

Early Years and Young Persons' Health Strategy

2025-2028



phn
DARLING DOWNS
AND WEST MORETON

An Australian Government Initiative



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Acknowledgement of Country

Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Custodians of the land on which we work. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and commit to a future with reconciliation and renewal at its heart.

We recognise that the concepts of land, family and spirituality are directly linked to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ physical, mental, social, spiritual and cultural wellbeing.

We also acknowledge the resilience and wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are one of the world’s longest lasting cultures. We recognise our responsibility to contribute towards a more equitable and culturally safe primary care system.

Foreword from our CEO and Chair

Every year, 9,000 babies are born in the Darling Downs and West Moreton region. Investing in the health of our young community members from preconception to early adulthood is an investment in a healthier future for all.

We are delighted to introduce the Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN's Early Years and Young Persons' Health Strategy 2025-2028. This strategy outlines our commitment to coordinating healthcare efforts across the region, aiming for significantly better health outcomes for our children and young people.

Our region has a high fertility rate (2.2 compared to Queensland's 1.8), and a significant number of very young parents. For women aged 15-19, our birth rate is 22.3 per 1,000, higher than Queensland's 16.3.

We understand that parenting can be challenging, especially for young parents or those facing difficult circumstances. Families in our region deserve well-coordinated, accessible, and supportive health services to give their children the best possible start in life.

In 2024, our 'TALK ABOUT First 2000 Days' campaign gathered invaluable community insights, which have been woven into every part of this strategy. Families consistently highlighted the importance of continuity of care, peer support programs, and feeling truly heard by their healthcare providers. They also expressed a strong desire for more local care options, improved coordination, and centralised information on available support.

We recognise that a child's wellbeing extends beyond just their physical health; it's intricately linked to their family life, education, and culture. This strategy clearly defines the PHN's role and identifies opportunities for enhanced cross-system integration.

The early years are a critical period for healthcare. Our strategy is built upon a vision of an ideal health pathway – from pre-conception care, pregnancy education and coordinated post-partum support, through to school readiness and wellbeing support for teenagers and young adults.

Achieving this vision requires a collective effort. Collaborative, intersectoral partnerships are essential to drive positive change at key points in the healthcare journey and to positively influence long-term health outcomes.

We extend our sincere gratitude to our partners for their collaboration; West Moreton Health, Darling Downs Health, the Thriving Kids Queensland partnership, the Department of Education Darling Downs and South West Region, and the Department of Education Metropolitan South Region. We also deeply appreciate our primary care providers and commissioned service providers for their dedicated care to families in our region.

With the support of our health system partners, the implementation of this strategy is our investment in a connected, equitable, and thriving local health system that empowers young people with the healthiest possible start to life.



Lucille Chalmers
Chief Executive Officer



Dr Tony Bayliss
Chair of the Board

Our vision

The ideal health pathway for children and young people

Preconception

Discuss parents' medical history, family history and lifestyle factors (including psychosocial and environmental exposure) that could influence pregnancy and child health.

Education and support provided on nutrition, necessary supplements and lifestyle changes.

Birth

Birthing parent receives culturally and psychologically safe maternity care. Breastfeeding or formula feeding support provided.

Information given for:

- Red Book
- Routine newborn screenings and vaccination
- Registration to Connecting2u.

Smooth transition of care from hospital back into general practice.

Pregnancy

Access to early and ongoing culturally safe and timely antenatal care to monitor maternal and fetal health.

Completion of appropriate screenings:

- Gestational diabetes
- Preeclampsia
- Perinatal mental health
- Family and domestic violence
- Group B strep
- Smoking, alcohol and other drugs
- Genetic screening
- STIs and fetal growth.

Ongoing support for prenatal lifestyle changes. Birth and early parenting education provided.

Infant and toddler years

Immunisation and development checks are completed by a GP or child health nurse at the required age.

Early referral for intervention of developmental delays, if needed.

Guidance for introduction of solids and common allergy causing foods.

Social prescribing into parenting support and playgroups.

Parents are educated on injury prevention, reducing home hazard risks, development milestones and signs of illness, and where to go for help.

