



Australian Government

Department of Social Services

Bundaberg – Hervey Bay Local Services Plan

March 2023

'I would first like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of Country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to Elders both past and present.

Support services for Australian local communities are shifting towards an increasingly place-based and community-led approach. Through our consultations, we have listened to what communities and service providers are saying. We are committed to addressing the community needs that have been identified.

Future support services will build on the valuable network of existing services. Drawing from the strengths of our communities will help us to meet the objective of improving available support services in these regions. This will provide lasting and sustainable solutions to address longer-term issues facing our communities.

The outcomes in this Plan reflect the government's commitment to key Closing the Gap Priorities, by ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a meaningful say in the initiatives that impact their lives.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those stakeholders who provided their valuable feedback and for working collaboratively to develop this Plan. I look forward to continuing our work together to uplift and support our communities.'



Introduction

As part of ending the Cashless Debit Card (CDC), and the introduction of enhanced Income Management in Ceduna, East Kimberley, the Goldfields and Bundaberg-Hervey Bay, the Australian Government committed to extending existing support services and delivering a range of new initiatives.

The government is working with former CDC communities to deliver on these commitments, improve support services and address social issues.

This Local Services Plan (Plan) outlines the current support services available and includes service gaps, social issues and priority needs that have been identified by the community. It provides an action plan for addressing these issues and service gaps.

A number of key stakeholders including service providers, community organisations, the Department of Social Services (DSS) and other government stakeholders have been involved in developing this Plan and formulating future actions to address the identified priorities.

Bundaberg-Hervey Bay Local Services Plan – Executive summary

Regional location

Bundaberg & Hervey Bay Region



Population snap shot

Population – 156,565

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander – 5%

Median age – 49

Unemployment rate – 7%¹

Engagement

Consulted – 42 Feedback – 12

- Community organisations
- Health services
- Businesses*
- State government*
- Local councils

*Partial/nil response

Priorities

Improving community services in the area



1. Assign a high priority to the collation of community data at the regional level to support the regular assessment, review and revision of support services



2. Investigate opportunities for greater collaboration and coordinated delivery of services to achieve collective impact

Addressing social issues in the area



3. Address alcohol and other drug addiction and improve mental health by building on and increasing related services



4. Improve outcomes for families and individuals experiencing family and domestic violence by improving access to early intervention supports



5. Improve economic independence for individuals by addressing barriers and improving job readiness

Executive summary of actions

This table provides a summary of the bodies responsible for each of the 6 actions noted in this Plan.

Department of
Social Services



1. Community data collation

4. Address demand for family and domestic violence services

Department of
Health and Aged
Care



3a. Ensure funding will be used to support alcohol and other drug treatment that complements existing services, addresses service delivery gaps, and is consistent with the needs and expectations of communities

Service
providers



2. Investigate increased collaboration to ensure services are not siloed

3b. Service providers to work with other stakeholders to improve access to mental health services for all community members

Department of
Employment and
Workplace
Relations



5. Support other employment measures to improve outcomes for individuals and families in the region

Consultation approach

Overview and background



Schedule 2 of the *Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Repeal of Cashless Debit Card and Other Measures) Act 2022* notes that the Minister must:

- (b) cause consultation to occur with the following:
- (i) community organisations, including First Nations organisations, that operate in the area;
 - (ii) health services that operate in the area;
 - (iii) businesses that operate in the area;
 - (iv) the State in which the area is located;
 - (v) each relevant local council.

Approach



Delivery methods included a combination of:

- information sessions with front-line service providers and key stakeholders
- round tables (virtual)
- opportunities for written feedback.

Consultations were supported by communications materials including PowerPoint presentations and feedback forms.

Consultation principles



The consultation approach was underpinned by the following principles:

- acknowledging that local communities have the best understanding of the issues they are facing, and insights into methods of solving these issues
- acknowledging that communities, especially Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities, prefer face-to-face engagement activities, which result in higher levels of engagement
- taking an open and collaborative approach that prioritises listening
- being culturally appropriate and respectful
- being targeted to ensure all stakeholders understand the intent and objectives of the Plan
- taking a collaborative, cross-agency approach to ensure the work being done by other government departments and agencies, and state and territory governments is acknowledged.

