood test to revolutionise the diagnosis process for coeliac disease

Page 27

Deeply personal goal a key motivator for Renee's rehab

Page 31

Clinical trial focused on improving debilitating symptoms



Message from Mackay HHS Chief Executive Sean Birgan

Welcome to the first edition of *The Rounds* – a new publication from Mackay Hospital and Health Service (HHS) – which reflects on patient experiences, clinical achievements and service improvements in 2025.

At its heart, this publication celebrates the dedication of more than 3000 clinical and non-clinical staff working across our health service.

Since stepping into the role of Chief Executive, I have seen our teams implement practical initiatives that increased services, streamline patient flow and strengthened capacity across our hospitals and community services.

Our magazine includes stories of our staff – those who have celebrated 50 years of service through to those who have arrived more recently who are implementing new patient care initiatives.

We also share some patient stories and I thank those who have generously shared their healthcare experiences.

There is much to look forward to in the year ahead, both in Mackay and across our region, including:

- Continuing to train the First Nations workforce of the future through the Big Dreams, Small Steps program
- Refurbishment works to provide a better patient experience at Mackay's Nelson Street Community Health Centre.
- Work on the old Sarina Hospital site to provide a dedicated space for long-stay and rehab patients.

In Mackay, we're looking forward to further progress on our Mackay Hospital Expansion Project, which includes a new hospital wing, multi-storey car park, helipad and birth centre.

When the new car park is complete, we will have a total of 1660 car parks on the MBH campus (about 600 more than we have now) and this will be a big win for patients, visitors and staff.

Work includes the development of a temporary parking solution while the multi-storey car park is under construction and we will share more on this when details are finalised.

I hope you enjoy reading *The Rounds*.

All the best, Sean



Message from Mackay Hospital and Health Board Interim Chair Monica McKendry

2025 was a year of significant change and achievement for Mackay Hospital and Health Service (HHS). Our new publication, *The Rounds*, offers an opportunity to reflect on this journey and the progress we have made together.

At the heart of everything we do is a commitment to delivering exceptional patient care for our region. This is made possible thanks to the resilience, dedication and professionalism of our workforce, who continue to provide high-quality care to more people, often in increasingly complex and challenging circumstances.

I also acknowledge the collective efforts of our leadership team, whose guidance continues to shape a strong and positive future for healthcare delivery across our region.

Mackay HHS has undergone meaningful transformation, with further improvements still ahead for the communities we serve. This 2025 edition of *The Rounds* captures many achievements, including:

- The successful implementation of electronic medical records to now include all rural facilities
- Sustained improvements in clinical safety, validated through external reviews and accreditation
- Growth in research activity and successful grant outcomes
- The broader positive impact on our community, reflected in the stories of patients whose lives have been touched by the excellent care they received.

The Rounds reflects the progress we have achieved together and provides an opportunity to recognise our staff and the ongoing commitment of our leaders to continuous improvement.

On a personal note, I have greatly appreciated the warm welcome and support from fellow Board members and Chief Executive Sean Birgan since commencing as Interim Board Chair in September.

As we look to 2026, we remain focused on driving continued improvement, growth and meaningful change across Mackay HHS. I hope you enjoy reading about these achievements in *The Rounds*.

Kind regards, Monica McKendry

Our strategy

The Mackay Hospital and Health Service Strategic Plan 2024 – 2028 outlines our priorities and explains how we will provide the best health care to our community now and in the future.

To develop this plan, we talked to more than 400 people including staff, community members, patients and health partners to gather contributions, insights and expertise. We held workshops, group consultations and conducted a survey.

The results form our Strategic Plan through to 2028. It sets out our vision, purpose and values, and supports the Queensland Government's plan for our communities to have good jobs, better services and a great lifestyle.

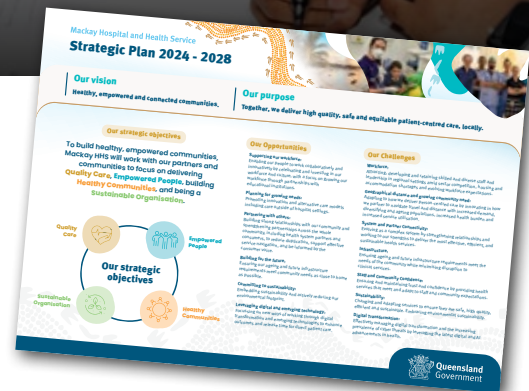


Our vision

Healthy, empowered and connected communities.

Our purpose

Together, we deliver high quality, safe and equitable patient-centred care, locally.



Our strategic objectives:



Quality care –
Excellent, person-centred
compassionate care for all.



Empowered people –
A respectful, inclusive, empowering and
caring place to work, learn and grow.



Healthy communities –
Informed, engaged and
connected communities.



Sustainable organisation –
A responsible, resilient and
proactive organisation.



Health Infrastructure Queensland's Sam Sangster, Mackay HHS Chief Executive Sean Birgan and Member for Mackay Nigel Dalton.

Mackay Base Hospital expansion update

Mackay Hospital and Health Service, in partnership with Health Infrastructure Queensland, was able to provide an update on the Mackay Base Hospital expansion projects in December.

Hospital Rescue Plan Implementation Lead Sam Sangster joined Chief Executive Sean Birgan and Member for Mackay Nigel Dalton for the announcement of a new procurement strategy which will give local builders the opportunity to be involved in our hospital build and other expansion projects.

Mackay HHS has now adopted the recommendations of the Independent Sangster Review, released in April.

To address those recommendations, we have commenced work on a new health infrastructure masterplan for Mackay.

It will consider all aspects of the Mackay Base Hospital expansion, including the new hospital wing, car park, helipad and birth centre, to ensure it is designed in a coordinated way that meets both clinical needs and community expectations.

Masterplanning will progress in 2026 and inform further development phases and project timelines.

The new strategy will support delivery of a new multi-storey carpark, with interest to be sought from local builders for both the carpark and other expansion works in early 2026.

The new multi-storey car park will provide a total of 1660 car parks on the MBH campus when complete. This will be a big win for patients, visitors and staff.

An interim parking solution is being developed which will provide additional parking spaces while the multi-storey car park is under construction.

We know that searching for a car park is stressful for all, and we have been working hard to achieve the best outcome for patients, staff and visitors both during construction and following completion of the new car park.

We look forward to providing more information once site investigations and lease agreements are finalised.





Mum Pam Evans with children Ryder and Aria, with Kem Kem Yanga midwife Madison Bailey.

Facility provides First Nations family care in the community

Mackay Hospital and Health Service (HHS) celebrated the official opening of the community-based Kem Kem Yanga Midwifery Group Practice (MGP) maternity service on 27 February with about 40 people in attendance.

The service, which was established in May 2019 and provides antenatal (before birth) care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and babies, has taken a further step in its development with the opening of the special facility located within the community at 25-29 Evans Avenue, North Mackay.

Former Mackay HHS Chief Executive Susan Gannon welcomed the provision of the service outside a hospital setting.

"This is a wonderful step forward in providing nurturing care for our First Nations families in a setting that is safe, welcoming and easier to access," Ms Gannon said.

"An important priority for our health service is improving health and wellbeing outcomes for First Nations families and that begins with the smallest members – our babies."

"This is a beautiful space which features a large meeting room as well as five smaller spaces to provide safe care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as they prepare to welcome these little ones into the world."

The Mackay Hospital Foundation were thanked for their support in arranging a

donation from Daly Bay to buy furniture and fittings for the new centre.

Chairs, tables, cushions, a refrigerator, books and indigenous-themed toys and games for children have all been provided.

The opening event included input from two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who had been involved with the Kem Kem Yanga program since its inception. Aunty Deb Clark delivered a Welcome to Country and Aunty Julianna Kennell performed a Torres Strait Islander blessing.

The community-based facility is staffed by four midwives and a health worker.



Lifesaving transplant gifts Kerryn more time with family

Kerryn Grieve spent six years on dialysis before he received a life-changing kidney transplant.



The Mackay father of three had been spending five hours at a time, three days a week at Mackay Base Hospital on haemodialysis after dialysing at home was no longer an option.

Kerryn was diagnosed with end-stage kidney disease in 2018 which was secondary to his lupus diagnosis 10 years earlier.

"You are placed on the kidney transplant waitlist when you first start on dialysis," Kerryn said.

"I started peritoneal dialysis in July 2018 so that I had freedom to continue working and do it at home. I became active on the transplant wait list in November 2024."

On 7 February 2025, Kerryn received a call from the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane which would change his life; he had progressed up to fourth on the transplant waitlist.

"At 1.30am on 10 February, I received a call that a kidney was available and was advised that the Mackay hospital would contact us with the flight details," Kerryn said.

"I felt overwhelmed and excited about the news. We had a plan in place beforehand and I had been very open with work, so everyone knew we were waiting for that call at any moment.

"From 1.30am we were organising the kids and dropping them to their nan's house. We were then at the airport at 5.30am for the 6am flight."