Daycare Kindy

Kindy

Children are enrolled in Kindy and on track with immunisations and development (including language and speech) checks.

Early referral for intervention of developmental delays, if needed.

Parents offered support for parenting and behavior management.

Dental, vision and hearing checks received.

Children are ready for prep.

School

School years

Multi-disciplinary support for management of development delays, where necessary.

Connection with school nurse, GP and counsellor.

Children are taught skills to increase their resilience and sense of wellbeing, including social media and online safety.

Parents are referred to appropriate parenting support, when needed.

Children ready to transition to secondary school.

Teenage years

Sexual and reproductive counselling provided.

Prevention and intervention for substance use.

Guidance for establishing healthy habits for nutrition, exercise and sleep.

Stress management and mental health support.

Enabled to begin managing own healthcare:

- My Health Record independent access at age 14
- Individual Medicare card at age 15
- Access to a regular GP
- Immunisations are completed
- Psychosocial Risk and Resilience Assessments (HEADSSS) and health care planning support are available.

Ready for adulthood!

Education on managing personal health and navigating the health system.

Preventative screenings completed at appropriate ages.

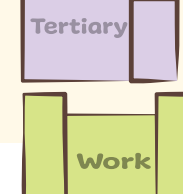
Vaccinations as required (e.g. HPV vaccine)

Continued support for chronic conditions and developmental issues.

Intensive support for young parents.

Guidance on substance use prevention and intervention.

Preconception care provided when required.



Our strategy

Strategic priorities	NEEDS We will focus on:	STRATEGIC INITIATIVES We will bring about this change by:	IMPACT Success will look like:
 Healthy Communities	Improving early life experiences for children and young people across the region.	Contributing towards family and community hubs in priority locations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowered and supported families feel confident and are connected to resources and support.
		Valuing the early years, and supporting work that raises awareness of the value of early intervention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong and inclusive communities provide a positive environment where children and families can thrive.
		Investing in resilience, nutrition and sexual health education in places such as schools, community hubs and other spaces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young people gain knowledge and access to resilience, nutrition, and sexual health programs.
 Healthy Primary Care	Timely and quality access to primary healthcare that leads to improved health outcomes during pregnancy and childhood.	Supporting pre and post-natal service providers to deliver gold standard, person-centred care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All women have access to safe, high-quality and reliable maternity care services close to home, no matter where they live.
		Enhancing child development screening and intervention referral pathways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children receive targeted and practical intervention through Kindy Kids program screening for hearing, vision and speech, prioritising children with identified concerns at pre-screening.
		Continuously upskilling primary care workforce and improving clinical resources to enable best practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health professionals conduct evidence-based practice that results in high satisfaction rates for both health providers and community members.
 Healthy Partnerships	Addressing complex issues in specific locations across the region.	Contributing to place-based initiatives across the region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong, stable and productive collaborative network that results in sustained, positive change for priority population groups.
		Formalising partnership with key stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased number of formalised partnerships with aligned impact goals relating to the early years.
		Exploring philanthropic and other funding streams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversified and sustained funding streams for early years projects.
 Healthy Organisation	Recognising the needs of children and young people in all PHN activities.	Revising policies and procedures to align with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children’s needs are prioritised in all operations, and there is a culture of child safety and wellbeing across the organisation.
		Coordinating widespread child safe training.	
		Supporting commissioned services and programs to meet the needs of children and young people.	