Scope

In scope

This Plan sets out an 18-month strategy for improving services and addressing social issues in the Bundaberg-Hervey Bay (BHB) region for the period of 1 January 2023 to 30 June 2024.

Addressing the social issues identified in this Plan and the implementation of some of the service improvements may require substantial time and resources.

It is recognised that the priorities and actions in this Plan align with the reform initiatives in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Any future work to address actions in this Plan, should ensure consideration is made against the applicable reform initiative.

Out of scope

While this Plan does not include funding commitments or specific service delivery proposals, it provides actions that will capitalise on local knowledge and the unique strengths of communities to guide the development of future support services.

Issues where there is already extensive work being undertaken by government and other stakeholders, such as housing, are beyond the remit of support services and will not be covered in this Plan.

Limitations

It is noted that the period available for consultation and development of the Plan was limited. Data able to be used to formulate the Plan was also limited.

Priorities 1 & 2 – Data and collaboration

What we found out about data...

- Data is critical to understand needs at the regional and community level.
- Access to this data will enable government and communities to:
 - i. identify and address service gaps
 - ii. measure impact of changes against identified needs
 - iii. drive social and economic outcomes in the region.

What we heard about collaboration...

- Input provided by stakeholders demonstrated the importance of collaboration in identifying, planning for and addressing key social issues in the region.

These insights and evidence have informed the development of the following priorities and actions.

Priority 1 – Data

Improving community services

This involves assigning high priority within DSS, and relevant state government departments to the collation of data at the regional and community level.

This will support the regular assessment, review and revision of support services which is critical to affecting lasting change in addressing key social issues in the BHB region.

As part of the Abolish the Cashless Debit Card Budget Measure, funds have been allocated for evaluation and analysis. This includes a review into the impacts of the CDC transition and future evaluation of support services. This work is building on previous investments under the Cashless Welfare Economic and Support Services Package (2021-2022 Budget measure).

Actions for this priority are outlined in the action plan below:

Action	Intent	Outcome	Measure of Success	Due date	Lead/partners
1. Collating community data at the regional/area level to assist support service assessment/ review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collating data and evidence and sharing with service providers and local community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community members and service providers can understand local and community needs Enable effective support services design Support local organisations/ communities to develop local solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisations and community members can use data to understand future needs of the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> September 2023 	<p><u>Lead</u> DSS</p> <p><u>Partners</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services Australia Community groups Service providers

Priority 2 - Collaboration

Improving community services

As part of the development of this Plan, stakeholders noted the need for greater collaboration between service providers to improve the accessibility of services in the BHB region.

Current initiatives which could be leveraged include:

1. **Existing service provider relationships:** through collaboration forums.

2. **National Centre for Place-Based Collaboration (Nexus Centre):** The government is engaging a 'Foundation Partner' to undertake foundational work, including extensive consultations, to inform the scope and functions of a potential Nexus Centre, envisaged to be an independent, non-government entity that will support partnerships between communities and governments by providing a connection point (nexus) for more effective ways of working together.²

Action	Intent	Outcome	Measure of Success	Due date	Lead/partners
2. Investigate opportunities for greater collaboration and reduced siloing of services, including in the areas of mental health and alcohol and other drug use support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase the accessibility and efficiency of services To encourage partnerships between service providers and governments Communities better understand needs, gaps and opportunities in BHB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular communication between service providers and stakeholders improves support and engagement for community members Regular collaboration forums or working groups utilised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular communication and collaboration is increased Services are tailored to meet need Fewer instances of service duplication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> June 2024 	<p><u>Lead</u> Service providers</p> <p><u>Partners</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DSS Services Australia National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)

Priority 3 – Alcohol and drug use and mental health

What we heard about alcohol and other drug use...