Kerryn's kidney transplant took place that same day. He was incredibly grateful for the lifesaving operation and new kidney, but it wasn't easy recovering from major surgery so far from home.

"It was very difficult to be away from the kids and family for six weeks," Kerryn said.

"My wife was able to be with me in Brisbane for three weeks and then returned home to be with the kids because it was the first time we had spent more than four days away from them."

After six weeks in hospital in Brisbane, Kerryn was able to return home and began weekly visits to the renal unit and nephrologist Dr Danielle Wu at Mackay Base Hospital for ongoing blood tests, monitoring and follow-up care.

Four months later, the visits reduced to fortnightly "because they are happy with how I'm travelling and I have not needed to return to Brisbane".

Kerryn has now returned to work and resumed normal activities with his family including taking his son to his soccer training and games.

The light at the end of the tunnel during his recovery, he said, was knowing that the transplant had gifted him "more time" with his young family.

"I also don't have to go to the hospital three times a week for dialysis anymore," he said.

"I'm looking forward to going home to Normanton, where I grew up and my family still lives.

"I haven't been able to go home since 2022 as they don't have dialysis available and travelling there was too far.

"Knowing that I can now go home to see my family really helped me to remain positive."

The opening of the North Queensland Kidney Transplant service in Townsville in 2025 had real potential to benefit local renal patients and enable more people to consider kidney transplants.

Being closer to home, it would also give young local families the opportunity to visit which may help patients with their recovery, he said.

"Being closer to home and not having to travel to a big city could help patients who are anxious about travelling to Brisbane," Kerryn said.

"Having to fly to Brisbane was not possible for my family when I had my transplant. We were lucky as my wife's mum and sister were able to help us with the kids.

"The kids didn't seem to be affected immediately, but after my return to Mackay my boy had a bit of anxiety thinking his dad was going to go away again."



Fully digital health service improves delivery of care



Mackay Hospital and Health Service (HHS) leapt into the age of digital healthcare with the completion of the ieMR (Integrated Electronic Medical Record) rollout across all rural sites in the region.

On 18 March, Clermont Hospital became the last of the Mackay HHS rural sites to replace all paper charts and store patient records online. This followed Dysart Hospital in February.

Mackay HHS became the seventh fully digital health service in Queensland following rollouts across Metro South, Children's, Gold Coast, West Moreton, Sunshine Coast and Townsville HHS.

Mackay Base Hospital went live with ieMR in January 2014 and was one of the first hospitals in the state to come online with the project.

Wave one of the rural site implementation started with Sarina Hospital in April 2024, making it the first rural hospital in Queensland to be born digital, followed by

Bowen Hospital in June and Proserpine and Whitsunday Community Health in July.

Wave two included rural sites Collinsville Hospital and Moranbah Hospital in November, Dysart Hospital and Middlemount Community Health Service in February and Clermont Hospital on 18 March.

The Moranbah Hospital, which opened on 26 November 2024, was the second hospital in the Mackay HHS to be born digital after Sarina in April.

"We had a patient with an issue in a rural hospital transferred to our tertiary facility and I was easily able to read the transfer notes from the rural SMO on ieMR. It made for a seamless digital handover that had a speedy positive impact for the patient." – ED physician.

Mackay HHS nursing director of Digital Health Solutions Seana Clarke said the purpose of the project was to make medical records visible across the state.

Digitising medical records improved efficiency and quality and with a high degree of security, it helped ensure clinicians across the health service got the right information at the right place at the right time.

"The rural rollout of ieMR has transformed how we deliver patient care throughout the Mackay HHS," Seana said.

"As a fully digital health service, staff across all eight facilities can capture and analyse patient data in real-time, integrate medical devices into digital workflows and improve service delivery for both our patients and our health colleagues," Seana said.

"Rolling out the ieMR into the Mackay HHS rural sites has helped close the digital gap between Mackay hospital and its rural sites and improved patient care, increasing accessibility to patient records across Queensland."

Collinsville Hospital went live on November 6, making it the 19th hospital in Queensland to roll out in ieMR in 2024.



Post-op service celebrates first anniversary

A busy hospital team helping improve timely care, enhancing patient experience and reducing pressure on the emergency department has celebrated 12 months of service.

The Post Operative Discharge Support Service (PODSS) provides telehealth support to post-operative patients within 30 days of discharge.

Since it commenced in March 2024, the service has managed almost 2500 presentations for issues including wound care, pain management, swelling, minor bleeding, scheduling follow-ups and obtaining medical documents.

PODSS clinical nurse consultant Chelsea Presley said 60 per cent of PODSS presentations had been managed by nurses over the phone with 25 per cent seen in the PODSS Rapid Access Clinic (RAC).

This was helping keep patients out of the ED and ensured they had shorter wait times for post-operative care.

"Essentially we look after patients who've had public surgery within our region and are having complications, problems, concerns or

have questions, so PODSS becomes the first point of contact to help them navigate their recovery," Chelsea said.

"It's streamlining their care beyond discharge and supporting their recovery. We provide information and reassurance in regard to pain, dressings and wound care, as well as follow-up appointments and general advice."

"We are primarily a phone-based rapid access service (RAS) with a non-bookable rapid access clinic (RAC) that is available daily for urgent patient assessment and management."

Since PODSS was implemented, the percentage of clinically avoidable ED presentations for post-operative patients who were within 30 days of surgery had more than halved, Chelsea said.

"We've had some wonderful feedback, also including that 98 per cent of patients using PODSS reported that their concerns were addressed in a timely manner and 97 per cent reported that it had actually improved their patient experience."

To meet demand for post-operative support care, the PODSS hours had also been extended and staff numbers increased.

Post-operative patients were visited by the PODSS nursing team prior to discharge from hospital and provided with a contact phone number for any queries or concerns about their recovery, Chelsea said.

PODSS is now piloting a trial with the Queensland Ambulance Service where the transport of patients within 30 days of surgery and clinically stable are referred to PODSS and directly managed by the service, thereby avoiding the emergency department.



Post Operative Discharge Support Service's clinical nurse consultant Christine Cunial, nursing director Perioperative and Ambulatory Care Lachlan Frank and clinical nurse consultant Chelsea Presley.



Attitude of gratitude supports physical recovery after stroke

Garreth Plumley admits life has “thrown him a few curveballs” in the last six months.

The 55-year-old Mackay man spent seven weeks in Mackay Base Hospital after suffering a stroke in early June, which left him paralysed on his left-hand side.

He had recently finished radiation treatment in Townsville after having a cancerous growth removed from his neck, when he woke during the night on June 6 with a very dry mouth and strange tingling in his leg and arm.

Early the next morning, he realised “something really wasn’t right” when he was unable to walk and couldn’t squeeze a fist or lift his arm.

He knew immediately these were symptoms that he could be having a stroke.

“It was surreal. I was thinking, ‘this can’t be happening to me, this happens to other people,’” Garreth said.

“I knew the signs of a stroke – FAST (Face drooping, Arm weakness, Speech difficulties and Time to call emergency services), but when it happens to you, you are almost in denial.”

He was taken by ambulance to the Mackay Base Hospital Emergency Department (ED), where tests and a CT scan quickly confirmed the diagnosis.

Garreth was fortunate that this timely medical intervention proved life-saving and

also played a crucial role in his recovery from paralysis.

After a second CT two days later, he was admitted to the stroke ward for two weeks. He began daily sessions with a physiotherapist and an occupational therapist, focusing on regaining motor control through neuroplasticity which is the brain’s ability to rewire itself.

“The team in the ED and the stroke unit were just wonderful. I cannot praise the OTs and physios highly enough for their attention and care in my recovery. I was just blown away by the medical attention I received,” he said.

“I’ve had to start from the very beginning and learn to walk again as the stroke killed off so many cells in my brain.”

Garreth was moved to a rehabilitation ward and spent the next five weeks working hard to make steady progress and get out of the wheelchair.

He describes the stroke as “life-changing” and said the mental battle was just as tough as the physical one. Discipline and determination were critical elements in his recovery journey.

“You have to stay positive – at least once a day I had a little moment because it was an absolute emotional rollercoaster,” Garreth said.

“I did think for a little while ‘why me?’. But then you have a look around and see how much worse off other people are,” he said.

“I’m certainly one of the younger stroke patients, but regardless, if you don’t stay positive, you will be in a world of pain.”

Excited but still nervous, he finally left the hospital and went home on Friday 1 August, ironically just days before National Stroke Week began.

Cultivating gratitude for his medical care and many other “small things” had also helped support his psychological resilience and physical recovery after the stroke.

“I’m grateful for my family, for my employer who continues to support me and even the fact that the stroke affected my left side instead of my right as I’m right-handed – the day-to-day struggles could have been so much more difficult,” he said.

“I’m so very grateful to the Base Hospital ED team, to the nurses and doctors on the ward and the OTs and physios – there’s so much to be grateful for. You have to focus on the positives as part of your recovery.