About our PHN

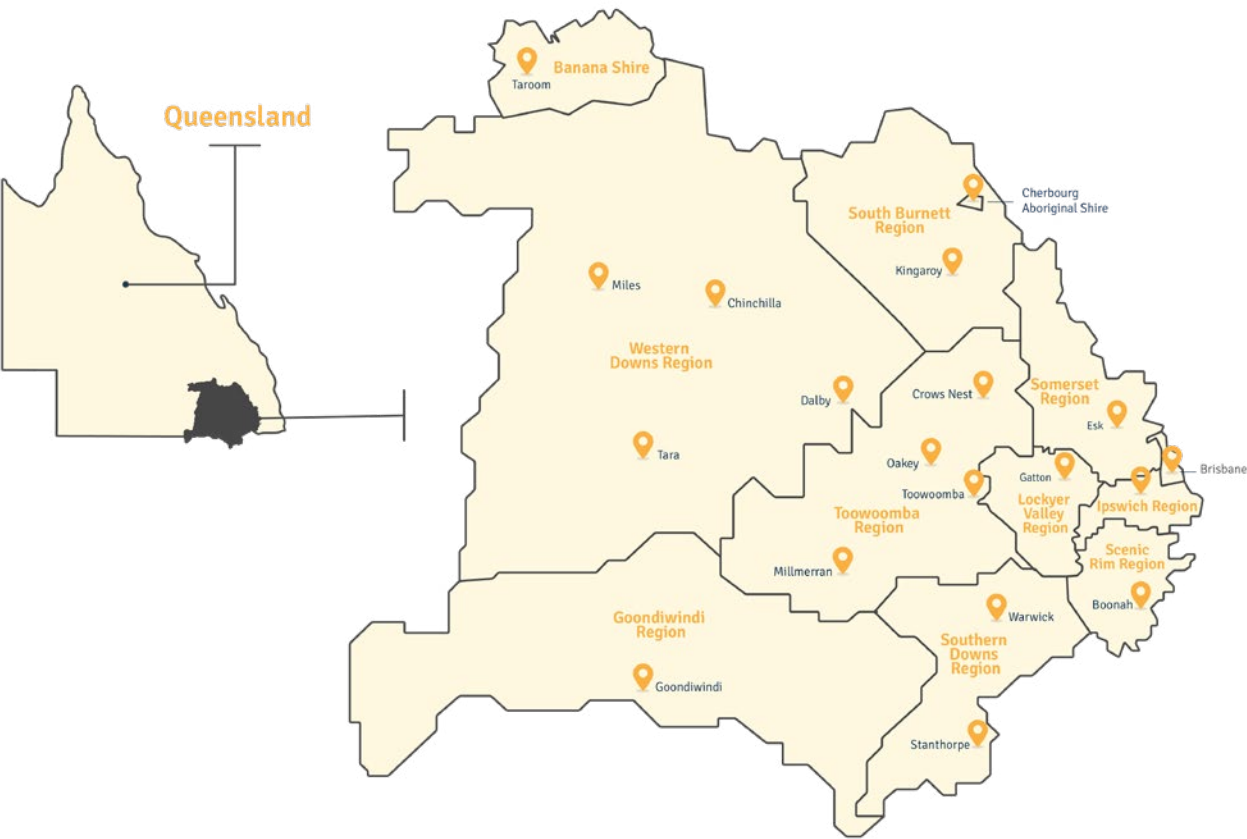
Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN is one of 31 Primary Health Networks across Australia funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health to improve primary healthcare (healthcare delivered outside of a hospital setting).

Our PHN works with our partners to strengthen primary healthcare for those who need it most. We are striving towards our vision of healthy communities, experiencing excellent healthcare closer to home.

Our region

The Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN region is large and diverse, geographically and demographically. At around 99,000 km², our region spans 12 local government areas (LGAs): Toowoomba, Ipswich, Lockyer Valley, Scenic Rim, Somerset, South Burnett, Cherbourg, Southern Downs, Goondiwindi and Western Downs LGAs. Our region also includes communities located in the Banana Shire and Brisbane LGA.

We are located outside the capital city and we support healthcare in urban, regional, rural and remote settings, all with their unique challenges. We have a diverse population of around 610,000 people. The region is one of the fastest growing areas in Australia and predicted to grow by 20% to 2030.



Our strategic priorities



Healthy communities:
Enabling equitable health and wellbeing across our lifespan.



Healthy primary care:
Developing a thriving primary care system, that is strong and resilient, innovative and digitally enabled, with a supported and sustainable workforce.



Healthy partnerships:
Collaborating effectively, with a one system mindset.

