



# Allied Health Engagement Strategy

2022/2023-2025  
External version

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# Darling Downs and West Moreton community profile

## Our regional community snapshot



**577,851**

is our total population with 20% projected growth by 2030



**39%**

with at least one chronic condition



**37%**

of adults are obese



**73%**

don't meet exercise guidelines



**24%**

have mental health or behavioural concerns



**4%**

have COPD



**18%**

of current adults smoke



**17%**

no home internet access



**32%**

dependent on government support in last two years



**5.2%**

identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

# Darling Downs and West Moreton health sector profile

In the Darling Downs and West Moreton region there are approximately:



**699**

Allied health practices



**161**

Pharmacies



**734**

GP full-time equivalent



**182**

GP practices



**5**

Secondary hospitals

## Allied health sector snapshot

### National features

- Australia's allied health workforce is predominantly female, and aged 20 to 34 years.<sup>1</sup>
- Allied health professions have remained female-dominated occupations since 2013. In 2018, the ratio of FTE rates for females in these occupations was over seven times that of males for nurses and midwives, and nearly two times for allied health practitioners.<sup>1</sup>
- Australia's health workforce has appropriately 200,000 registered Allied health practitioners with expected demand to continue to grow in the next ten years, particularly rurally.<sup>4</sup>
- The allied health workforce in Australia is regulated by either national regulation by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, or self regulated by professional associations.<sup>4</sup>

1. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/health-workforce>, 4. <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/allied-health/in-australia>

## Darling Downs and West Moreton features

The Darling Downs and West Moreton region's primary care workforce is significantly lower than the Queensland average per 100,000 population.

Numbers of practitioners per 100,000 population	Darling Downs and West Moreton	Queensland
Allied health	189.59 per 100,000	272.20 per 100,000
General practitioners	343.79 per 100,000	409.53 per 100,000

The following table demonstrates the spread of the most prevalent allied health practitioners by discipline across the Darling Downs and West Moreton region.

The table has utilised the MMM model (Modified Monash Model), which defines a location by city, rural, remote or very remote. [Click here](#) for more information about this model.

Allied health profession	MM 1 (Urban)	MM 2-7 (Rural)	% Private practice
Psychologists	201	272	65%
Physiotherapists	169	244	61%
Podiatrists	29	59	83%
Occupational Therapists	148	219	53%
Optometrists	48	77	95%
Pharmacists	211	307	71%

Source: National Health Workforce Data Set 2020, Workforce Survey, Allied Health Practitioners.

To best understand the workforce in our region, the PHN commissions an annual workforce survey through Health Workforce Queensland. In the five years that Health Workforce Queensland surveys have been conducted, five occupational gaps have been consistently ranked by survey participants. These workforce types were psychology, speech pathology, social work, occupational therapy, and GPs.

**Allied health occupations that were indicated to be experiencing the highest workforce gap in the PHN's region were:**



Psychology



Speech pathology



Social work



Occupational therapy



GPs

Reference Health Workforce Queensland, Needs Assessment 2021<sup>3</sup>

**Health services that were indicated to have the highest service gap ratings in the PHN's region were:**



Community based rehabilitation



Mental health



Alcohol and other drugs



Health prevention/promotion

Reference Health Workforce Queensland, Needs Assessment 2021<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.healthworkforce.com.au/hwna?source=google.com>

# 1.0 Executive summary

The Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN recognises that the allied health sector is an integral part of the primary care system and significantly contributes to supporting positive health outcomes for our region’s community. The need to support this sector is vital in enabling continuity of care and team care arrangements in the primary care environment, providing the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

Through extensive primary care consultation and local health intelligence, interrogation of local health data and health needs assessments, review of industry literature and reference to evidence-based research, the key challenges faced by the allied health sector in our region have been identified. These include adoption of digital health solutions, service availability and access, service integration and sustainability.

A part of the development of this Strategy document, the PHN contributed to the development of a National Allied Health in Primary Care Engagement Framework, a project driven by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. Findings from our local consultation process in the development of this Engagement Strategy correlated strongly with the National Allied Health in Primary Care Engagement Framework consultation findings and have been summarised as part of this document.

The findings from our consultation process for the development of this Engagement Strategy found that the Darling Downs and West Moreton allied health sector has low levels of digital maturity and interoperability issues between health disciplines. Poor interoperability creates barriers to the adoption of digital health practices and tools, which have been proven to deliver improved health outcomes for patients and impacts collaboration and connectedness with other health professionals.

Our consultation process also found there is a need for a more tailored approach from our PHN in regard to supporting the allied health sector in terms of networking, education, and professional development. Further to this, there was an identified need for an up-to-date, easily accessible service and landscape mapping of the sector to improve interdisciplinary connectedness and facilitation of team based care.

