

Service Model Overview

CountryCare Connect Hubs

Mental Health Multidisciplinary Teams Program

Overview

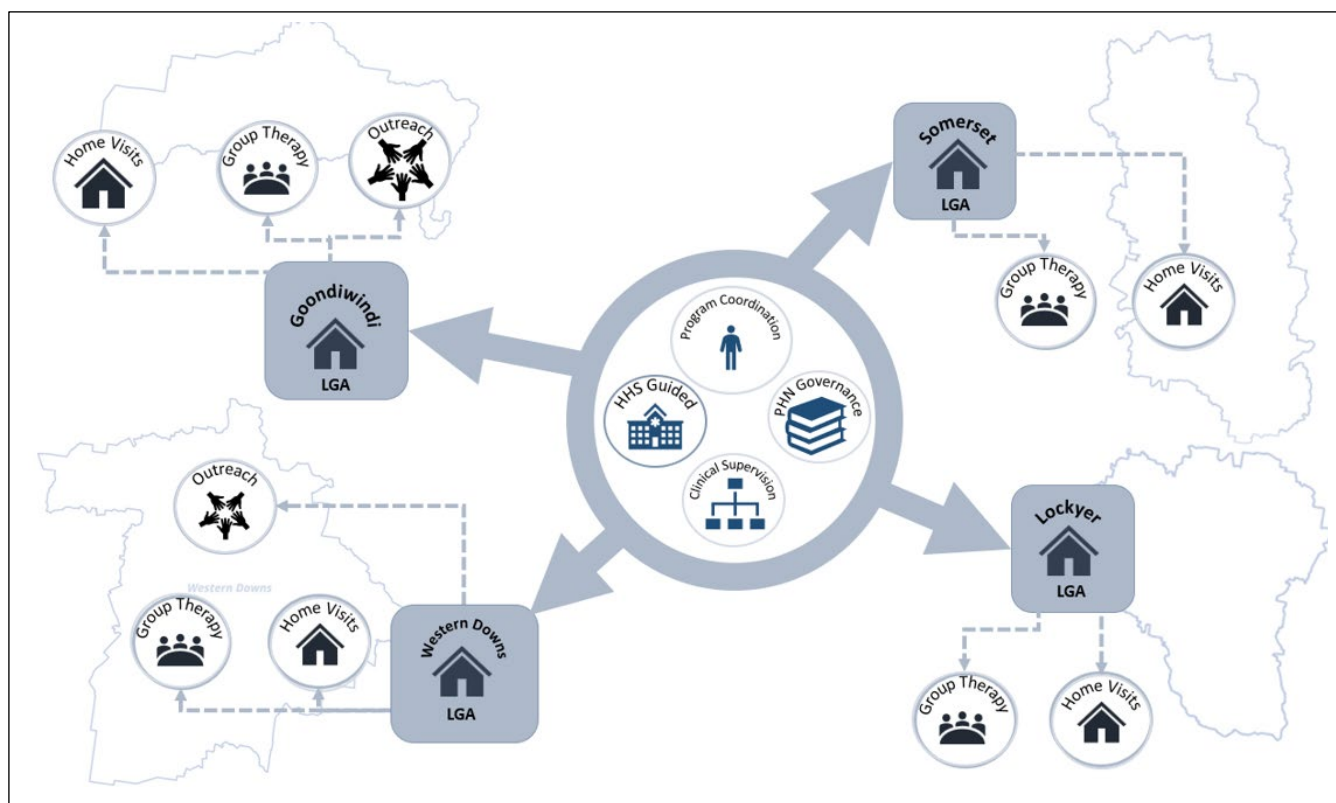
A patient-centred, team-based approach is essential for a sustainable health system, particularly in regional and rural areas where timely access is limited and workforce challenges are common.

This activity prioritises adults aged 18–64 years severe and complex mental health needs in four underserved, rural communities within the PHN region. The aim is to increase access to care, reduce delivery fragmentation, prevent avoidable hospital admissions, and improve mental health outcomes.

GP clinics will serve as the Hubs in the Western Downs, Goondiwindi, Somerset, and Lockyer Valley LGAs, supported by the multidisciplinary Allied Health Professional (AHPs) Team which will be complemented by access to telehealth psychiatry. CountryCare Connect will be a GP-led Hub-and-Spoke model, placing GPs at the centre of care coordination.