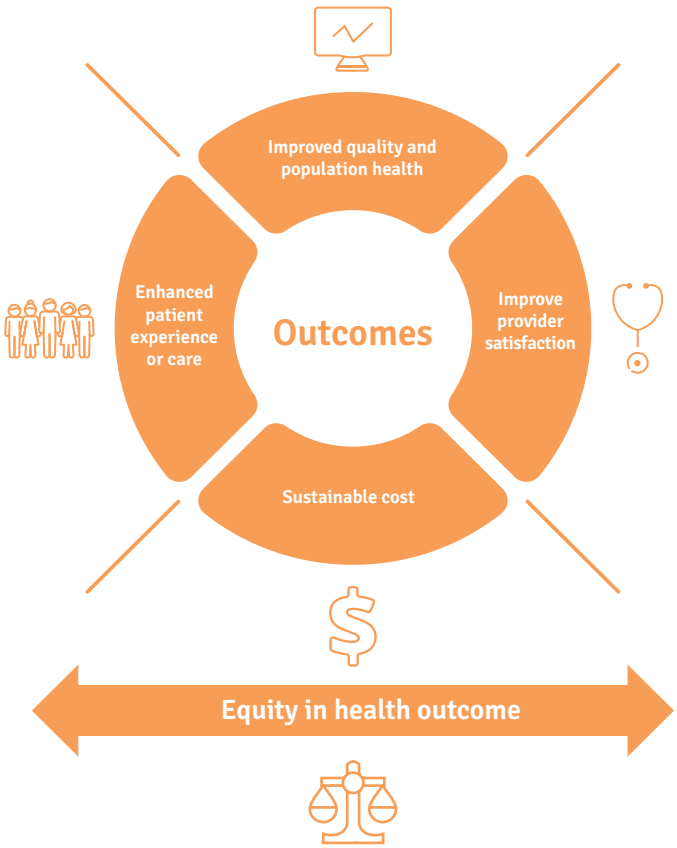


Healthy organisation:
Empowering staff within a capable and impactful organisation.

Measuring our impact

The quintuple aim for healthcare systems is being widely adopted across Australia as the primary framework for assessing the impact of state and federally funded health services.

Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN has adopted the quintuple aim as the outcomes framework used at all levels of our strategic planning and evaluation.



Working in partnership

Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN recognises the critical role of our system partners in delivering the Early Years Health Strategy. We extend our thanks to the following organisations for their commitment to our shared vision of an accessible, coordinated and culturally safe system that gives every child in our region the best possible start to life.

Our health system partners

Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service and West Moreton Hospital and Health Service acknowledges the complex and vast health needs of pregnant woman, children and young people and the requirement of coordinated and integrated of services to ensure needs are met. We recognise that an intersectoral partnership will enable more impactful, innovative change to take place and we commit to a collaborative ongoing partnership with the Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN in the delivery of the Early Years Strategy.

Annette Scott, CEO Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service
Hannah Bloch, CEO West Moreton Health Hospital and Health Service

Our education system partners

The Department of Education Darling Downs and South West Region and Metropolitan South Region commits to partnering with Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN to deliver this strategy. We recognise the importance of working in partnership to address the complex issues facing children, young people and families today. Our cross-sector, collaborative partnership will focus on targeted intervention for our most vulnerable communities where the intersection of health and education will be vital to elicit change.

Linda Vella, Director Partnership and Programs Metropolitan South Region Department of Education
Melissa Kidd, Partnerships and Programs Darling Downs South West Region Department of Education

Thriving Kids Queensland

Thriving Kids Queensland Partnership (TKQP) will work alongside Darling Downs West Moreton PHN as a coalition builder and system broker, providing evidence and insights, to help drive systematic improvement for children and young people in the Darling Downs and West Moreton region to thrive. Our partnership has been formalised through the signing of the TQKP partnership charter.

Rowena Cann, Acting Convenor and Lead for Learning and Places, Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership ARACY

Thriving Lockyer Kids

Thriving Lockyer Kids is a place-based, collaborative initiative focused on ensuring all children in the Lockyer Valley have the best start to life. The partnership with the PHN is a key strength of the initiative, with the PHN being on the Thriving Lockyer Kids Leadership Group and the auspice of the backbone position that supports coordination and system integration.

Since establishment, the initiative has made significant progress across multiple priority areas, including child and family hub development, workforce wellbeing, and early support for families. The program's activities include diagnostic child development appointments at Gatton State School, integrated Child Health services into community playgroups such as Laidley Little Legends and Gatton Library Services, and supporting major events including Under 5s and Under 8s days that connect families in fun and inclusive settings.



