



# Action Plan

2023 - 2024

Healthy North Coast

&

North Coast Allied Health Association

**The Action Plan for collaborative work between HNC and NCAHA should be read in conjunction with the HNC and NCAHA MOU 2023 – 2025.**

The 2023 – 2024 Action Plan focuses on the following projects:

- 1. Boosting engagement of allied health professional workforce with Healthy North Coast**
- 2. Enhancing allied health workforce data and description on the North Coast**
- 3. Supporting healthy ageing on the North Coast**
- 4. Enhancing mental health service access for children**
- 5. Supporting digital health**
- 6. Expanding CPD options and resources for allied health professionals**

Engagement between HNC and NCAHA on other topics and issues will no doubt take place during the 2023-2024 period, but the topics listed above will be the subject of joint planning and implementation under the Action Plan.

It is forecast that a priority will include promoting the uptake of the My Health Record (MyHR) system by allied health professionals in future financial years.

Action Plan meetings will then take place six monthly, or as often as agreed, to progress and review the projects and actions.

## 1. Boosting engagement of allied health professional workforce with Healthy North Coast

**Background:** In regional and rural Australia the Allied Health Professional workforce in primary care, particularly in the private sector, has had limited historical support to build health practice and businesses to deliver high quality services to meet the needs of Australians living outside the major cities. The consequence has been ad hoc development of allied health services, considerable variability in the quality and integration of these services, and a failure of many sections of communities to be able to adequately access allied health services required to meet their needs. Limited support to date has resulted in suboptimal connections between allied health workers and other key health providers such as GPs, thus presenting barriers to effective and efficient integration of health care for patients.

The recent endorsement and release of the National PHN Allied Health in Primary Care Engagement Framework offers great potential to commence stronger engagement of allied health within the multi-disciplinary primary care team delivering coordinated services to the Australian community. In particular on the North Coast NSW, where the NCAHA and HNC already have a MOU for collaborative action, there are opportunities to give effect to the Engagement Framework in areas of: allied health practice engagement; building stronger multi-disciplinary health culture; enhancing workforce data and planning; improving access to allied health services, and; exploring collaborative models for improved integration of healthcare on the North Coast.

Strategy	Actions	Who	Timeframe	Status
<p><b>1. The MOU partners to consult on the elements and recommendations of the Engagement Framework to determine areas that need additional focus in the coming period</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Partners to focus on current activity in, and plans from, the following areas in the Engagement Framework:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Role of allied health in prevention and early intervention</li> <li>- Allied health practice engagement and investment for tools and resources to promote quality of allied health services</li> <li>- Assessment of the situation with national digital health infrastructure for better integration of allied health in primary care</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	HNC	October - December 2023	

<p><b>2. The MOU partners to contribute to the development of the proposed national PHN toolkit to support development of AH practices to deliver quality care</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The partners to develop resources to contribute to the national toolkit, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- business skills for allied health practice,</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Collaborate to strengthen and integrate referral processes and guidelines between general practice and allied health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- summaries of allied health service provision and skills in areas such as: aged care, mental health, disability, chronic disease (for use by health colleagues and the public)</li> <li>- Promote uptake of HNSD utilisation within AH workforce</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>HNC and NCAHA</p>	<p>October - December 2023</p>	
--	--	----------------------	--------------------------------	--

## 2. Enhancing Allied Health Workforce data and description on the North Coast

**Background:** More than 20 distinct health professions come under the banner of ‘Allied Health’ or Allied Health Professionals (AHP), with some of these professions nationally registered under AHPRA, but most being self-regulated professions. To add complexity, AHPs work in a variety of settings and under a range of funding structures ranging from private allied health practices, non-government organisations, state health systems, and in education and other sectors. It is little wonder therefore that the overall allied health workforce in regions like the North Coast NSW is poorly described, measured or monitored. There are pockets of accurate and up-to-date workforce data, particularly for AHPs employed in NSW Health facilities, but little is known of the overall numbers or placement of people employed in the private or NGO sectors. It is difficult to plan effectively and support interdisciplinary integrated primary health care if little is actually known about the workforce. HNC and NCAHA will seek ways to more clearly elaborate this workforce over the next 12 months and in the coming years.

