



NSW Regional Health Strategic Plan 2022-2032 Priority Framework

A sustainable, equitable and integrated health system delivering outcomes that matter most to patients and the community in regional, rural and remote NSW.

Acknowledgement of Country

NSW Health acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands across NSW. We acknowledge the many Aboriginal nations, their Elders both past and present and offer our respect to all Aboriginal people. We acknowledge the importance of working in partnership with Aboriginal people to achieve the health outcomes we aspire to through this plan.

Overview

NSW Health is committed to ensuring that people living in regional, rural and remote NSW can access high quality, timely healthcare and have excellent patient experiences and optimal health outcomes.



The NSW Regional Health Strategic Plan 2022-2032 will guide our strategic focus and provides a blueprint for the future that understands, and celebrates, the diverse and unique nature of regional communities.

Regional NSW encompasses all regional, rural and remote areas of NSW. It includes areas within the regional and rural local health districts (LHD) and Albury/Wodonga Health: Central Coast, Far West, Hunter New England, Illawarra Shoalhaven, Mid North Coast, Murrumbidgee, Northern NSW, Southern NSW, Western NSW. Some areas of other local health districts may also be considered regional for the purpose of this plan such as South Western Sydney and Nepean Blue Mountains. The plan is also supported by the metropolitan local health districts and by the Specialty Health Networks which have patients in many regional locations.

The plan will deliver improved outcomes for people living in regional, rural, and remote NSW through the effective use of the resources and networks of NSW Health and through collaboration with our communities and all our partners in care.

How the Plan was developed

The Regional Health Strategic Plan has been informed by our previous work, academic research and by the insights, experiences and information shared with us by communities, staff, partners and other stakeholders.

This includes:

- the directions in the [NSW Rural Health Plan: Towards 2021 Final Progress Review](#), the concluding report summarising progress from the previous plan
- findings and recommendations of the NSW Parliament's inquiry report, [Health Outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote NSW \(the Rural Health Inquiry\)](#)
- academic research from the Sax Institute commissioned by NSW Health
- the NSW Health guide emphasising the importance of patient experience: [Elevating the Human Experience – Our Guide to Action](#)
- the [NSW Health Workforce Plan 2022-2032](#)
- other NSW Health strategic plans
- initial consultation with stakeholders conducted in June and July 2022 and consultation on a draft strategic framework for the Plan conducted throughout October 2022.

Priority 1: Strengthen the regional health workforce



Build our regional workforce; provide career pathways for people to train and stay in the regions; attract and retain healthcare staff; address culture and psychological safety, physical safety and racism in the workplace.

Targets by 2026

There are 3,800 more staff working in regional LHDs.

There are 100 more Nurse Practitioners working in regional LHDs.

At least 85% of the Rural and Regional Health Career Scholarships have been taken up.

All regional LHDs have achieved and maintained at least 4% or greater representation of Aboriginal staff employed.

Access to new and existing staff accommodation in regional LHDs is increased by 10%.

Investment and initiatives

As part of the 2022-23 Budget the NSW Government invested \$883 million over 4 years to attract and retain staff in regional NSW, as well as build the future regional workforce pipeline.

This includes:

- An incentives package which will allow local health districts to offer significant benefits to employ people in hard-to-fill and critical roles in regional health facilities.
- Focus on maximising recruitment with nurses and midwives a key priority, in the first two years.
- Funding for increased numbers of Aboriginal nurse cadetships.

In the 2022-23 Budget, the NSW Government committed a record investment of \$1.76 billion over 4 years to enable NSW Ambulance to open 30 more stations and recruit 1,858 extra paramedics, 210 ambulance support staff, 52 nurses and 8 doctors.

The 2021-22 State Budget included \$34 million over 4 years to convert 246 paramedics to Intensive Care Paramedics, of which 203 will be in regional areas. This complements the rollout of 50 Specialist Intensive Care Ambulances into rural and regional areas during 2021.

Strategic objectives

1. **Invest in and promote rural generalism** for allied health professionals, nurses and doctors
2. **Prioritise the attraction and retention** of healthcare professionals and non-clinical staff in regional NSW
3. **Tailor and support career pathways for Aboriginal health staff** with a focus on recruitment and retention
4. **Expand training and upskilling opportunities, including across borders** to build a pipeline of regionally based workers
5. **Accelerate changes to scope of practice while maintaining quality and safety** – encouraging innovative workforce models and recognition of staff experience and skills
6. **Nurture culture, psychological and physical safety in all NSW Health workplaces** and build positive work environments that allow staff to thrive.