- Numerous stakeholders in the BHB region have identified concerns around the prevalence of alcohol and other drug (AOD) use.
- Data provided by the Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service (WBHHS) which serves the broader Wide Bay-Burnett region noted that 37.6% of WBHHS adults were risky drinkers in 2019-2020.³
- Bayside Transformations indicated that need to travel to Brisbane or Townsville to access detox services has negative impacts on individuals and the community.⁴
- The need for rehabilitation and detox facilities in the region is a recognised priority that is being addressed via a new residential rehabilitation facility funded by the Queensland Government in Bundaberg.

What we heard about mental health...

- Some service providers identified difficulties with workforce shortages and increased wait times, leading to individuals with complex needs being unable to receive support, however, this was not universal.
- Costs of accessing private services including psychologists is a concern for individuals seeking mental health support.
- One stakeholder stated that:

“A current funding prioritisation of mental health supports that require clinically-qualified staff, combined with the shortage of these professionals in the Bundaberg region (and nationally) has led to people struggling with poor mental health being left in limbo. The consequences of being unable to obtain timely support for this vulnerable cohort can be permanent, devastating and life-altering for those struggling and their loved ones. There is often only a small window of opportunity to assist these individuals when they have the courage to request help. If there are no available services to provide assistance when needed, they may not ask again.”⁵

These insights and evidence have informed the development of the following priority and actions.

Priority 3 – Alcohol and other drug use and mental health

Addressing social issues

1. AOD use

Key priorities in regards to AOD use include:

- the need to address the prevalence of risk taking behaviours including AOD use
- limited availability of select services such as detox beds and residential rehabilitation facilities, including for youth.

Progress against these priorities will be measured against the community level indicators of:

- number of people able to access services locally, by service types
- availability of detox beds and residential rehabilitation services in the region.

2. Mental health key priorities include addressing:

- accessing mental health support services including wait times
- limited number of suicide support services in the region, including for youth
- limited supports for youth
- need for non-clinical solutions to combat staffing shortages
- greater information sharing about mental health and support services within the community
- need for early intervention supports
- need for integration and reduced siloing of services.

Progress will be measured against the following community level indicators:

- wait times for services
- availability and uptake of non-clinical supports such as peer support workers and mentors
- level of cooperation between services and stakeholders to share information and provide early intervention supports.

Current initiatives which could be leveraged include:

1. Additional alcohol treatment services in the region of Bundaberg-Hervey Bay (QLD):

- The Australian Government is providing funding of over \$49 million (GST exclusive) over four years to establish additional alcohol treatment services in the regions of Ceduna (SA), Bundaberg-Hervey Bay (QLD), East Kimberley and the Goldfields (WA)
- The Department of Health and Aged Care is undertaking a thorough consultation process with communities to ensure the funding addresses service delivery gaps and is in line with the needs and expectations of the four communities.
- The additional treatment services will be co-designed with the local community to ensure the support meets local needs. Funding will be used to support alcohol and other drug treatment that complements existing services, addresses service delivery gaps, and is consistent with the needs and expectations of the communities.

2. WBHHS: are currently undertaking a range of mental health, AOD and other health initiatives to improve services including outreach services, growing the lived experience workforce to deliver peer support across the region, crisis support spaces, referral services to providers such as Bridges Health & Community Care, and working with Queensland Health to build an AOD Treatment Facility located in Bundaberg for the Wide Bay area.

Priority 3 – Alcohol and other drug use and mental health

Addressing social issues

Action	Intent	Outcome	Measure of Success	Due date	Lead/partners
<p>3a. Investigate opportunities to utilise existing services and community plans to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support individuals to access AOD services • scope proposals for additional services such as early intervention services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on existing community strengths and services to improve the accessibility of services • Identify opportunities for necessary additional services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access to local AOD services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals report improved access to local AOD services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June 2024 	<p><u>Lead</u> DoHAC</p> <p><u>Partners</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSS • Service providers • NIAA • WBHHS • Queensland Health
<p>3b. Investigate opportunities to utilise existing mental health services to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • address barriers such as staff shortages and wait times which prevent people from accessing mental health services • support individuals accessing suicide support services and non-clinical services and support the dissemination of mental health information in the community • support early intervention approaches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving access to mental health services for all community members, including youth • To support the use of early intervention and non-clinical solutions such as peer-support and mentoring • To promote greater mental health awareness in the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access to mental health supports in the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in wait times • Increase in number of people able to access supports, including early intervention supports to prevent deterioration of poor mental health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June 2024 	<p><u>Lead</u> Service providers</p> <p><u>Partners</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSS • Queensland Health • DoHAC • WBHHS

Priority 4 – Family and domestic violence

What we heard about family and domestic violence (FDV)...