It also appears there is inadequate collaboration between the Hospital and Health Service and community-based allied health practitioners in respect to co-ordinated patient care and a lack of clarity regarding referral processes and eligibility criteria to access public sector services for patients.

Allied health practitioners indicated that the Medicare Benefits Schedule provides inadequate funding options for patients requiring regular care in particular for chronic conditions, and the requirements for GP referrals to access this funding increases barriers for patients to access allied healthcare.

Workforce is a significant issue for the allied health sector, with inadequate tertiary graduate output, lack of support for emerging clinicians, and significant recruitment and retention issues due to public sector competition. In addition, the NDIS and the female, child-bearing age dominant workforce including obstacles to re-entry following maternity leave negatively influences the allied health workforce. These workforce challenges are magnified in rural areas. Consultation has highlighted the potential to explore alternative models of service delivery that could help to minimise some of these challenges.

In presenting the findings from the consultation process and in keeping with the National Allied Health in Primary Care Engagement Framework recently developed, the following priority areas have guided and formed the foundation of this Allied Health Engagement Strategy:



Data, quality and digital maturity



Practice support



Models of care and care integration



Workforce and access

It is anticipated that the successful implementation of this strategy over the next three years will result in:

- Allied health professionals confidently utilising digital health tools to provide optimal patient centred, team-based care in regional and rural areas.
- Regular engagement with the PHN and other health professionals and stakeholders in the region to provide informed, appropriate care to the community.
- An inclusive primary care sector with collaborative relationships between all health professionals in the region, providing timely, appropriate team-based care to patients.
- A sustainable, regularly upskilled allied health workforce that is efficiently utilised within their scope of practice and supported to provide timely access to services in the region.

Activities identified in the Allied Health Engagement Strategy intend to accomplish the vision of supporting the allied health sector to integrate with, and contribute to, primary healthcare service delivery to enable optimal patient outcomes.



## 2.0 Introduction

### 2.1 Background

The Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN recognises that the allied health sector is an integral part of the primary care system and provides an important contribution to supporting positive health outcomes for our region's patients.

We understand that by supporting the allied health workforce in our region, it enables improved continuity of care and team care arrangements in the primary care environment, providing the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

**In previous years**, the PHN has engaged with and supported the allied health sector through the following activities:

- Allied health professional representation within PHN staffing.
- Networking and Meet and Greet events.
- Supported opportunities for contributing to service integration, development and improvement.
- Commissioned allied health services to deliver patient care in our region.
- In-practice support with digital health solutions such as My Health Record, telehealth, secure messaging and electronic prescribing.

**Currently**, the PHN is engaging with the allied health sector through the following activities:

- allied health professional representation within PHN staffing
- primary care health professional chapter meetings
- networking and Meet and Greet events
- representation on PHN Community Advisory Groups and Clinical Council
- commissioned allied health services to deliver patient care in our region
- integration with HealthPathways (referrals and resources)
- TALK ABOUT consumer engagement campaigns
- regular PHN communications (newsletters and alerts)
- tertiary institution engagement
- facilitating PPE distribution and COVID 19 vaccine transfers to pharmacies.

The Allied Health Strategy 2022/2023-2025 is our commitment to building on the above activities and strengthening further opportunities for partnering with our region's allied health professionals, whilst supporting our broader strategic direction.

### 2.2 Purpose

This strategy aims to support our region's allied health sector to:

1. Strengthen its linkages to the region's primary care services such as other allied health professionals, general practitioners, specialists, peak bodies and other key stakeholders.
2. Optimise opportunities to greater contribute to the primary care sector by growing (and/or maintaining) their practice and patient base sustainably.
3. Utilise evidence based information to support best practice and innovative approaches that enhance continuity of care, coordination and efficiency.
4. Identify opportunities to strengthening the sector in the context of primary care and PHN priorities.
5. Have a clear understanding of the PHN's role, priorities and opportunities in relation to growing the sector.

This document identifies short, medium and long term strategies and ensures a sustained commitment to GPs, specialists, allied health professionals and other stakeholders in the PHN region. The actions will be reviewed annually as part of the PHN's broader strategic review cycle, in addition to ongoing monitoring.



# 3.0 Strategy development

## 3.1 The National Allied Health in Primary Care Engagement Framework

At the time of developing localised Allied Health Engagement Strategy for the Darling Downs and West Moreton region, the National PHN Cooperative commenced the development of a National Allied Health in Primary Care Engagement Framework for Allied Health. The goal of this framework is to address how PHN's can work nationally to consistently engage and identify needs of allied health professionals, to enable PHN's to best support the primary care sector to deliver efficient and effective health services to their regions.