Priority 1 continued.

In October 2021, \$21 million in funding was committed over 4 years for every local health district and specialty health network to employ Aboriginal Care Navigators and Aboriginal Peer Workers. The funding will support 36 full-time equivalent staff across the two disciplines.

NSW Health has increased Aboriginal staffing from 2.49% in 2014-15 to 2.91% in 2020-21. The target for Aboriginal employment in NSW Health is 3% with many NSW Health agencies and LHDs aiming to exceed that target. Regional LHDs are aiming to achieve and maintain 4% or more Aboriginal staff by 2026.

In November 2022, the NSW Government announced additional funding of \$5 million for the Rural and Regional Health Career Scholarships program.

In December 2021, the NSW Government announced \$75 million in funding for key worker accommodation to deliver modern, sustainable accommodation for health workers close to health facilities.



The NSW Government
is providing

\$75m

in funding for **key worker accommodation** to deliver **modern, sustainable accommodation** for **health workers close to health facilities**.



Priority 2: Enable better access to safe, high quality and timely health services



Improve transport and assistance schemes; deliver appropriate services in the community; continue to embed virtual care as an option to complement face-to-face care and to provide multidisciplinary support to clinicians in regional settings.

Targets by 2026

75% of applications for the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS) are completed online to ensure faster payments to patients.

There will be over 45,000 patients accessing IPTAAS each year.

Maintain 90% 'very good' or 'good' patient experience rating for virtual care in regional areas.

Investment and initiatives

In 2022-23, on top of more than \$30 billion in recurrent funding, the NSW Government will invest \$2.8 billion in capital works to continue building and redeveloping hospitals and health facilities, delivering improved health outcomes for NSW families and communities.

Hospital upgrades and redevelopments starting in 2022-23 in regional NSW include:

- \$263.8 million for the Grafton Base Hospital Redevelopment
- \$200 million for the Bathurst Health Service Redevelopment
- \$111.5 million for the Cessnock Hospital Redevelopment
- \$80 million for the Temora Hospital Redevelopment
- \$45 million for the Albury Hospital Redevelopment. NSW and Victoria will each invest \$225 million, adding to the \$108 million already invested by the NSW and Commonwealth Governments towards the \$558 million project
- \$25 million for the Finley Hospital Upgrade
- \$20 million for the Forster-Tuncurry Hospital
- \$10 million for the Broken Hill Hospital Emergency Department
- An additional \$60 million for the Eurobodalla Regional Hospital Redevelopment, with the NSW Government's total investment now \$260 million towards the new hospital to be built in Moruya
- An additional \$40 million for the Cowra Hospital Redevelopment, which means the NSW Government is investing a total of \$110.2 million for the redeveloped hospital
- An additional \$30 million for the Glen Innes Hospital Upgrade, resulting in a NSW Government commitment of \$50 million towards the redevelopment.

Strategic objectives

1. **Improve local transport solutions and travel assistance schemes**, and address their affordability, to strengthen equitable access to care
2. **Deliver appropriate services in the community** that provide more sustainable solutions for access to healthcare closer to home
3. **Leverage virtual care** to improve access, whilst ensuring cultural and digital barriers are addressed
4. **Enable seamless cross-border care and streamline pathways to specialist care** ensuring access to the best patient care regardless of postcode
5. **Drive and support improved clinical care, timely access and safety and quality outcomes** for patients in hospitals and other settings
6. **Align infrastructure and sustainable service planning** around the needs of staff and communities and to enable virtual care.

Priority 2 continued.

Hospital upgrades and redevelopments in progress across Regional NSW include:

- Tweed Hospital and Car Park (\$723 million)
- The new Shellharbour Hospital and Integrated Services and Car Park (\$722 million)
- Shoalhaven Hospital (\$438 million)
- Griffith Base Hospital (\$250 million)

An investment of an additional \$149.5 million to improve and expand the [Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme \(IPTAAS\)](#) in the 2022-23 budget. These changes came into effect on 1 August 2022:

- An increase in the fuel rebate from 22 cents to 40 cents per kilometre for patients who drive their own car more than 100 kilometres for treatment.
- The subsidy for a 1 to 7-day stay away from home was nearly doubled from the current \$43-\$60 to \$75 per night, and the rate for patients who spend more than 7 nights away increased to \$120 per night.
- The scheme was expanded with patients using non-commercial clinical trials, high risk foot clinics, highly specialised publicly funded dental health clinics and ophthalmologists now eligible for assistance.