“I’m here, I’m still smiling and I’m making progress – it could have been so much worse.”

Family grateful to team for care which saved premmie bub

Little Hudson McCann's first birthday in April triggered mixed emotions for his parents, Kellie and James.



The Mackay couple are proud of their happy, cheeky and mischievous son and also very grateful he overcame such incredible odds after what was a terrifying birth ordeal.

Kellie was 34 weeks and five days pregnant on April 16 2024, when she noticed decreased foetal movement.

"Hudson was quite the active baby in the womb which is why not feeling him moving that day was quite scary," she said.

"It was a mother's instinct something wasn't right some would say."

Kellie was rushed into the Mackay Base Hospital operating theatre for an emergency caesarean when a strong foetal heartbeat couldn't be detected.

In what his mother remembers as an absolute whirlwind, Hudson James McCann was delivered prematurely by emergency caesarean at 6.55pm. He weighed just 2.45kg (5lb 4oz), wasn't breathing and had no heartbeat.

"James and I were both very scared that we were going to lose our baby boy," Kellie said.

"A day that was meant to be one of the happiest of new parents' lives was definitely a terrifying one for us."

The tiny baby had to be resuscitated by the midwife and surgical team and had sustained a moderate hypoxic brain injury. He required

urgent specialist treatment in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) in Townsville and was flown 400km north by the Royal Flying Doctors early the next morning accompanied by his distressed father James.

Due to blood loss in her surgery, Kellie was unable to be transferred to be with her son until two days later.

"Hudson's prognosis was very unclear for probably the first week due to him being put on a cooling mat and then he needed an MRI to determine the extent of the inflammation on his brain due to the hypoxic event," she said.

Kellie didn't hold her newborn son until he was five days old. The family spent seven days in the NICU and another five days in the Special Care Nursery (SCN) in Townsville.

Eleven days after his traumatic birth, Hudson and Kellie were transferred back to Mackay Base Hospital where he had to spend another 14 days in the SCN.

They visited their son two to three times a day and once Hudson was properly breastfeeding, every three hours. He was discharged from hospital on 10 May, ironically two days before Mother's Day and 12 days before his original due date.

Kellie describes Hudson as a very happy little boy who is meeting all his milestones for his corrected age.

"His physio and occupational therapists are gobsmacked by just how well he has come along with his growing and developing," Kellie said.

"He is such a busy, inquisitive and curious child. He is cheeky and an absolute pleasure to parent."

It has been an eye-opening journey for the McCann family.



"A big thank you to all of the staff involved in the delivery and care of Hudson that night, especially the ones involved in his resuscitation," Kellie said.

"Their quick thinking and actions saved our boy's life and we are forever grateful."





| Kirsty Dolphin, clinical nurse midwife and gestational diabetes educator

Versatility of rural role appeals to midwife

Proserpine midwife Kirsty Dolphin was deeply moved to win an award named in honour of a former colleague and mentor.

Kirsty was presented with the Isabelle Mullen Memorial Award at Proserpine Hospital on International Day of the Midwife. She was incredibly proud to receive the award in 2025 after Isabelle had such an impact on her, both personally and professionally.

"I was lucky enough to work with Isabelle many years ago while she was still working here," she said.

"This award means a lot to me as she was an amazing, knowledgeable midwife, with a kind, big heart and a very strong work ethic; she was a wonderful teacher."

As a clinical nurse midwife and gestational diabetes educator at Proserpine Hospital, Kirsty loves the versatility of her role and the ability to help and make a difference to women's lives in the small rural town.

"I love the care we can provide women and their families in our community," she said.

"We get to know them during their pregnancies, provide care in labour and then postnatally, including home visits.

"We are a midwifery-led unit which provides us with an amazing level of autonomy, but we are supported by an amazing team of doctors who share our woman-centred focus."

Originally from Port Lincoln in South Australia, Kirsty started her career at Mackay Base Hospital as a graduate registered nurse in January 2008 before moving to Proserpine six months later.

She completed her Diploma of Midwifery at CQUniversity Mackay and a Graduate Certificate in Diabetes Education at Southern Cross University.

Seeing the smiles on the women and their family's faces when they welcomed their new little person into the world makes her role incredibly rewarding.

"Being able to share such an incredible time in people's lives is an absolute privilege," Kirsty said.

"Within my gestational diabetes educator role, I love being able to provide the women with education and support to help them navigate through their pregnancy and make it as easy as possible for them."

Kirsty prides herself on delivering passionate care and attention to detail, prioritising making people's experiences memorable and meaningful.

In her spare time, she enjoys "hanging out with my kids, friends and enjoying all the Whitsundays has to offer", she said.

"I would eventually like to expand my role in GDM (Gestational Diabetes Mellitus) to possibly outside of Proserpine Hospital and be able to provide support for pregnant women in other communities as well," she said.

Congratulations on your award win, Kirsty!

Credentials advance lactation care for local community



Three rural hospital staff have embraced the opportunity to advance their skills and make an even greater difference in the lives of local families.

Proserpine Hospital midwives Angela Kay, Rebecca Jennings and midwife unit manager

Nickey Pilgrim have added International Board-Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLC) to their list of credentials.

As lactation consultants, they provide essential support to new parents with breastfeeding basics and guiding them through the early days, but these new qualifications also equip them with extra skills and knowledge for tackling more complex challenges.

IBCLCs work collaboratively with prenatal and postpartum providers to help new families meet their breastfeeding goals. They are important members of the maternal-child health team, specialising in breastfeeding care.

To meet IBCLC criteria, the three midwives had to meet rigorous eligibility requirements and pass an examination which assesses knowledge in breastfeeding management. They must now recertify every five years to maintain their premier global credential in the lactation care profession.

The midwives continue to work as part of a team alongside child health nurses Jo and Ruth to support and empower Whitsunday families.

Angela, Nickey and Rebecca also deliver breastfeeding and childbirth classes to expectant parents at the Proserpine Hospital.



Guard of honour farewells long-time patient

After almost two years in hospital, Dan Honnery finally went home on Friday 6 June 2025.

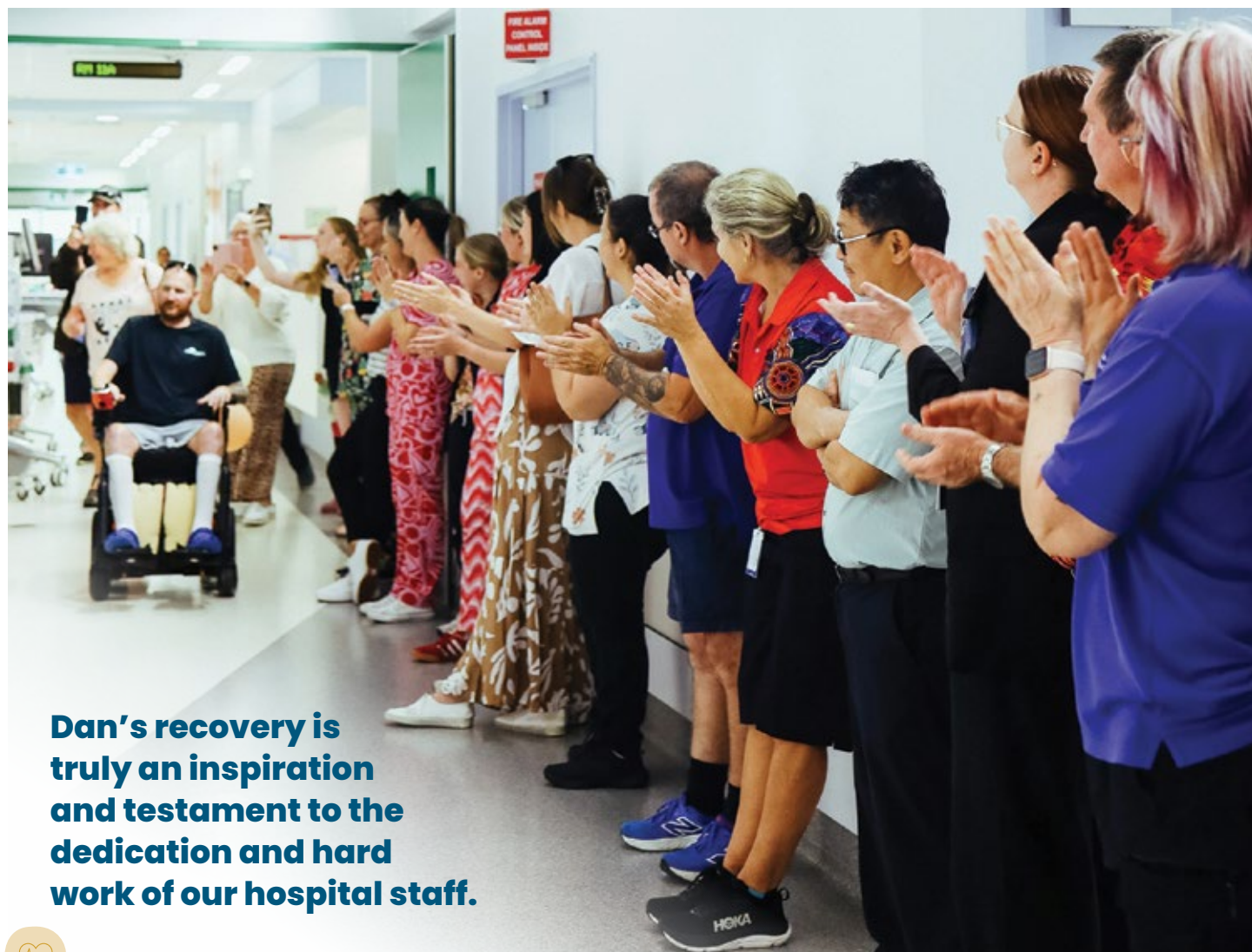
Applause and cheers rang out across Mackay Base Hospital as he was discharged after 581 days spent battling a rare and debilitating illness.