Key documents



Australian Government Early Years Strategy 2024-2034

Sets the direction and course for our collective efforts to nurture young children for a bright future.



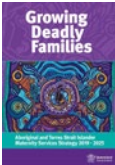
First 2000 Days Queensland Clinical Senate Meeting Report

Outlines 14 recommendations for health system change to improve early life experiences for children and families. The report is being actioned by Queensland Health Reform Office.



Putting Queensland Kids First: Giving our kids the opportunity of a lifetime

Outlines investment to help set the youngest Queenslanders on positive and healthy pathways and empower families to build the best foundations for their children at every stage of life.



Growing Deadly Families

Identifies characteristics of effective, culturally focussed and safe maternal health services for mothers of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander babies.



The Queensland Women and Girl's Health strategy 2032

Aims to improve the health and wellbeing of all women and girls across their life course, with focus on priority communities.



National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

Sets a nationally consistent approach to promoting a culture of child safety and wellbeing within organisations.



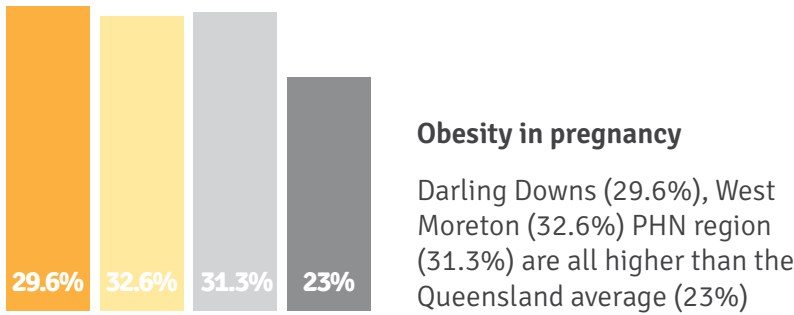
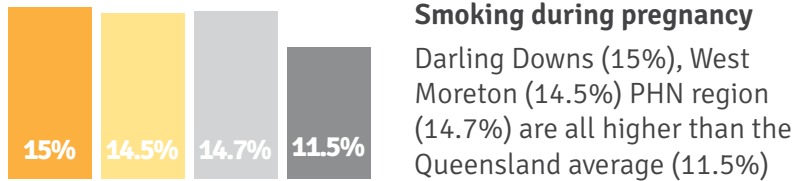
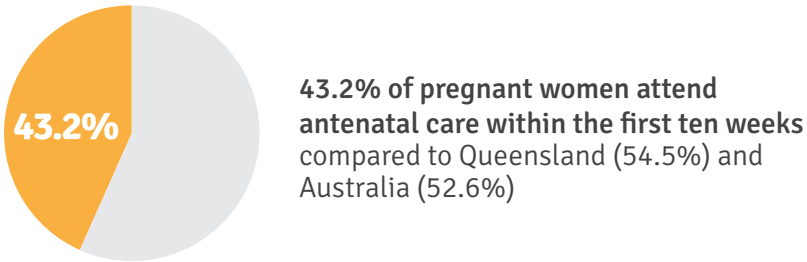
Regional demographics

Our region is vast and diverse, with a population of just over 610,000 people living across urban, rural and remote areas. Population health data reveals a high fertility rate across the board, coupled with higher rates of health risk factors, infant mortality and developmental vulnerability. Families in our region need accessible and well-coordinated care to give children the healthiest start to life.