Stroke patients in many regional areas now have 24-hour access to an innovative new virtual care service as part of a \$21.7 million initiative jointly funded by NSW and the Commonwealth Government which is being rolled out across NSW.

The [NSW Telestroke Service](#) offers people living in regional and rural areas increased access to life-saving stroke diagnosis and treatment. It does this by connecting local doctors in 23 regional and rural hospitals' Emergency Departments via video consultation with a network of virtual specialist stroke doctors, managed by the Prince of Wales Hospital.

An investment of \$743 million funding boost over the next five years to enhance end-of-life care in NSW. The 2022-23 funding boost is on top of the \$300 million the NSW Government invests each year in palliative care.

Implementation of the [NSW Health Virtual Care Strategy 2021-2026](#), a strategy which outlines the steps NSW Health will take to further integrate virtual care as a safe, effective, accessible option for healthcare delivery in NSW.

Reducing NSW Ambulance use in Non-Emergency Patient Transport cases through NSW Health [Patient Transport Service](#) for people who require transport to, or from, a health facility such as a hospital or rehabilitation unit but do not need a time-critical emergency ambulance.



Over the next 4 years, **regional and rural communities** all over NSW will see a further

\$3b

plus investment in **health infrastructure.**



Priority 3: Keep people healthy and well through prevention, early intervention and education



Prevent some of the most significant causes of poor health by working across government, community, and other organisations to tackle the social determinants of health; prepare and respond to threats to population health.

Targets by 2026

75% of mental health patients in regional NSW are followed up within 7 days after discharge from hospital.

Increase the number of pregnant women in regional NSW quitting smoking by the second half of their pregnancy by 4% each year through to 2026.

Maintain the number of referrals to the Get Healthy Information and Coaching Service – Get Healthy In Pregnancy to over 5,000 referrals in regional NSW per year.

Investment and initiatives

In 2020, the Mental Health Commission released [Living Well in Focus 2020–2024](#) following a mid-term-review of a 10-year reform for mental health. The review had an extensive focus on regional NSW and identified whole-of-government priorities for mental health reform and strategies that will have a positive impact on rural and remote communities.

In October 2022, the Mental Health Commission released [Shifting the Landscape for Suicide Prevention in NSW- A whole-of-government Strategic Framework for a whole-of-community response 2022-2027](#) which outlines key areas of focus for regional, rural and remote communities.

The NSW Government announced a 4-year \$500 million investment in September 2022 as part of the response to the NSW Special Commission of Inquiry into the Drug 'Ice' recommendations. This will fund a range of health rehabilitation services and justice initiatives including \$358 million to address treatment gaps and improve health and social outcomes.

Strategic objectives

1. **Address the social determinants of health** in our communities by partnering across government, business and community
2. **Invest in mental health and make progress towards zero suicides**
3. **Invest in maternity care and early childhood** intervention and healthcare to give children the best start in life
4. **Invest in wellness, prevention and early detection** of chronic disease, including a focus on complex health and social needs
5. **Prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from pandemics**, and other threats to population health.

Priority 3 continued.

\$2.9 billion investment in funding for mental health in 2022-2023. Highlights include:

- \$143.4 million across 4 years for Towards Zero Suicides, to fund suicide prevention initiatives.
- \$60.7 million over 4 years for Aftercare to support people who have attempted suicide or experienced suicidal crisis.
- \$46.5 million over 4 years to expand and enhance Headspace services for young people
- \$26.4 million over 4 years to establish Head to Health hubs
- \$17.9 million over 4 years for new child health and wellbeing community-based hubs
- \$28.5 million over 4 years for Lifeline to boost crisis counselling services.

In March 2022, the NSW Government invested \$25 million to fast-track access to essential trauma and recovery services to communities hardest hit by the flooding in Northern Rivers NSW. This includes a number of assertive outreach programs to provide mobile and flexible supports to people in regional and rural areas including: Rural Adversity Mental Health Program Coordinators, Disaster Recovery Clinicians and Farm Gate Counsellors and Drought/Rural Peer Support Workers.

[The Wellbeing and Health In-reach Nurse Coordinator Program](#) is a partnership between NSW Health and the NSW Department of Education. The program establishes a Wellbeing Nurse position in selected metropolitan, regional and rural communities in NSW to work with identified secondary and primary schools.

NSW Health set up the **Maternal Health and First 2000 Days/Women's Health initiative** to support the mother's health during pregnancy and child's health during their first 2000 days (5 years) of life. This research activity continues as part of the [Preventive and Public Health Research initiative](#).

The NSW Government [NSW Healthy Eating and Active Living Strategy 2022-2032](#) was released in September 2022 with regional, rural and remote communities as a priority population under the strategy.