As part of this National Framework project, our PHN was invited to participate in two national workshops, facilitated by Pricewaterhouse Coopers Australia. The workshops included representation from all Primary Health Networks (PHNs) in Australia and peak bodies and provided a forum to gather qualitative information. Our participation in these workshops informed this localised engagement strategy and we have adopted the five point national framework to present the consultation findings, actions and strategic direction.

The five priority areas identified:



Data, quality and digital maturity



Practice support



Models of care and care integration



Workforce and access



Governance

## 3.2 Strategy alignment

The PHN Allied Health Engagement Strategy has been developed in alignment with the organisation's relevant key guiding principles and plans.

These are:

- Strategic Plan 2021-2023
- Chronic Conditions Plan 2022
- Digital Health Strategy 2022.

Furthermore, this strategy has also been informed by:

### a) Desktop review

A desktop review of key national and state policies, literature (including best practice service delivery and workforce models/approaches for allied health), and other key documents was undertaken. The review included:

- PHN allied health across Australia
- Primary Healthcare Advisory Group literature
- Allied Health Professions Australia
- peak bodies and other allied health associations
- federal government literature and policies
- state government literature and policies
- Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency
- Medicare Benefits Schedule.

See Appendix E for an extensive list of desktop sources reviewed.

### b) Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN Health Needs Assessment (HNA)

The PHN's annual Health Needs Assessment (HNA) guided consultation and confirmed priority focus areas for the Allied Health Engagement Strategy development. Key areas from the HNA that highlighted the importance of the allied health sector's contribution were as follows:

- Preventing and managing chronic conditions:
  - o The HNA identified the opportunities available for allied health professionals to provide preventative healthcare and to improve outcomes of people with chronic conditions.
- Increasing access and coordination of care:
  - o Solidified findings from the consultation regarding the need for effective communication and coordination between providers to improve healthcare delivery.
- Increasing workforce capacity and wellbeing:
  - o The HNA confirmed the need for action and innovative approaches to recruitment, retention and training strategies for the allied health sector
- Promoting health and preventing disease:
  - o The HNA identified opportunities for the allied health sector to contribute to positive health promotion and prevention, to reduce hospitalisations.

### 3.3 Strategy challenges

The PHN is committed to strengthening relationships with our region's allied health professionals to support the PHNs broader strategic directions and achieving better patient outcomes. However throughout the development of this engagement strategy, we identified a range of allied health industry challenges. These included:

#### Adoption of digital health solutions

- Capacity and interoperability to implement and adopt various service delivery strategies and digital health solutions (e.g. telehealth, My Health Record, HealthPathways, Secure Messaging).

#### Service availability and access

- access and availability of services especially in rural and remote locations
- long travel times/distances for visiting some areas
- limited funding available for outreach
- inadequate MBS item rebates for patients with chronic/complex conditions
- variability in capacity and capability for the provision of telehealth.

#### Service integration

- lack of, or limited primary healthcare service integration/connectedness/coordination leading to poor continuity of care
- limited service coordination across a fragmented system with a broad range of care providers (e.g. across allied health and broader health services and supports)
- lack of understanding of allied health professionals scopes' of practice within the primary sector.

#### Service sustainability

- barriers to sustaining a workforce especially in rural areas
- sustainability of allied health practices (including business viability, sustaining strong referrals etc.)
- uncertainty regarding long-term sustainability and support.

In addition, the above challenges are further exacerbated by regional specific external factors such as:

- impacts of our dispersed geography
- impact of health sector workforce shortage
- an ageing population
- increasing prevalence of chronic disease leading to increased demand for services
- impacts of significant population growth.

### 3.4 Strategy priorities

The following priorities for supporting the goals of the Strategy have been identified through a range of stakeholder co-design consultation processes, the National Allied Health in Primary Care Engagement Framework and a review of key documents and other PHN-wide strategic directions.

The co-design consultation findings and the development of recommended actions undertaken for the compilation of the Engagement Strategy have been mapped across four priority areas and are explained as follows:

**1. Data, quality and digital maturity**

Improving accessibility and uptake of digital health tools to improve integration, patient outcomes and business processes.

**2. Practice support**

Providing allied health professions with learning and education opportunities. Assisting professions to meet relevant regulatory and clinical requirements, providing regular relevant news and opportunities updates. Facilitating opportunities for enhancing communication and relationships between the primary care sector health professionals.

**3. Models of care and Integration (and funding)**

Building strong partnerships, enhancing opportunities for collaboration and team-based care, and improving the referrals and interface between primary allied health, general practitioners, specialists and hospital and community supports. Demonstrating the value of allied health to referrers and other stakeholders.