- Service providers have identified an increase in family and domestic violence incidents and demand for related services.
- There is a lack of funding for domestic violence non-crisis counselling support. A service provider in the region noted that they were currently self-funding this area of counselling, but that wait lists were growing and self-funding of these services would not be sustainable in the long-term.
- As with other key services, service providers have indicated that there is high demand for existing services. This has led to lengthy wait times for services which prevents individuals in need of these services from accessing them when required.

What we heard about family breakdown...

- Service providers raised concerns around the increasing demand on services to support families navigating trauma and breakdown of family relationships given the limited number of services available in the BHB region.
- Referral data provided by UnitingCare noted that of the referrals they received, 45% were for relationship distress and 37% of referrals included reports of domestic and family violence.⁶
- High demand for family and relationship services has also contributed to extended wait times to access services. Full waitlists and services at full capacity have led to delays for clients attempting to access services or, clients outright being denied access to support.
- Other concerns included the negative impact of family breakdown on children, and the risk of children falling behind their peers due to problems in their family life and a lack of access to support services.

These insights and evidence have informed the development of the following priorities and action.

Priority 4 – Family and domestic violence

Addressing social issues

1. Family and domestic violence

Key priorities include addressing:

- increases in family and domestic violence (FDV) incidents and demand for related services
- lack of funding for non-crisis support available in the region
- wait times for services
- concerns around emergency accommodation for youth and child safety services.

Progress will be measured by:

- wait times for FDV services.

2. Family breakdown

Key priorities include addressing:

- increased demand and limited availability of services to support families navigating trauma and breakdown in the BHB region
- extended wait times for services and number of clients being denied access to services due to high demand
- increased demand for intensive family support services.

Progress will be measured against the following community level indicators:

- wait times for services
- number of people accessing family and relationship services.

Current initiatives which could be leveraged include:

1. DSS - Safe and Supported: The first Action Plans for Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031 were launched in February 2023.

This will ensure that systemic change for children, young people and families over the course of the Action Plans is done in a collaborative manner with other portfolios affecting children and families.

2. DSS - National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children (National Plan): The National Plan provides an overarching framework to guide actions aimed at ending violence against women and children within one generation. Commonwealth, state and territory governments developed the National Plan which sets out actions aimed at prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing. The government has also committed to a stand-alone First Nations National Plan.

Priority 4 – Family and domestic violence

Addressing social issues

Action	Intent	Outcome	Measure of Success	Due date	Lead/partners
<p>4. Investigate opportunities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • utilise existing FDV services • discover future opportunities to invest in early intervention programs to improve outcomes for families and individuals • raise awareness of available supports within the BHB region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To address demand for FDV services • To improve early intervention services and outcomes for families and individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access to early intervention FDV and other FDV supports leading to better outcomes for individuals and families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced wait times for services • Increase in number of people accessing early intervention services • Improvements in outcomes for families and reduction in need for intensive service in the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June 2024 	<p><u>Lead</u> DSS</p> <p><u>Partners</u> Service providers</p>

What we heard about employment...

Unemployment and underemployment are key issues facing residents of the BHB region. At the 2021 Census, 7% of the Hinkler electorate population was unemployed compared to the national figure of 5%.⁷

Stakeholders identified a number of barriers to employment experience by individuals including:

- low levels of digital literacy
- lack of education on process of applying for a job such as writing a cover letter and resume
- some employers may be willing to train an individual but do not reflect this on their job advertisements which can turn a job seeker away who on paper, may not match the requirements but has the right attitude and transferrable skills.