\$143.4m
across 4 years to fund suicide prevention activities for **Towards Zero Suicides.**



Priority 4: Keep communities informed, build engagement and seek feedback



Provide more information to communities about what health services are available and how to access them; empower the community to be involved in how health services are planned and delivered; increase responsiveness to patient experiences.

Targets by 2026

All regional LHDs have an effective local community engagement model that elevates the voice of communities and consumers in health service planning and outcomes by 1 July 2024.

Further improve the cultural appropriateness of health services delivered to Aboriginal people by ensuring that all staff in regional local health districts complete Aboriginal Cultural Training: Respecting the Difference by 2026.

Investment and initiatives

In the 2022-23 Budget, the NSW Government committed \$3 million to improve access to health services in regional communities through better coordination and information services.

NSW Health is reviewing, reinvigorating and promoting the role of Local Health Advisory Committees (LHAC) to ensure genuine community consultation on local health and hospital service outcomes, and health service planning. We are partnering with all regional local health districts including health staff and local health committee members as well as system experts to:

- Assess the strengths and challenges of the various operating models of LHACs across NSW Health local health districts
- Provide evidence-based recommendations for achieving consistent outcomes for LHACs
- Develop best practice models for community consultation through LHACs that can be adapted to suit local conditions.

Local health districts have developed Community Engagement Plans. For example, Western NSW Local Health District offers community members the opportunity to:

- Provide input on how consumers and communities feel and think about certain issues and health needs
- Be active participants on committees, Health Councils and special interest working groups to ensure the consumer and community concerns are recognised.

Strategic objectives

1. **Encourage choice and control over health outcomes** by investing in health literacy, awareness of services and access to information
2. **Engage communities through genuine consultation and shared decision-making** in design of services and sustainable local health service development
3. **Support culturally appropriate care and cultural safety** for zero tolerance for racism and discrimination in health settings
4. **Capture patient experience and feedback** and use these insights to improve access, safety and quality of care
5. **Improve transparency of NSW Health decision-making** and how it is perceived and understood by patients and the community.

Priority 5: Expand integration of primary, community and hospital care



Roll out effective, sustainable integrated models of care through collaboration between Commonwealth and NSW Government and non-government organisations to drive improved access, outcomes and experiences.

Targets by 2026

Deliver at least 10 Urgent Care Services that are available to residents in regional NSW.

Reduce preventable hospital visits in regional areas by at least 5%.

Double the number of collaborative care models across regional local health districts by trialling and expanding on effective models.

Investment and initiatives

The NSW Government has committed to 25 Urgent Care Services in NSW, including in regional areas.

The NSW Government announced a trial for pharmacy reforms in November 2022 which may make it easier for people living in regional areas to access medications through a local pharmacy.

The [Joint Statement](#) between NSW Health, the NSW Primary Health Networks (PHNs) and the Primary Care Division of the Australian Government Department of Health encourages a one health system mindset and working in partnership to deliver patient-centred healthcare with shared goals, resources and investment in prevention and primary and community healthcare.

[HealthOne NSW](#) brings Commonwealth-funded general practice and state-funded primary and community healthcare services together. HealthOne services may be co-located, hub and spoke models or virtually integrated services – depending on what is best suited to each location. Other health and social care providers may also be involved in the HealthOne NSW model, for example, pharmacists, public dental services, private allied health professionals, other government agencies and non-government organisations.

A single employer model is being trialled via the [Murrumbidgee Rural Generalist Training Pathway](#). It allows seamless transition between hospital and community-based training General Practice training. Trainees are employed by the local health district on an up to 4 year contract (depending on level of entry to the pathway) for the duration of training. Remuneration and award entitlements align with other medical speciality training giving certainty and protection of the industrial award. The pathway enables trainees in General Practice to have certainty about location, income and working conditions for the duration of their General Practice training.

Strategic objectives

1. **Develop detailed designs for expanded primary care models** and trial their implementation in regional NSW through working with the Commonwealth and National Cabinet, Primary Health Networks, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, NGOs and other partners
2. **Address the employer model** to support trainees and staff to work seamlessly across primary care, public, private settings and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations to deliver care to regional communities
3. **Improve access and equity of services for Aboriginal people and communities** to support decision making at each stage of their health journey
4. **Develop 'place-based' health needs assessments and plans** by working closely with Primary Health Networks, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and other local organisations including youth organisations and use these to resource services to address priority needs.