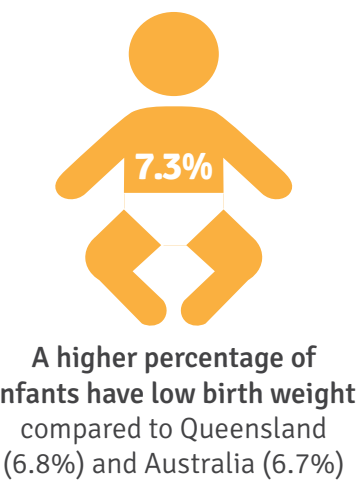
A high fertility rate:



During pregnancy:

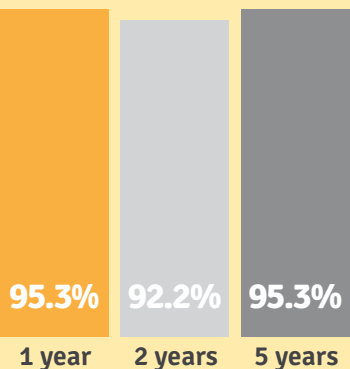
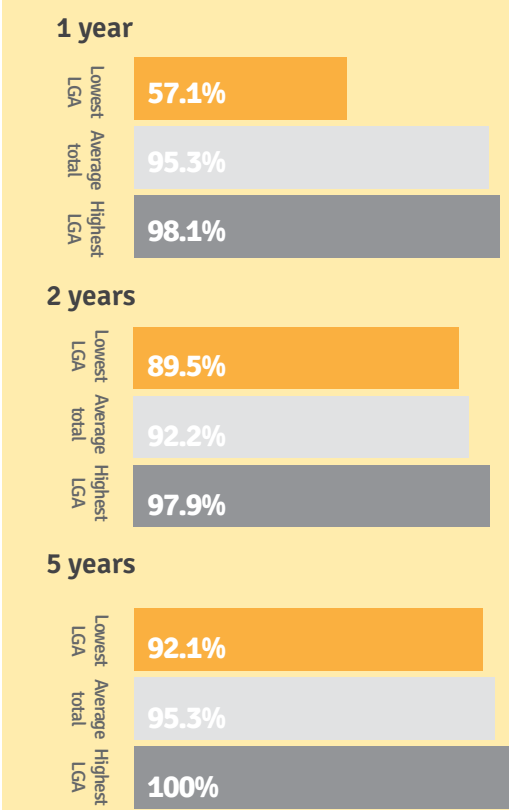


Birth Outcomes:



Strong childhood immunisation rates

Immunisation rates for one, two and five years of age were around 95%, on par with rates across Queensland and Australia.

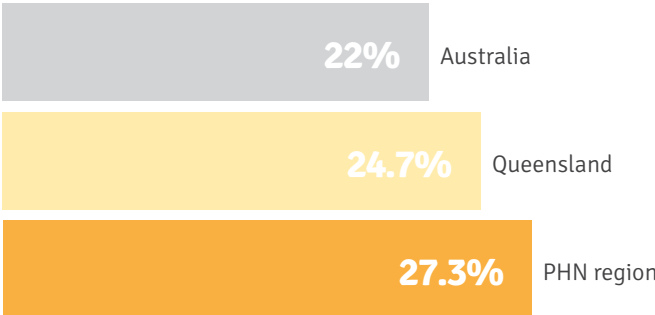


Regular GP access:



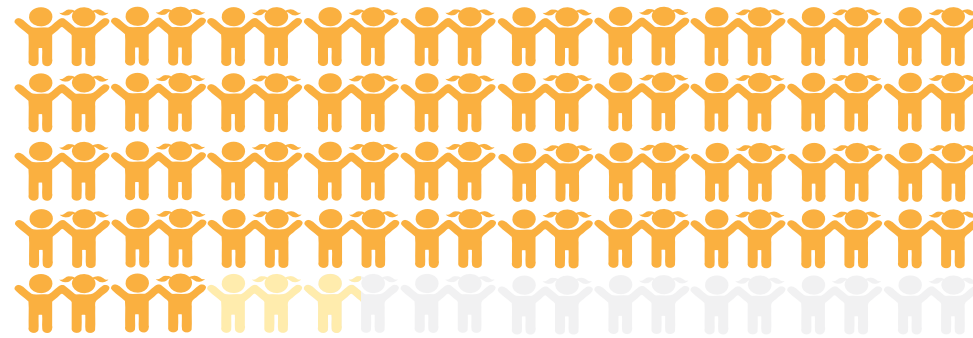
Around 8 in 10 children aged 0-4 years, 6 in 10 children aged 5-11 years, and 7 in 10 young people aged 12-18 years regularly saw their GP in our region over the last 12 months.