Dan, 45, spent more than nine months in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and 12 months in the F0 rehabilitation ward since his admission to hospital on November 3, 2023.

He was diagnosed with Guillain-Barre syndrome, a severe and life-threatening autoimmune disorder where the body's immune system attacks the nervous system causing paralysis and long-term, life-changing complications.

Staff from throughout the hospital formed a guard of honour to farewell a patient who has had one of the longest stays in our hospital, to acknowledge his resilience and incredible story of survival.

It marked the beginning of another journey for Dan, one that requires ongoing support, rehabilitation and adaption to a new reality of life at home in Collinsville.



Dan's recovery is truly an inspiration and testament to the dedication and hard work of our hospital staff.



Cruise ship patient's survival an "absolute miracle"

What was supposed to be a relaxing family getaway in paradise turned suddenly into a terrifying medical emergency at sea for Joshua Gul.

Joshua Gul and his wife Nancy in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at Mackay Base Hospital.

The 55-year-old Buderim man was one of 16 family members who boarded the Carnival cruise ship Encounter in Brisbane on 24 June, excited for a four-night adventure to the magical Whitsundays to celebrate his father's 80th birthday.

On day two, the holiday at sea took a very unexpected and serious turn.

When the cruise ship was anchored offshore at Airlie Beach, Joshua awoke at 6am with radiating pain in his left hand and arm, which grew quickly in intensity.

His wife Nancy, was immediately alarmed and alerted family members next door.

"Thankfully, they quickly rang the onboard medical team who arrived at our cabin within five minutes," she said.

"When the doctor and nurses arrived, he was already unconscious and had gone into cardiac arrest - they had to start resuscitation immediately; it all happened so fast."

The team performed CPR on Joshua for 30 minutes as his wife and 16-year-old daughter stood by in what she describes as a "terrifying ordeal".

In a complex and well-coordinated emergency transfer, he was taken from the cruise ship to shore by shuttle boat and then by ambulance to Proserpine Hospital.

He was medically evacuated by rescue helicopter from Proserpine Hospital to

Mackay Base Hospital. Joshua was placed in an induced coma and spent the next five days being ventilated. He was so gravely ill, his family decided to leave the cruise; his parents hired a car to be by his bedside and other family members followed, catching a maxi taxi from Airlie Beach to Mackay to lend Nancy their support.

On day seven in the hospital and two days after he finally woke up, Joshua underwent an angiogram at the Cardiac Catheter Lab (CCL) at the hospital. This identified the potential blockage and narrowing of blood vessels in his heart as the cause of his cardiac episode.

"We've been extremely impressed by the level of care he's had here in Mackay – it's exceeded our expectations," Nancy said.

"It's a very good team in the ICU, they are very efficient. Everyone from the paramedics on the helicopter right through to the doctors and nurses in the ICU and Cardiac Care Unit (CCU) has been great and the communication with us has been excellent."

Nancy said the family appreciated the knowledge and support of staff through such a stressful ordeal, particularly that of Dr Levi Atamanchuk in the CCU and Dr Stephen Luke and Dr Ashwin Sunil Wadwani in the ICU.

"The paramedics were very reassuring that the Mackay teams were the absolute best

and that my husband was in very good hands here," she said.

"That gave me some positivity in what was a very dark time for us."

Nancy considers it an "absolute miracle" that her husband of 24 years woke up in the hospital without any cognitive impairment.

"Joshua was very lucky in what was an incredibly unlucky situation for us," she said.

"If this cardiac episode had happened at home and not on the cruise ship in the Whitsundays, Joshua wouldn't have had such rapid access to care like he did, and he probably wouldn't have made it."

Mackay Base Hospital ICU director Stephen Luke said Joshua's cardiac ordeal offshore highlighted how crucial a fast and well-coordinated medical intervention was.

"CPR and defibrillation on the cruise ship truly saved his life," Dr Luke said.

"We were all really excited to see Josh wake up without serious damage to his brain. We're also very fortunate to have such a great partnership with our cardiologists," he said.

Joshua hasn't ruled out a return to a cruise ship holiday after he recovers.

"I'll be back though; I was having a great time on the ship ... but I was on a shuttle boat, had my first ride in a helicopter as well as an ambulance trip – and I missed all of it as I was unconscious," Joshua said.





Mackay Base Hospital gastroenterologist Dr Bob Anderson, former Mackay HHS Chief Executive Susan Gannon and Executive Director Operations Mackay Jenny Farley at the launch.

Mackay Hospital and Health Service

Let us know if you're not going to show

Can't make your appointment?

Call the phone number on your appointment letter

Respond to your SMS appointment notification

Missed appointment cost prompts HHS call for action

A new campaign launched by Mackay Hospital and Health Service (HHS) is encouraging people to 'Let us know if you're not going to show'.

The initiative, which encourages people to think twice before skipping an appointment at the specialist outpatient department or at rural sites, was launched by former Mackay HHS Chief Executive Susan Gannon, Executive Director of Operations Mackay Jenny Farley and Dr Bob Anderson at the Mackay Base Hospital on Friday 8 July.

Missed appointments cost us all and people were not only putting their own health at risk by failing to attend specialist appointments, but it also meant others in need of specialist appointments were waiting longer to be seen, Jenny said.

"We want to reduce the amount of time people are waiting for a specialist appointment, so we're asking the

community to help us deliver that care sooner with 'Please let us know if you're not going to show,' she said.

Mackay HHS sends SMS messages and letters in a bid to remind people about appointments.

"We are always working to reduce our waiting lists and improve our service, and we are appealing to the community to play their role by attending or cancelling appointments," Jenny said.

"Missed appointments cost us all. They are a health risk for the individual who doesn't attend an appointment, and they mean others are unable to access timely health services through the lack of attendance of others.

"Our message to everyone is 'Let us know if you're not going to show'.

20,204 appointments were missed in 2024 across the health service (including at rural facilities and units in Mackay)

11,985 appointments were missed at the MBH specialist outpatient department (an average of 230 every week)

9490 outpatient appointments were missed from 1 January to 31 May 2025 including:

- **Paediatric Development** – average of 10.2 per cent or 104 appointments a month
- **Orthopaedics General** – average of 8.1 per cent or 79 appointments a month

- **General Surgery** – average of 7.2 per cent or 70 appointments a month

- **Gynaecology** – average of 14 per cent or 69 appointments a month

- **Paediatric Medicine** – average of 10.5 per cent or 58 appointments a month.



Let's Celebrate MHHS People Awards

In July, staff gathered to celebrate our dedicated individuals and teams and recognise their contributions to healthcare across the region.

A number of awards are presented to acknowledge commitments to clinical excellence, patient care, and innovation.

One of the highlights of the night is the presentation of the CE Values Award, which went to **Dr Wojciech Szubert, staff specialist Obstetrics and Gynaecology.**

Dr Szubert is well-known for his tireless work in advancing care for women with chronic pelvic pain and endometriosis.

Since joining Mackay HHS, he has been the driving force behind the establishment of the Mackay Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Service (MEPPS), delivering care which previously required women to travel to Brisbane or Townsville.

Wojciech has developed collaborations across departments and specialties, advocating for improved service delivery both locally and at the national level.

His patients feel heard, valued and supported, and his colleagues describe him as kind, humble and an inspiring mentor.

His impact on healthcare is already profound and his vision continues to shape a stronger, more inclusive health service for women in our region.

Let's Celebrate our People – Award Winners

• Clinical Excellence Award:

Vicki Braithwaite – Patient Safety Clinical nurse consultant

• Non-Clinical Excellence Award:

Natalie Williams – Acting director of Strategy & Planning

• Golden Boot Award:

Breen Austin – Operational Services in Collinsville

• Innovation and Productivity Award:

Emma Hess – Nursing Director Patient Flow

• Closing the Gap Award:

Charmaine Pangi – Advanced Indigenous Health Worker, Bowen

• Volunteer of the Year Award:

Cheree Condon – Mackay Hospital Foundation volunteer

• People's Choice Award:

Palliative Care Team – a team who have touched the lives of so many



Dr Wojciech Szubert, staff specialist Obstetrics and Gynaecology



Golden Boot a fitting recognition for three decades of dedication

Breen Austin has been a humble and hardworking figure in the Collinsville community for more than three decades.