Each Hub will develop a detailed prioritisation plan identifying target population. Care will be predominantly face-to-face based in the selected GP practice locations, with telehealth to enhance accessibility. Hard-to-reach areas will be supported by outreach clinics and home visits. Group therapy will be offered alongside individual therapy, tailored to care plan goals. All services will be free to patients.

The hub-and-spoke model is outlined below:



The PHN will commission GP practices to employ 2.0 FTE AHPs per Hub and provide appropriate clinical space. The AHPs, comprising a psychologist/mental health worker and a social worker, will deliver clinical and psychosocial support in close collaboration with the GP. All GP practices in the area will be encouraged to refer to the program, further embedding GPs as the first point of contact and key drivers of ongoing care. The commissioned telehealth psychiatrist will support GPs and AHPs with diagnostic, treatment, and medication advice. AHPs activities will include:

- Assessment, diagnosis and treatment of psychological problems
- Psychotherapy, counselling and therapy
- Delivery of person-centred and evidence-based clinical and non-clinical interventions
- Advocacy, clinical care and resource coordination, case management
- Recovery planning that includes education to support patients and carers to understand their mental illness.

A commissioned telehealth psychiatrist, with AHPRA registration and relevant Fellowships, will provide diagnostic, treatment and medication support.

CountryCare Connect will also collaborate with local key stakeholders enabling an integrated response, which will include local wrap-around services (e.g., non-PHN commissioned services, family violence, homelessness, AOD, cultural services), the local Hospital and Health Services, and other PHN-commissioned services. This includes the integrated mental health hubs/networks that are being established in the Western Downs, Goondiwindi, Somerset, and Lockyer Valley LGAs alongside CountryCare Connect.

Funding mechanism

Funding will be provided for general practices, who will then directly engage allied health professionals through employment or contracting arrangements, including fee for service arrangements as relevant.

Roles

GP practice/s will engage 2.0 FTE AHPs per Hub (with support from the PHN) and provide appropriate clinical space or alternative working arrangements. The AHPs, comprising a psychologist/mental health worker and a social worker, will deliver clinical and psychosocial support in close collaboration with the GP. All GP practices in the area will be encouraged to refer to the program, further embedding GPs as the first point of contact and key drivers of ongoing care.

AHP teams will be supported through:

- An integrated team-based approach with the commissioned general practice
- Regular Communities of Practice
- Professional development
- Clinical and professional supervision provided by appropriate hospital and health service personnel
- Performance management
- Access to Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

GP Practices will support the AHPs by providing:

- Guidance to clearly define roles and responsibilities
- Access to necessary resources (see budget for costs)
- Interprofessional collaboration, advocating for AHP to work top of scope of practice
- Clinical governance
- Case conferencing
- Care coordination.

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Key model components

The CountryCare Connect Hub Multidisciplinary Team Initiative will align with the RACGP's Practice Standards and build on the areas in the RACGP's Vision for general practice and a sustainable healthcare system.

These are:

- Medical Home governance
 - Participating health professionals utilising same medical records
 - Written agreements between practices, health professionals and patients involved in the program
- Patient-centred care
 - A GP champion at each practice is selected to advocate/lead the initiative within general practice
 - Relevant privacy policies adhered to
 - CALD (cultural and linguistically diverse) resources and support available, where required
 - Coordinated care
 - Participating GPs and allied health providers should have extensive knowledge of local community services available
 - All participating practices and staff to conduct regular case conferencing
- Comprehensive preventive, acute and chronic disease care
 - Health professionals engaging in continued professional development, providing evidence-based care
 - All patient records remain up to date with all service providers
- Accessible care
 - Appointments will incur no additional cost to the involved patients
 - After hours support services available in place if appropriate
 - Appointment availability for high-risk patients
- Safe, high-quality care
 - A community of practice and/or clinical supervision program introduced to relevant professionals
 - Clear communication within each practice on the allied health professions scope of practice
 - Additional funding to support CPD and upskilling of the allied health professional relevant to general practice
 - A comprehensive evaluation process employed of the program with relevant PREMs/PROMs and other reporting measures included in initial service design.