Higher levels of developmental vulnerability in our region:



Percentage of children showing developmental vulnerability on one or more domains, compared to Queensland (24.7%) and Australia (22%).

Kindergarten participation rate:



Priority populations

Our PHN acknowledges within children and young people, there are certain groups who experience the most significant barriers to accessing health care, education and community support. To bring about significant, positive change, fostering more equitable access stands at the core of improving outcomes for children across our region.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

Our PHN acknowledges that many of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living within our region are the descendants of those who were relocated from their original lands, some were forcibly removed from their families as part of the Stolen Generation, and that the traumas associated with those events continue to have profound intergenerational impacts.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 6% of the total population in our region, and 2% of the local health workforce. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 12% of the population aged 0-4 years and 8% of those aged 0-14 years. Across maternal and child health indicators, there is progress to be made to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and babies. This strategy acknowledges the importance of culturally capable services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.



Children in out-of-home care

Out-of-home care (OOHC) refers to alternative living arrangements of a child, managed by government child protection departments. Children who have experienced OOHC are disproportionately affected across all domains of the social determinants of health, leading to long-term negative impacts on their wellbeing. This strategy will build on existing work conducted by the PHN in partnership with general practices to strengthen health assessment pathways for children in out-of-home care.



Multicultural families

Children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds encounter additional barriers as they interact with Australian systems, cultures and social norms. The data shows that children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are less likely to attend early childhood education and more likely to be developmentally vulnerable at school entry than other children. This strategy recognises there is a larger piece of work addressing multicultural health needs being conducted by our PHN and we endeavour to stay informed and contribute to this work when required.



Young parents

Young parents face unique challenges in parenthood. Statistics show young mothers have a higher incidence of smoking and alcohol use during pregnancy. Young mothers are also less likely to attend antenatal visits which can result in pregnancy complications and poorer outcomes for mother and baby. Stigma around young parents can lead to social isolation meaning they are less likely to seek out support. Supporting young parents is essential to ensure their children are given a strong start to life.