Strategy	Actions	Who	Timeframe	Status
<b>1. Review recent (2022) HNC Primary Care Workforce update report to consider relevance of data on allied health workforce and identify major workforce data gaps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circulate Workforce update report and convene a meeting of HNC and NCAHA to identify relevant report data and clarify data gaps</li> </ul>	HNC	October 2023	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritise data gaps which are feasible to address at the North Coast level and develop plans for expanding the data; e.g. gaps in child mental health services workforce</li> </ul>	HNC and NCAHA	September 2023	
<b>2. Identify and engage allies in the development of more accurate allied health workforce data for the North Coast</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult RDN on allied health workforce issues – (RDN manage the Rural Workforce Agency for NSW)</li> </ul>	HNC	July 2023	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain communication with SARRAH and the Commonwealth Chief Allied Health Officer to elicit any new information about allied health workforce data collection and projects</li> </ul>	NCAHA	Regular communication and report back	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult Queensland and Tasmanian Rural Workforce Agencies for information and ideas on allied health workforce data collection and trends</li> </ul>	NCAHA	July 2023	
<b>3. Develop a best possible profile of the allied health workforce on the North Coast</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce a report on the North Coast allied health workforce profile (considering all information above)</li> </ul>	HNC & NCAHA	March 2024	

4. <b>Support a North Coast Allied Health practitioners Directory of services and service providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Optimise uptake / promote Allied Health Providers updating NHSD directory details</li> </ul>	HNC & NCAHA	Ongoing	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use of PHC / AH support officer to promote uptake along with internal Comms and education events</li> </ul>	HNC & NCAHA	Ongoing	

### 3. Supporting Healthy Ageing on the North Coast

**Background:** An increasing number of people choose the North Coast as an area for retirement, and the overall population profile shows a high percentage of elderly residents. Data shows that the majority of older North Coast residents face increasing social disadvantage with all but two of the 12 Local Government Areas in the North Coast having above the state average percentage of pensioners. National data shows that a high number of people over the age of 65 have at least one chronic disease, and 75% of those aged over 75 years have co-morbidities as well. However, there is now mounting evidence of the benefits that improved diets, physical activity and sustained social connections can have on the quality of life of older people. For these reasons, the HNC has embarked on the development of a Healthy Ageing Strategy for the North Coast. Given the fundamental relevance of many of the allied health professions to aged care and better health and wellbeing outcomes for the elderly, HNC will engage NCAHA in the design and development of the Strategy to ensure integration of allied health in supporting healthy ageing through patient-centred care and team-based models of service provision.

Strategy	Actions	Who	Timeframe	Status
1. <b>Update on the implementation of the Healthy Ageing Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide an update of the development of the Strategy and the points of relevance for engagement with services and expertise of the allied health professions</li> </ul>	HNC	August 2023	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet to discuss points of engagement of allied health with the Strategy and commence planning to develop allied health engagement for the benefit of older people on the North Coast</li> </ul>	HNC/NCAHA	August 2023	

<b>2. Consult North Coast AHPs and organisations for innovative programs in aged care and concepts of best practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide regular updates on developments with the UCRH Aged Care Project and explore opportunities for linkages with the North Coast Collective Healthy Ageing Strategy</li> </ul>	NCAHA	Consider at each MOU meeting	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct forums for North Coast AHPs on Aged Care and identify innovative and/or best practice programs of service provision in the field for reporting and possible integration with Healthy Ageing Strategy</li> </ul>	NCAHA/HNC	Throughout 2023	