Priority 6: Harness and evaluate innovation to support a sustainable health system



Continue to transform health services through aligned funding and resourcing models, digital and health technologies, research and environmental solutions.

Targets by 2026

50% of regional General Practices are linked to the Lumos data system.

10% increase in the number of health sites that are exempt under section 19(2) of the *Health Insurance Act 1973* (Cth) across regional NSW to provide greater access to primary care in rural and remote areas.

Deliver 3 clinical trial support units in regional, rural and remote areas to deliver increased and more equitable access to clinical trials.

Investment and initiatives

Some local health districts have developed sustainability plans and strategies to guide them over the coming years including:

- Hunter New England LHD has a vision to be carbon and waste neutral by 2030. In 2021, the District saved nearly \$1 million by implementing a range of sustainability initiatives in energy, water, fleet, paper and procurement.
- Murrumbidgee LHD has released its [Environmental Sustainability Plan](#) and its [Board's Environmental Sustainability Statement](#) recognising the connection between health and the environment.

Strategic objectives

1. **Align NSW and Commonwealth funding and resourcing models** to provide the financial resources to deliver optimal regional health services and health outcomes
2. **Fund and implement digital health investments and increase capability of workforce** to deliver connected patient records, enable virtual care, provide insightful health data and streamline processes
3. **Undertake research and evaluation** with institutions, industry partners, NGOs, consumers and carers
4. **Commit to an environmentally sustainable footprint** for future regional healthcare.



Priority 6 continued.

The [Lumos](#) program is a pioneering program that provides new insights on the patient journey through the NSW health system. Lumos houses de-identified data from general practices and is linked with other health service data to provide a more comprehensive view of patient pathways. This can help identify opportunities for improving patient outcomes and experiences. The data asset is continually growing and spans regional, rural, remote and metropolitan areas across NSW.

Value Based Healthcare initiatives and programs including:

- [Leading Better Value Care](#) involves clinicians, networks and organisations working together on high-impact initiatives to improve outcomes and experiences for people with specific conditions. NSW Health has identified and scaled 13 evidence-based models or standards of care.
- [Collaborative Commissioning](#) with local health districts and primary health networks in Patient Centred Co-commissioning Groups (PCCGs) to focus on local health needs and develop interventions to improve patient and community outcomes.
- [Commissioning for Better Value \(CBV\)](#) provides a structure that puts the patient at the centre of service design, with a focus on measuring and achieving outcomes.
- [Integrated Care](#) utilises state-wide strategies that coordinate and encourage better communication and connectivity between healthcare providers in primary care, community, and hospital settings and provide better access to community-based services closer to home.



Lumos is a pioneering program that provides new insights on the patient journey through the NSW health system





Governance, Accountability and Delivery

Governance and accountability will drive commitment and collaboration to achieve the vision, priorities, goals and outcomes of the Regional Health Strategic Plan 2022-2032. The Plan will be governed through regular reporting to the:

- Regional Health Ministerial Advisory Panel
- Regional Health Plan Steering Committee
- NSW Health Regional Health Committee.

Delivery Roadmaps

The Plan provides an overview of the 10-year deliverables and the realistic and measurable goals which will monitor progress towards better health outcomes for regional communities.

To drive implementation, a delivery roadmap will be developed for each priority and this will include:

- leads and key partners who will be accountable for delivery
- a detailed action plan for the first delivery horizon covering the first 3 years – to 2026
- an alignment of work already underway to the new Regional Health Strategic Plan.

The delivery roadmaps will be developed through a collaborative process and reflect on what was shared by stakeholders about short, medium and long-term priorities through the extensive consultation undertaken to develop the Plan.

The Regional Health Strategic Plan is not a static document. NSW Health will continue to review the health outcomes and needs of people living in regional NSW, and to incorporate new deliverables driven by technological advances, changes to policy, and other international drivers of change in healthcare.

Aligning the health system

Local health districts, specialty health networks, NSW Health pillars and other health organisations are encouraged to incorporate the goals and deliverables from this Plan into their local strategic and business planning, so that they are fully aligned to the strategic direction set by this Regional Health Strategic Plan.

Opportunities will be explored to embed the goals and deliverables of the Plan into local service agreements, aligned to [Future Health](#).

Progress Reporting

A measurement framework will be developed to monitor progress against the goals and targets stated in the Regional Health Strategic Plan.

Progress will be publicly reported in line with the 3 time horizons of 1 to 3 years, 5 years, and 10 years. A focus will be on short term initiatives and establishing models to successfully drive medium to long term goals.

A comprehensive evaluation will be conducted to determine the impacts and success of the plan.