Collinsville MPHS wards person Breen Austin.

As the local X-ray operator and wards person at the Collinsville Multi-Purpose Health Service (MPHS), Breen's passion for the community and knowledge of the healthcare facility run deep.

He was presented with the Golden Boot Award at the Let's Celebrate MHHS People Awards, a fitting recognition for his dedication, which goes above and beyond just supporting the small rural health service.

Breen grew up in Cairns and attended school in Townsville before moving to Collinsville to work as a painter at the local power station. When it closed, a six-week stint backfilling for an injured ward's person at the small local healthcare facility in December 1988 turned into 37 years of service.

His role has evolved well beyond traditional duties, and Breen enjoys the variety of his work and the ever-changing range of tasks.

As the X-ray operator, Breen helps locals access crucial diagnostic imaging without having to travel long distances. His service doesn't end when the workday does — Breen is known to step in at a moment's notice, even on his days off. He also leads

patient handling training for staff, sharing his expertise with a positive attitude and unwavering commitment.

From managing hot water systems and medical gases to contaminated waste and cleaning the aged care ward, Breen's responsibilities are as varied as they are vital. Other duties sometimes include the daily mail run and medical collection for the local pharmacy.

His colleagues consider Breen an all-round team player and a dependable presence; his long knowledge of the facility has made him the 'go-to person' for everything from finding water mains to switches — and he always answers with a helpful smile.

Teamwork among the staff at the Collinsville MPHS was vital; respect and courtesy were important and always given to colleagues, even during times of high demand.

What keeps Breen going at Collinsville after nearly four decades? It's simple: the people at the heart of the small mining town.

"I love interacting with the aged care residents," he said.

"Telling them a joke that brightens their day, genuinely learning about their lives — that's the part of the job that means the most."

One memorable moment he recalls is when a child he'd X-rayed weeks earlier ran up to him in town, excited to share that their arm had healed.

"Working in a small community, everyone gets to know you and the work that you have done for them," he said.

"It's so amazing to have that community appreciation."

Breen was shocked to be nominated for the Golden Boot Award at the annual staff awards.

"Winning it was very surprising, but I'm thrilled to receive the honour," he said.

"I enjoyed the awards night in Mackay and the crowd support; it was a great atmosphere."

Congratulations Breen and thank you for all you do for your colleagues and the Collinsville community.



50
YEARS

Five decades of service to nursing and community

A 50-year nursing career at Mackay Base Hospital is a testament to Florence (Flo) Pitt's dedication, resilience and passion for people and healthcare.

She has witnessed firsthand the evolution of nursing practices from hospital-based training in the mid-1970s to the integration of technology and digital health in modern care.

Flo's career has morphed as much as the Mackay Base Hospital itself. She trained onsite as an enrolled nurse, worked in the emergency department, and then moved to outpatients, where she stayed for 30 years. She has worked in elective bookings for the last 15 years.

As one of eight children born and raised in Mackay in a Torres Strait Islander family, Flo started at the hospital straight out of high school.

"We didn't have so many career options back then and I could either go admin or the medical field," Flo said.

"I couldn't see myself working as a receptionist, so I applied and started my hospital training in 1974.

"It's been my whole heart; it's been wonderful and I can't imagine working in any other field."

Flo started her career in a different time; when stockings and starched white dresses were 'so stiff they stood up by themselves', staff were addressed by their titles including 'matron and sister', there was a focus on

precision and detail in tasks such as bed-making, and hospital staff rode to work on bikes or lived in quarters onsite.

"When I first started everything was done on paper. Appointments were booked into diaries, emails were non-existent and there wasn't a computer in sight," she said.

"Sometimes I sit and think to myself, who would have thought when I first started that today I would be sitting in front of a computer doing work?"

Processes, paperwork and patients have changed considerably in 50 years. Long gone were concertina cards packed with patient details, folders full of medical records and bulldog clips of referrals stored under desks filed alphabetically. Today, records are all digitised.

Advances in technology and digital health had expanded the scope of nursing practice, Flo said, allowing for care in various specialities and settings, including community-based care.

"There are definitely a lot more nurse specialities now, but I'm quite pleased really that when I was in outpatients I got to work with so many different people across so many specialities," Flo said.

Flo has many fond memories of working alongside practitioners, nurses and

operational staff who she considers colleagues as well as friends. Respect, rapport and teamwork were always important in the hospital, she said.

"I recall getting a phone call at home one day from Dr Peter de Jersey. He was leaving and just wanted to thank me for all I'd done for him over the years which was just unheard of," Flo said.

"I have worked with so many wonderful doctors, including Dr Davies and Dr Vigna, and I recall often reminding a young Dr Westcott about ensuring his handwriting was legible when he first started here."

Flo attended the Length of Service recognition event at the Base Hospital on 3 June to collect her 50-year Length of Service pin and gift. She enjoyed reuniting and reminiscing with colleagues, including Heather Skien, Dr John Hadok and Dr Adrian Westcott.

"It had gotten to the point where the children of the children I've cared for were coming back to have babies and they'd say, 'Are you still here?'" Flo said.

"But I tell them that I've been happy and fulfilled here or I wouldn't have stayed for 50 years."





From left, Director of Nursing and Operations Perioperative and Ambulatory Care Samantha Sanders, Clinical Director General Surgery Dr Adrian Westcott, Clinical Nurse Consultant – NSQIP Emma Jacobson and A/Nursing Director Lachlan Frank.

Base adopts world-leading surgical improvement program

A program with a proven track record of improving the quality of care for surgical patients has been introduced at Mackay Base Hospital and the clinical team overseeing the initiative is excited about its potential.

The National Surgical Quality Improvement Program (NSQIP) was developed by the American College of Surgeons (ACS) in the early 90s to monitor the surgical care of veterans.

The local project is led by Surgeon Champion Dr Adrian Westcott and clinical nurse consultant Emma Jacobson, who was appointed to the role of Mackay NSQIP Surgical Clinical Reviewer in July 2024.

"This is a program trusted around the world to check and improve on the safety and quality of surgical care and it has now been rolled out in 24 hospitals in Queensland," Emma said.

"I review surgical patient charts to check the patient recovered well in hospital and speak to them over the phone to assess how they recovered at home after surgery.

"That's the great thing about NSQIP, I'm not just looking at a chart; but I'm also calling the patient and completing an over-the-phone assessment of how they recovered after surgery so I can really get an accurate portrayal of what's happened to them postoperatively.

"This is not just about the surgery itself. It's about making sure that across the entire spectrum of our patients' journey, we are providing the best care possible."

Emma has undergone intensive training to use the program and cases are chosen for review via a sophisticated selection process to ensure broad sampling from all surgical specialties.

"I am working towards a goal of reviewing 40 cases every eight days and I am looking to see how the patients are going between 30 and 90 days after their surgery," she said.

"I'll be looking at their pre-operative risk factors too which is an important predictor of surgical outcomes. Caring for someone who is elderly or chronically ill is very different to caring for a healthy 18-year-old so we need to consider that in our quality improvements.

"I also ask some questions about their experience. Questions such as: 'Did they have the opportunity to discuss the risks with their surgeon prior to surgery?' and 'Did they receive information about their procedure and what to expect afterwards?'"

Emma started capturing data for surgeries at the end of September 2024 and is looking forward to the provision of benchmarking reports going forward.

She also said she had a positive response to the process from patients.

"Most people are really excited to either talk about their surgical experience or to know that someone cares how they're going, even after they've maybe been discharged from a post-operative clinic list," Emma said.

"The Post Operative Discharge Support Service (PODSS) was created thanks to NSQIP data from the STARS hospital in Brisbane, identifying a need for this kind of service for patients after surgery. The PODSS model of care has now been rolled out across multiple hospitals across the state including Mackay.

"Our patient information brochures are the next quality improvement project we are working on. We want to make them easier to read and more accessible for patients online."

ACS NSQIP Fast Facts:

- It's estimated that between 200 and 500 complications are prevented annually in NSQIP hospitals.
- Over 850 hospitals participate in NSQIP around the world.
- MBH is sampling cases from obstetrics, gynaecology, orthopaedics, general surgery (breast, endocrine and colorectal) and urology.
- Read more about NSQIP at www.clinicalexcellence.qld.gov.au/programs-initiatives/national-surgical-quality-improvement-program



Fisherman thanks Bowen team's response to emergency



Justin and Pamela Stokes of Bowen.



Bowen Hospital emergency department admin officer Katie Lingard and registered nurse Amy Cunningham, clinical nurse Tracey Petersen and registered nurse Katrina Smith.