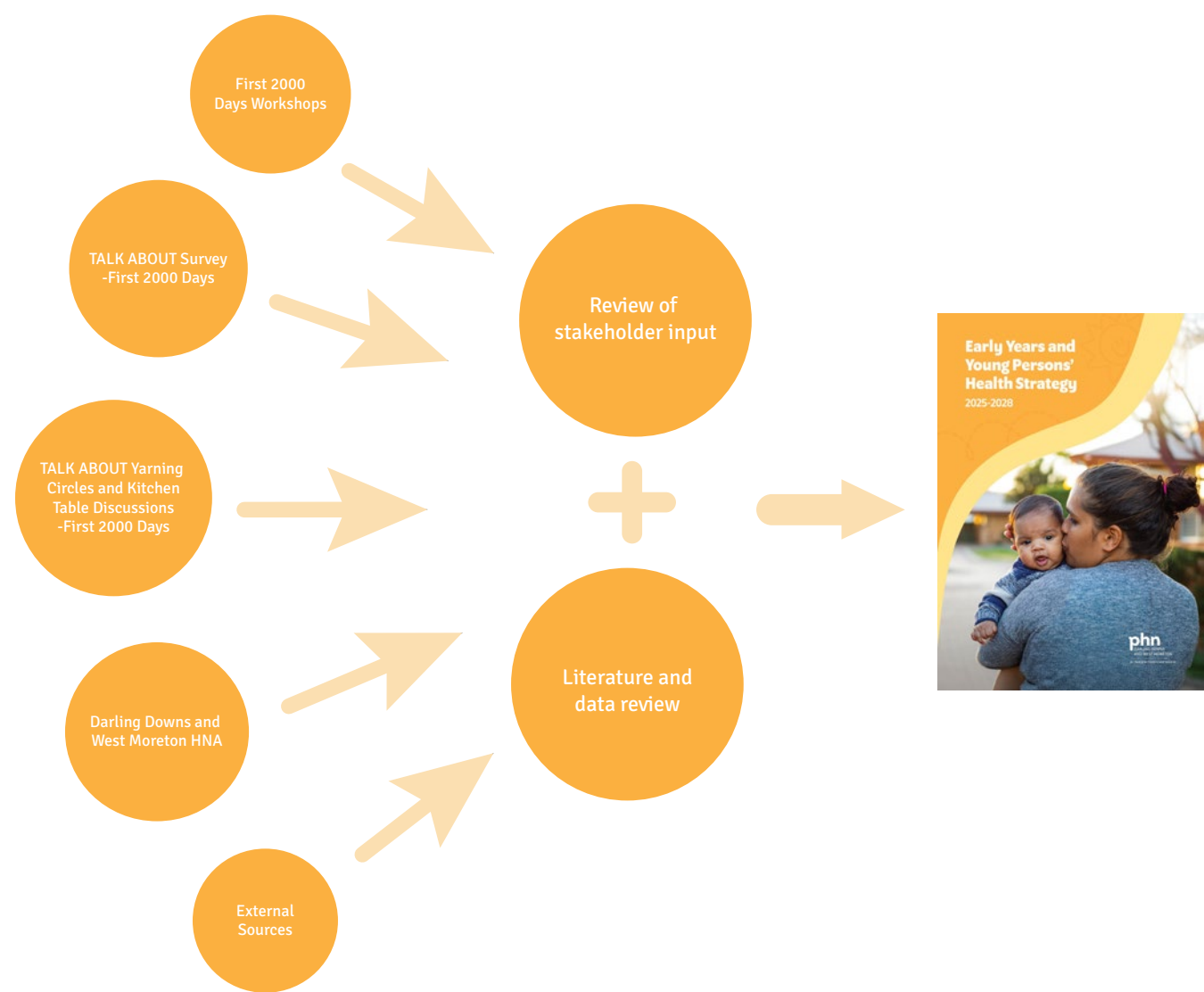


Vulnerable families

To have a good start to life, several factors need to be in place. These include the presence of a loving parent or caregiver, financial security, stable and safe housing, access to sufficient healthcare, and social and emotional support. When any one of these factors is compromised, children become vulnerable and require greater care and support from health, education and community to ensure their needs are met.

Stakeholder voice

Our consultation approach



First 2000 Days Stakeholder Workshops

Stakeholder consultation was undertaken throughout the strategy development process. Held in the form of in-person workshops and online, this consultation has clearly defined our shared roles and a clear understanding of the service ecosystem we are working within.

Across Darling Downs and West Moreton, 74 health and community sector professionals shared their insights into the current health journey for young people and discussed areas for change. Participants included midwives, GPs, various other child health professionals and early educators from across West Moreton and Darling Downs. The overarching takeaway from the workshops was that good services exist within our region to support parents and children; however, navigation of services requires high levels of system knowledge not held by the general or vulnerable population. Based on these workshops, we have defined six guiding principles.



TALK ABOUT

TALK ABOUT is an ongoing community research and engagement campaign conducted by the Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN. Each year, four health topics are selected and pitched to the local community of community members and health professionals to build our knowledge of what is working well, and what could be done to improve healthcare in the region. This is done in the format of an anonymous online survey and a series of Kitchen Table Discussions and Yarning Circles across the region with relevant community stakeholders. In preparation for this strategy, the PHN built upon previous ‘Mums, Bubs and Kids’ and ‘Young People and Their Health’ topics to present the topic of ‘First 2000 Days’. This information has been embedded throughout the development of this strategy.

160 community members + 30 health professionals responded to our topic

Overall, the community rated their experience with early years health services 5 out of 10.




The community told us that these parts of their care were working well:

- continuity of care through midwife programs, child health nurses and GPs
- supportive community connections
- affordable healthcare services and immunisation programs.

We also heard about what could be done better:

- more education and information
- assistance to navigate the healthcare service system (such as reminders) continuity of care throughout pregnancy and early childhood phases.

A photograph of a woman with long brown hair, wearing an orange tank top, smiling and holding a young boy. The boy is wearing a blue and green plaid shirt and has his right arm raised. They are outdoors, with a bright sunset or sunrise in the background, creating a warm, golden glow. The image is framed by a large, stylized yellow and white graphic on the left side.

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