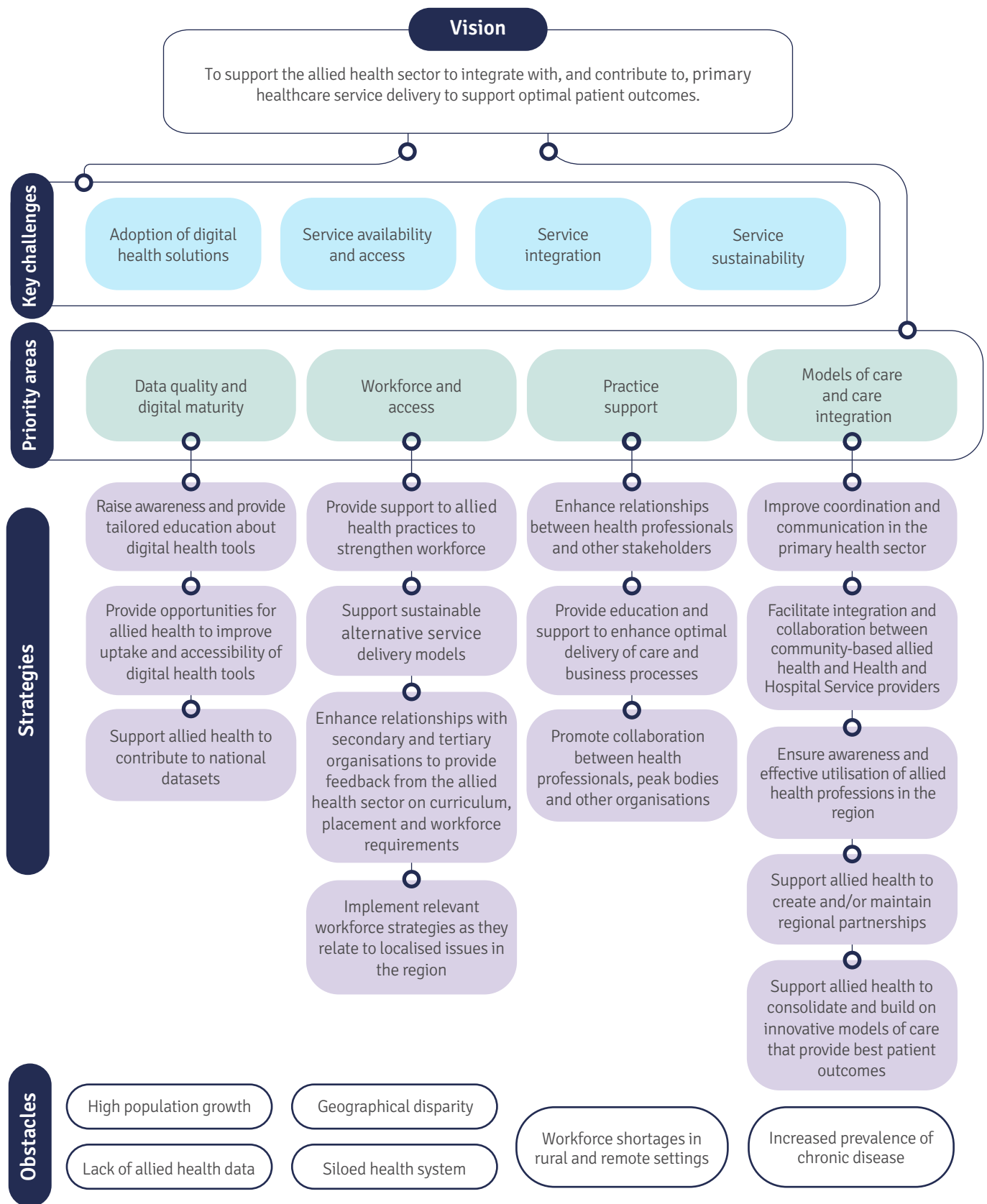
**4. Workforce and access to allied healthcare**

Improving patient access to allied health services across the region whilst enabling available resources to be used more efficiently and effectively. Enhancing opportunities for improved patient outcomes and service responsiveness, and building capacity and capability to support primary care and early intervention by collaborating with stakeholders to provide innovative models of service delivery.

The consultation and co-design methodology, including scope, processes employed and summaries of findings, have been included in the appendix.

[View appendix E - consultation and co-design methodology](#)

## 4.0 Allied Health Strategy on a page



### Enablers

Health system intelligence with access to data and digital health knowledge, evidence based practice, funding and investments.

### Levers

Collaborative partnerships and alliances, governance, innovative and engaging culture, strong leadership.

### Stakeholders

Hospital and Health Services, Department of Health, private allied health professions, general practice, specialists, Health Workforce QLD, tertiary institutions, CheckUp, Toowoomba and Surat Basin Enterprise, Southern Queensland Rural Health and industry peak bodies.