Justin Stokes considers himself extremely lucky that the weather was too rough for him to "even wet a fishing line" on August 3. It probably saved his life.

The 70-year-old Bowen retiree was about 50km offshore, one of three people in a 26-foot boat at night, when he started to feel very unwell and light-headed.

"We were already headed back to shore because of the weather and I wasn't feeling great when the boat began taking on water; the bilge pump couldn't keep up as the waves were coming over the front of the boat," he said.

"My son and his mate had to start bailing. It was all a bit stressful."

After the trio urgently radioed Volunteer Marine Rescue (VMR) and advised them of the situation and that he had a stent inserted in his heart in 2023, still had two blockages and was feeling increasingly ill, Justin was transferred aboard the rescue vessel back to shore.

He declined transport by ambulance and instead was met at the boat ramp by his wife, Pamela who took him directly to Bowen Hospital.

"I didn't feel well, but I didn't think it was going to be a bad problem or issue," Justin said.

"At the hospital, I told them I was starting to get worse chest pain, so I was taken in to ED and had just sat on the bed - that's the last thing I remember before I passed out."

An after-hours admin officer and a graduate nurse triaged Justin quickly and took him directly to the resuscitation bay. He was being connected to monitoring when he collapsed unconscious.

Bowen clinical nurse educator Tracey Petersen said the ED team responded to the resus call button to find Justin unresponsive and not breathing and went straight into advanced life support.

"Within a minute, Justin's airway was secured, we had commenced CPR and the senior medical officer on duty was going through the steps to deliver a shock," she said.

"Within one minute of that first shock, he was back and talking to staff."

An ECG showed Justin had a serious heart attack, and plans were made immediately to transfer Justin to Mackay Base Hospital by rescue helicopter under the care of the cardiology team.

"I woke up while they were getting me ready for the flight to Mackay. Within two hours, I was at Mackay Base Hospital; I don't remember the flight at all other than getting on and landing," he said.

Justin spent the next four days in the Cardiac Care Unit (CCU) with serious swelling and fluid around his heart. Investigations and his treatment by an MBH cardiologist are ongoing.

Justin said he was incredibly impressed by the hospital and dedicated staff's response to his life-threatening situation.

"I couldn't wish for better treatment - they did a fantastic job to bring me back because for a few minutes there I wasn't of this world," he said.

"I don't think they get enough praise - you only ever hear the negative stuff about our health system.

"I cannot fault the staff in Bowen or Mackay Base Hospital - they were all just amazing and very caring."

Wife Pam appreciated the kindness and consideration shown to her by Bowen Hospital staff during such a stressful situation.

"They really deserve every praise - Justin's heart is only beating today because of them," she said.

Tracey believes the quick actions of the Bowen Hospital ED team that Sunday morning gave Justin a chance he might not have had otherwise.

"I honestly believe without the after-hours admin officer and quick triage, he would have arrested in the waiting room and the outcome could have been very different," she said.

"The entire Bowen team deserves praise for their quick response and calm, systematic approach to what was a very stressful situation."





Trainees graduate with big dreams for next step in healthcare careers

Graduates Madison Tatow, Joni Thompson, Imogen Joseph, Isabella Coe, Maleek Brennan, Grace Ridge and Olivia Jones.

A graduation ceremony at Mackay Base Hospital for seven Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students marked the next big step in turning their healthcare career dreams into a reality.

The teens completed an 18-month traineeship across various departments at the hospital as part of the Budyubari Bidiyiri Kebi Stapal or Big Dream, Small Steps Program.

In a ceremony at the hospital on Friday 22 August, the students celebrated with their families and were presented with their Certificate III qualifications in either Health Services Assistance or Allied Health Assistance.

The 2025 graduates were congratulated on beginning their traineeships.

"Each trainee has gained valuable skills, insight and experience in the healthcare industry while still at high school and working in various units across the Mackay Base Hospital," Former Mackay HHS Chief Executive Susan Gannon said.

"The aim of the program is to build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce to better reflect the community we care for."

Mackay HHS Executive Director People and Culture, Peta-Maree France, said the traineeship gave the students 'on-the-job'

experience and helped them develop foundational skills, knowledge and practical experience working in the health sector.

"We congratulate these graduates for their incredible courage and commitment as they transition from high school students to the next generation of our healthcare workforce," she said.

St Patrick's College student Maleek Brennan said the traineeship had cemented their decision to study and eventually work as a nurse practitioner.

"I've had great support from the staff during my traineeship and I have now started the Assistant in Nursing (AIN) program while I am working in G2 at the Base Hospital," Maleek said.

"I intend to apply for a Bachelor of Nursing and Bachelor of Behavioural Science (Psychology) at QUT and eventually hope to work in mental health."

Holy Spirit College Year 12 student Grace Ridge said she enjoyed working in the Women's Health Unit for six months as part of her traineeship and was fortunate to witness two babies being born.

"It's really been eye-opening and a unique experience, giving us good insight into the profession; the staff here have been very welcoming," Grace said.

The 2025 Big Dream, Small Steps graduating trainees are:

- **Maleek Brennan** – Certificate III Allied Health Assistance
- **Isabella Coe** – Certificate III Health Services Assistance
- **Olivia Jones** – Certificate III Health Services Assistance
- **Grace Ridge** – Certificate III Health Services Assistance
- **Joni Thompson** – Certificate III Health Services Assistance
- **Madison Tatow** – Certificate III Health Services Assistance
- **Imogen Joseph** – Certificate III Health Services Assistance

The Big Dream, Small Steps Program is a collaborative effort that provides a network of support for students. It is funded through Metro North's Deadly Start program who has partnered with registered training organisation (RTO) Connect 'n' Grow to deliver the training.





Dr Robert Anderson, gastroenterologist

Blood test to revolutionise the diagnosis process for coeliac disease

A revolutionary blood test developed by a Mackay Hospital and Health Service (HHS) gastroenterologist is poised to transform coeliac disease, offering patients a less invasive path to diagnosis.



Mackay HHS gastroenterologist Dr Robert Anderson said the antigen-specific T-cell blood test eliminates the need for patients to undergo a gastrointestinal endoscopy.

"Potentially, you no longer have to do that," Dr Anderson said.

"You can just draw blood and you can measure the immune response in a blood sample. There's no real need to eat gluten and it actually turns out that the immune response in the blood is, if anything, stronger in people who are on a gluten-free diet," he said.

Current diagnosis for the disease requires patients to consume a diet high in gluten prior to having a gastroscopy.

This is often met with resistance by patients due to uncomfortable symptoms experienced like nausea, pain and bloating.

"It's removing a big barrier to them getting a correct diagnosis - an accurate diagnosis for people on a free diet has huge implications," Dr Anderson said.

The test has proved highly successful in a recent clinical trial, with results published in the Journal of Gastroenterology.

Currently progressing through clinical trials, the test is set to revolutionise the diagnostic process, Dr Anderson said.

"The results demonstrate high accuracy of the test for diagnosing coeliac disease," he said.

"The biggest public health issue around coeliac disease is the accurate diagnosis and finding all these people in the community who actually have coeliac disease and then making sure that they get the treatment that we already know about, which is a gluten-free diet."

"The thing that really seems to have resonated with a lot of people around the world, particularly the doctors, is to have a good diagnosis."

Dr Anderson believes the test will also help to identify patients who have been incorrectly diagnosed with the disease.

"The gluten-free diet probably costs around three thousand dollars or more per year, which is extreme," he said.

"You don't go to social events, you mistrust everything and you're burdening the person and the family with psychological issues.

"And (in the case of an incorrect diagnosis) it's unnecessary. This is the other side of the blood test that you can perhaps unravel," he said.

The test also shows potential for diagnosing other autoimmune diseases and conditions involving immune reactions.

Dr Anderson returned from Finland, in September where he was presented with the prestigious Maki Celiac Disease Tampere Prize, an award which acknowledges an individual whose research has made a significant contribution to the fields of coeliac disease and other gluten-induced disease entities.



Health minister tours Sarina Hospital sites

Mackay HHS welcomed Minister for Health and Ambulance Services Tim Nicholls and Member for Mirani Glen Kelly, who toured both the old and new Sarina hospital sites.

Mackay HHS Chief Executive Sean Birgan, Member for Mirani Glen Kelly, Minister for Health and Ambulance Services Tim Nicholls and Mackay Hospital and Health Board Interim Chair Monica McKendry.

During their visit, Minister Nicholls and Mr Kelly viewed plans and demolition works currently underway at the old hospital.

The site is being repurposed to provide a 17-bed transitional healthcare facility designed for patients who have received hospital care and are awaiting further services before discharge.

They also spent time at the new Sarina Hospital, meeting staff and touring the hospital's rehabilitation gym, inpatient unit and emergency department.

Redevelopment of the old hospital site was announced following the opening of the new Sarina Hospital on Brewers Road in April 2024.

Upgrades to the building will provide single, double, triple and quad ensuite inpatient rooms, along with consultation rooms, a rehabilitation gym, a lounge and dining room and a cultural family space.