In relation to unemployment, service providers in the region raised the following issues:

- high levels of youth unemployment or underemployment
- intergenerational unemployment and welfare dependency
- transport issues
- significant number of vacant jobs in the region which are left unfilled due to mismatch between required skills and applicant skills
- unwillingness to work
- difficulty retaining staff
- highly casualised workforce
- lack of opportunities to gain relevant work experience
- lack of infrastructure leading to skilled workers leaving the region.

These insights and evidence have informed the development of the following priority and actions.

Priority 5 – Employment

Addressing social issues in the area

Key priorities include addressing:

- high levels of youth unemployment or underemployment
- intergenerational unemployment and welfare dependency
- transport issues impeding ability of individuals to access training, education and employment
- significant number of vacant jobs in the region
- highly casualised workforce
- a lack of opportunities to gain relevant work experience
- a lack of infrastructure leading to skilled workers leaving the region.

Change will be measured against the following community level indicators:

- number of youth accessing employment/pre-employment supports
- number of youth achieving employment
- number of people accessing training and skills development opportunities that align with local job availability
- number of jobseekers obtaining and maintaining employment.

Current initiatives which could be leveraged include:

1. DSS – Digital and financial literacy: DSS is currently investigating opportunities to support the digital and financial literacy capabilities of communities in former CDC locations.

2. DEWR – Workforce Australia: Workforce Australia is the mainstream employment service which operates across non-remote Australia. It includes a digital employment service and platform, and a network of providers delivering personalised and tailored support.

3. DEWR – Transition to Work: A demand driven program that provides intensive pre-employment assistance to disadvantaged young people aged 15-24 who are at high risk of becoming long term unemployed.

4. DEWR – ParentsNext: A pre-employment program that aims to help parents plan and prepare for employment before their youngest child starts school.

5. DEWR – Local Jobs: Supports the development and implementation of tailored approaches to accelerate reskilling, upskilling and employment across Australia and seeks to provide tailored responses to support local labour markets.

6. DEWR – Time to Work Employment Service: Aims to assist adult, sentenced First Nations prisoners to access the support they need to better prepare them to find employment and reintegrate into the community upon their release from prison.

7. Back to Work: The program provides both financial and non-financial support to Queensland employers and disadvantaged jobseekers.⁸

Priority 5 – Employment

Addressing social issues

Action	Intent	Outcome	Measure of Success	Due date	Lead/partners
<p>5. Investigate opportunities to utilise existing services and community plans to fill gaps that help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • address high levels of unemployment • address transport and other barriers to training, education and employment including digital literacy • increase the number of people able to access local employment opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support other employment measures to improve outcomes for individuals and families in the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals are supported to overcome barriers to achieve meaningful local employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals access pre-employment support and go on to achieve training or sustained employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June 2024 	<p><u>Lead</u> DEWR</p> <p><u>Partners</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSS • Service providers

References

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2. Department of Social Services (DSS), *National Centre for Place-Based Collaboration (Nexus Centre)*, DSS website, updated 3 May 2022.
3. Queensland Health, 'Detailed Queensland and regional preventive health survey results', *Detailed Queensland and regional preventive health survey results | Queensland Health*, August 2021.
4. Bayside Transformations, 'Bayside Transformations Local Service Plan Information', response to request for input, December 2022.
5. IMPACT Community Services, 'IMPACT Community Services: feedback as requested', response to request for input, December 2022.
6. UnitingCare Community, 'Information required for Local Plan', response to request for input, January 2023.
7. ABS, 'Income and Work, *Hinkler 2021 Census All persons QuickStats*, ABS website, 2021, accessed 31 January 2023.
8. Queensland Government, *Back to Work*, Back to Work website, n.d., accessed 28 February 2023.

Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AOD	Alcohol and Other Drugs
BHB	Bundaberg and Hervey Bay
CDC	Cashless Debit Card
CLSS	Community Led Support Services
DoHAC	Department of Health and Aged Care
DSS	Department of Social Services
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
FDV	Family and Domestic Violence
LGA	Local Government Area
NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency
QLD	Queensland
WBHHS	Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service