The project is forecast for completion in 2026.



Sean Birgan, Glen Kelly, senior project manager Travis Bickford and Tim Nicholls.



Demolition works in progress.



Tim Nicholls with Sarina SMO Dr Anneliese Slack.



Tim Nicholls toured the new Sarina Hospital with Sarina staff.



Emergency medicine specialists' certification a milestone for ED

The Mackay Base Hospital Emergency Department (ED) has celebrated a major workforce milestone with four staff recently attaining the highest professional qualifications for emergency medicine.

Signalling a significant strengthening of the department's clinical expertise and leadership capacity, four ED doctors have become FACEMs (Fellows of Australasian College of Emergency Medicine) in the last 12 months, a credential given to doctors who have demonstrated excellence in the field of emergency medicine.

Dr Ajay Venkatesh and Dr Nirindu Weerakoon successfully completed the ACEM Fellowship Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE), which assesses a physician's clinical skills and knowledge.

Dr Rotimi Akinola and Dr Mohamed Ahmed, who joined the Mackay ED as Specialist International Medical Graduates (SIMGs), have also recently completed their fellowship requirements.

Mackay Base Hospital Emergency Department Clinical Director Dr Syed Khadri said having locally based FACEMs was vital to meeting the hospital's ongoing service needs and ensuring high-quality emergency care. It also helped boost training and supervision capacity, enhanced departmental resilience and reflected the HHS's commitment to professional development.

An ED with more FACEMS on staff was viewed as more advanced and well-supported, which could also help attract future trainees, specialists and funding opportunities, he said.

"This 100 per cent result and our four recruits successfully achieving their fellowship is also reflective of their perseverance and dedication despite working in a demanding emergency department," Dr Khadri said.

"They were all recruited as non-specialist ED senior medical officers (SMOs) and are now certified as emergency specialists."

Becoming a FACEM was a career goal for clinicians who wanted to specialise in emergency medicine, offering a pathway to become a consultant emergency physician with high earning potential and opportunities for leadership and professional development.

This "growing our own" FACEM strategy in Mackay was proving vital as it had previously proven challenging to attract and retain specialists to regional areas, Dr Khadri said.

"The barometer for a successful department is an equal emphasis on meeting both the ever-challenging service and staff's academic needs," he said.

"I am incredibly proud to be part of a dedicated multi-disciplinary team in the Emergency Department at Mackay Base Hospital which truly embodies the values of our hospital and health service," he said.



Newest FACEMs on the block are Mackay Base Hospital emergency medicine specialists Dr Nirindu Weerakoon, Dr Ajay Venkatesh, Dr Mohamed Ahmed and Dr Rotimi Akinola.





"To see these people living their best lives and the gratitude they have, that's what makes the job so good."

Donna Contor, clinical nurse consultant organ donation

Donna's dedication leads to wishes fulfilled

An inability to fulfil the final wish of a former patient prompted Mackay Hospital and Health Service (HHS) nurse Donna Contor to undertake specialised training to ensure that didn't happen again.

The clinical nurse consultant for organ donation at Mackay Base Hospital has dedicated many years to supporting those in the region who wish to donate or receive organs.

While managing the process is complex, a previous barrier to donating eye tissue has been removed thanks to Donna's dedication.

"My role involves coordinating any organ donations and looking after the families and potential donors along with going out into the community and raising awareness of organ donation," Donna said.

"I'm out there to champion the cause.

"We had a person whose dying wish was to donate their eyes and we couldn't do it. Had that person been in Brisbane it would have been okay," she said.

"It got my brain ticking over; I was thinking how good it would be to offer that to local residents."

Donna responded to an expression of interest for a scholarship from DonateLife, who manage organ and tissue donation statewide and she was successful.

"I went to the tissue bank at Coopers Plains to get more training," Donna said.

"I think it's important for this area. There are some people who may only be able to donate their eye tissue and now we can ensure that wish is fulfilled."

Donna was initially the only person based in the regions able to perform the delicate surgery, but there are now three more staff in regional areas undertaking the same training.

While the role is a challenging one, Donna said the rewards are worth it.

"I'll be at community events and someone will come up to me and tell me they received a kidney, or a lung transplant and some of those people go on to do things with me," Donna said.

"To see these people living their best lives and the gratitude they have, that's what makes the job so good.

"My work is mostly with the donor families, consenting, looking after them and their relative. They give me strength and if we can offer a donation that has a positive outlook in the end, the fact they are helping people...it's hard to explain how people go from their lowest point to a positive place.

"Seeing that resilience, that's the best part of my job and living in Mackay, you often bump into them around town and it's a unique

relationship. You're in their world at such an intense time."

Statistics show that eight out of ten Queenslanders are in favour of organ donation, but only 31 per cent of Queenslanders have signed up to become donors.

"Many people just don't get round to taking action on their wishes and we are all busy these days," she said.

"Since the reminder to register came in with driver's licence renewals there has been an increase in registrations, but we still have a long way to go and I guess talking about your death and dying with your family is never something that anyone wants to do."

If you want to register as a donor, Donna has some advice.

"Jump online; it's so simple," she said.

"Registering takes the pressure off the family when they are in mourning; we can say to them, this is what that person wanted."



It takes less than a minute to register as an organ donor.
Find out more at:
www.donatelife.gov.au



You can also donate blood and plasma in Mackay at:
www.lifeblood.com.au/donor-centre/qld/mackay-donor-centre



Deeply personal goal a key motivator for Renee's rehab

At 88, Proserpine local Renee Scott has lived a life stitched together with love, family and crochet hooks. But when she suffered a stroke in August, she found herself unable to move the entire right side of her body and unsure if she'd ever pick up a crochet hook again.

Renee Scott and senior occupational therapist Maddy Miller.



One of Renee's crocheted blankets.

"I noticed my speech was slurring and by the time I got to Proserpine Hospital, within the hour, my whole right side was paralysed," Renee said.

Doctors transferred her to the Mackay Base Hospital stroke unit, where she spent four weeks in acute care before moving to the rehabilitation ward.

For someone as independent and active as Renee, who volunteered for Meals on Wheels for more than 20 years and has lived alone since her husband passed away four years ago, the sudden loss of function and dignity was devastating.

Her rehabilitation was focused on relearning how to stand, walk, dress, and feed herself, but her motivation came from one deeply personal goal: to finish a collection of crocheted blankets for her family.

Renee has crocheted blankets for her nine grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren, each one made with the care only a grandmother's hands can give. It was a

hobby she learned from her mother in early childhood which had more recently kept her mentally active and "her hands moving". The finished product was also always "very satisfying and gives you quite a thrill."

But when she suffered her stroke, she still had one-and-a-half blankets left to finish — the final pieces of a plan she started in 2024 to ensure no future great-grandchild would miss out on "one of Nanny's blankets."

"There are five grandchildren who don't have children yet, so I worked out I needed to make about 15 blankets for them," Renee said.

"I'd crocheted 13-and-a-half — I just needed to finish the last one-and-a-half," she said.

Working closely with Mackay Base Hospital senior occupational therapist Madeline (Maddy) Miller and the rehabilitation team, Renee focused her therapy on regaining movement and coordination in her right side through repetitive exercise and retraining her brain.

She celebrated many rehab milestones, but when her crochet hook proved too thin to manage, Maddy improvised a thicker handle so Renee could grip it more easily.

"Adaptation is a huge part of what we do," Maddy said.

"It's about finding ways for people to keep doing the things that matter most to them. For Renee, that was crocheting," she said.

"We were able to tailor her therapy around that meaningful goal and she's inspired so many other patients on the rehab ward along the way."

Maddy said Renee's progress was testament to her determination, family support and passion to achieve her goal.

"Rehab is never easy and there have been hard days. But Renee's motivation and commitment, even outside therapy sessions, have been incredible.

"The most rewarding part of this job is seeing the joy that it brings people when they're able to return to doing the things that are most meaningful to them."

Renee credits her therapy team for keeping her spirits high and her goals firmly in sight.

"They've been marvellous — every one of them," she said.

"When you're feeling down, they lift you up."

Renee said the key to her recovery had been persistence and purpose.

"You've just got to have fighting spirit," she said.

"Laying down and giving up is too easy. For me, a goal like finishing those blankets gave me something to really look forward to.

"With help from the OTs, I'm on top of the world that my great-grandkids won't miss out on one of Nanny's blankets now."



Moranbah Hospital celebrates first year of care

Staff celebrated new facility's first birthday on 26 November.



Moranbah Hospital ended 2025 by reaching two significant milestones: Celebrating the first year of patient care at the new, state-of-the-art hospital and the first aeromedical transfer from the facility's new helipad.

On 26 November, staff gathered for lunch to celebrate and acknowledge the dedicated hospital and project teams who worked together to deliver a new hospital for the Moranbah community.

CQ Rescue landed at the hospital helipad on 1 December to transfer a patient to Mackay. It marked the culmination of almost a year of construction and planning to ensure the new landing site is safe and fit for purpose.

Director of nursing and facility manager Melanie Hornery recounted the challenges and achievements embraced by our teams to deliver a new era of health care, now and into the future.

"We are incredibly proud of the facility we have today. Seeing our staff come together over the past year, adapting and streamlining processes, has been nothing short of inspiring," Melanie said.

"Navigating our new facility has required a great deal of hard work, good humour and support to ensure we continue providing safe, reliable, and compassionate care."

Melanie expressed a heartfelt thanks to all Moranbah staff across various departments for their vital role in making this hospital work for the Moranbah community.

"This first birthday is just the beginning of our journey. Together, we've built a strong foundation for health care in Moranbah and I'm excited for what we'll achieve in the years ahead."

Care provided at Moranbah Hospital in the past year:

-  **More than 9,000 Emergency Department presentations**
-  **Over 1,500 total inpatient days**
-  **Almost 3,000 medical imaging examinations**
-  **Over 3,000 outpatient appointments**

Congratulations and great work, Moranbah team!



The hospital's newly established helipad is now in operation and was used for the first patient transfer on 1 December.

Clancy falls in love with rural medicine in Moranbah

Medical student Clancy Morgan



Medical student Clancy Morgan has found more than just clinical experience during her rural placement in Moranbah. She's also found a community that feels like home and her career pathway.

Clancy, a James Cook University student completing her second-year placement at Moranbah Hospital, describes her four-week experience in the small mining community as "amazing".

"The doctors and nurses have been incredibly supportive and keen to teach," she said.

Clancy, who is from Mackay, said coming to the small mining town, she expected mostly older patients at the hospital. Instead, she quickly learned the community is filled with young men who often push through illness or injury without complaint.

"This has really opened my eyes to the health behaviours and culture of rural communities, as well as the different work-related injuries we see," she said.

She's gained a keen understanding of rural and mining health dynamics, from supervisors bringing workers in for 'fit for work' assessments to balancing clinical responsibilities with the politics of workplace health.

"I've learned how to keep the focus on caring for the patient while the supervisor stays outside," she said.

Clancy appreciated the trust and independence the clinical team had given her.

"They allow me to do initial assessments, think through differential diagnoses and present my findings directly to the doctor," she said.

"I've also been able to help with triaging patients, which has made me feel more independent and capable in a real clinical environment."

Her hands-on experience has been equally rich, from taking bloods, inserting IVs, running ECGs and even assisting with a plaster on a fractured metacarpal.

Local paramedics have also welcomed her, inviting her to visit their station and join a ride-along.

One standout moment came when a rescue helicopter performed a trial landing on Moranbah Hospital's new helipad.

"People lined the roadside to watch," Clancy said.

"It was such a wholesome moment that really shows how connected the community is."

Outside the hospital, Clancy has also made the most of life in Moranbah.

She's visited the local hotel and golf club and has joined the Moranbah Boxing and Sporting Club for her daily workouts. She's also enjoyed relief from the heat at the community pool, visited local cafés and is planning a trip to nearby Clermont to catch up with friends.

All of these placement experiences, both clinical and personal, have strengthened her passion to eventually pursue a career as a rural generalist.

"There are so many aspects of Moranbah and the hospital that have made me fall even more in love with rural medicine," she said.

"My family has a mining background, so maybe I'm a bit biased, but this placement has been incredibly affirming, and I'm grateful for such a wonderful opportunity."



Dignity the first step in healing on patient journey

Clinical nurse consultant in Patient Flow and Access Services, Kaylene Chetham.



For Kaylene Chetham, dignity has been more than a principle—it's been the cornerstone of a 25-year nursing career devoted to compassionate care and improving the patient journey.

As a clinical nurse consultant in Patient Flow and Access Services at Mackay Base Hospital, Kaylene's path into nursing was anything but conventional.

A self-described "late bloomer", she didn't find her calling until after she had children, when she began working in Toowoomba as a diversional therapist.

"I started in aged care while my kids were little and I found it incredibly rewarding," Kaylene said.

She went on to earn her Certificate IV in Diversional Therapy and took on a role at Laidley Nursing Home, organising meaningful activities for residents, particularly those with dementia.

"It was very rewarding and I developed a lot of knowledge about aged care and the importance of dignity and quality of life."

Moving to Mackay in 2003, and with no diversional therapy roles available, Kaylene took a job as a cleaner at Mackay Base Hospital. But it proved transformative.

"Walking the wards here and talking to nurses, I realised that nursing is what I wanted to do; to truly help people," she said.

She studied nursing while working full-time in the Mental Health Unit as a recreational officer and graduated in 2008, taking on a post-grad position in the Emergency Department at Mackay Base Hospital, where she stayed for a decade.

"I loved working in the ED for the fact that you always had to think on your feet," she said.

"You see patients at the most vulnerable time of their lives when they really need your support.

Kaylene then took on a project role as nurse manager for Rural Step Down, originally a six-month role which turned into a nine-year tenure, building pathways for rural patients to receive care closer to home.

In early 2025, Kaylene took on a challenge of a 90-day "No Delay" project with Patient Flow to streamline discharge processes. This work also helped ensure patients had a safe, supported transition out of the hospital and improved access to the Transit Care Hub.

Now, in another natural career progression, she's leading a new initiative that speaks to the heart of her career-long mission: restoring dignity in the patient journey.

As the project clinical nurse consultant for End PJ Paralysis, Kaylene is spearheading the local campaign to help patients get up, get dressed and get moving. It aims to encourage patients to get out of bed and

dressed in their clothes and where able, start walking.

"End PJ Paralysis is about restoring a patient's independence and dignity; patients should still feel independent and nurses can help support that by encouraging day clothes instead of pyjamas, as well as movement and interaction," she said.

"End PJ Paralysis is a mindset change – hospital doesn't have to mean stuck in bed. We want the opposite, for those suitable patients to get up and take charge of their health."

The project involves ongoing staff, patient and visitor education as well as roadshows to rural sites. The ultimate goal is reduced length of stay, preventing falls and improved patient morale.

With additional support from 'champions' in wards and at rural sites, Kaylene hopes the program will help embed dignity and independence back into the patient journey.

"It's back to basics nursing—getting patients out of bed, out of hospital gowns and back to feeling more like themselves," she said.

"We want to take the 'sick' out of the hospital. Dignity can be the first step in healing."





Clinical director MHAODS Dr Graham Pasternak and staff specialist Mental Health Dr Alok Rana.

Clinical trial focused on improving debilitating symptoms

Panic disorder, or reoccurring panic attacks, can be a debilitating condition which significantly impact quality of life.

Two Mackay psychiatrists are keen to explore a potential solution for those willing to join a clinical trial.

Psychiatrist and clinical trial lead Dr Alok Rana said patients described panic disorder as all-consuming.

"Their life goes on hold," Dr Rana said.

"They can't go out in public a lot of the time.

"There are triggers which are outside the house, so they start confining within the house.

"Also, they struggle to drive, so they lose their independence as well.

"Some people may struggle to carry on with jobs because the stressors at the job or stressors anywhere in life can bring these panic attacks on."

Mackay Institute of Research and Innovation (MIRI), the research arm of Mackay Hospital and Health Service (HHS), is recruiting

patients between 18 and 65 years of age diagnosed with reoccurring panic attacks for a clinical trial focused on improving symptoms.

The study aims to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of a potential new oral treatment.

"We are using a combination of two medications, which are already used for physical health issues and widely used in the population," Dr Rana said.

"So we know that these are safe medications.

Assisting on the trial, psychiatrist Dr Graham Pasternak is passionate about finding treatments that are less likely to cause addiction.

"An interesting thing about this combination drug is that it's not tolerance or dependence forming, whereas if you provide Valium to these people, there can be immediate relief, but long term, you develop significant dependence," Dr Pasternak said.

"And then we see later, addiction and other sorts of co-existing disorders."

Trial participants will have access to ongoing support from the clinical trials unit throughout the 15-week study period.

"They are getting access to two experienced consultant psychiatrists, at no cost to the patient, and dedicated clinical trials nurses," Dr Rana said.

It's hoped the new treatment will prove effective in reducing the frequency and severity of panic attacks.

"By providing some symptomatic relief, hopefully, it reduces long-term functional decline that's associated with most mental illnesses," Dr Pasternak said.

Recruitment is continuing until participant targets are met.

For information about eligibility and taking part in the trial, contact the clinical trials team on 4885 7561 or email mackay-clinical-trials@health.qld.gov.au.





Printed on 100% recycled fibre paper —
biodegradable and recyclable.

Mackay Hospital and Health Service

Connect with us



www.facebook.com/mackayhhs



www.instagram.com/mhhscomms



www.linkedin.com/company/mackay-hospital-and-health-service



Mackay HHS TV

www.mackay.health.qld.gov.au

Information is correct at the time of publication and may be subject to change.