#### 4. Enhancing Mental Health Service Access for Children

**Background:** During 2021 NCAHA became aware that counselling and treatment services for children with mental health conditions were in short supply on the North Coast, and particularly in the Coffs Harbour region. Members in the field reported long waiting lists for affected children to see psychologists and counsellors, and that this was causing additional stress for children and their families, as well as for practitioners unable to meet community needs in a timely way. Scoping consultations undertaken by NCAHA in 2022 revealed a number of areas of concern: failure to provide timely responses for children with mental health challenges is likely to predispose to further health challenges in adolescence and later life; there are high rates of mental health medication for children on the North Coast, possibly associated with limited treatment options for children; there is a limited mental health practitioner workforce on the North Coast able or willing to treat children; there are funding barriers for health practitioners to treat children with mental health conditions under Medicare; there are inefficiencies in referral processes between GPs and psychologists under Medicare. Since then, NCAHA has informed HNC of concerns in this area, and has established collaborative efforts with Southern Cross University to seek funding for research projects to fully investigate this area of service deficiency and to explore local regional solutions to improve service responses. It is now an appropriate time for all organisations with health responsibilities in the region to come together in concerted efforts to improve early intervention and treatment services for children with mental health challenges.

Strategy	Actions	Who	Timeframe	Status
1. Investigate and address mental health service access issues, including access for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highlight key barriers and enablers in MH service access, reform, and delivery – IAR / MH reform / Res Kids</li> </ul>	HNC	August 2023	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate GP referral issues with local psychologists and determine strategies/actions for improved referral</li> </ul>	HNC/NCAHA	August 2023 onwards	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult SCU research project on scoping service availability and quality for children with mental health challenges on the North Coast</li> </ul>	NCAHA	Ongoing through 2023	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support submissions to the Peregrine Centre for projects evaluating training programs for parents of children with mental health conditions</li> </ul>	NCAHA	March 2023	

## 5. Supporting Digital Health

**Background:** Our primary health care system in Australia, including on the North Coast NSW, is highly complex with a number of different sectors and many different health professions and workforce categories engaged. This presents challenges for health consumers and providers alike and is the reason why improving integration of primary health care is a priority for both HNC and NCAHA. Fundamental to improved integration is the ease of communication between health providers and across sectors, and core to this is the connectivity of the digital health systems used by health providers. Consequently, it is now imperative that the allied health professions are fully included in the developments around My Health Record and digital health systems, and that they are appropriately supported to take up inter-operable digital health systems that bring AHPs, GPs and other primary health care providers into efficient and effective information sharing on behalf of their mutual clients. At the current time, many private practice and NGO AHPs are using paper-based records or digital health systems that are not compatible with GP systems. They will need information, training, and funding assistance to come into line with the nationally developed systems.



Strategy	Actions	Who	Timeframe	Status
1. <b>Develop a plan to improve Allied Health integration into primary health care services on the North Coast through enhanced digital connectivity with national health data systems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet to formulate a plan to align allied health digital health systems with national digital health and MHR</li> </ul>	HNC/NCAHA	October 2023	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult the National Digital Health Agency for advice on best ways to connect AHPs into the national digital health platforms</li> </ul>	HNC/NCAHA	November 2023	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult NCAHA members and other interested stakeholders on issues of digital health and ideas for improving integration of digital health systems with General Practice</li> </ul>	NCAHA	November 2023	

## 6. Expanding CPD options and resources for allied health professionals

**Background:** The CPD options for AHPs in regional and rural areas have been limited. On the North Coast, discipline-specific allied health CPD is typically sourced from national allied health associations, such as the Australian Physiotherapy Association, or Speech Therapy Australia. For this reason, allied health practitioners in the region are encouraged to maintain or take up membership with their professional associations, even though the CPD opportunities provided by these associations are more limited than is available in urban areas. Progressively in recent years HNC and its predecessors have developed and provided CPD programs for the multi-disciplinary primary care team, albeit with a central focus on general practice in primary care. More recently, NCAHA has been providing CPD focussed on the multi-disciplinary allied health team, including Webinar events and face-to-face forums on topics of multi-disciplinary relevance; e.g. aged care, mental health. There is now an opportunity for HNC and NCAHA to combine their expertise and resources to provide better planned and more effective CPD for the allied health sector, including allied health engagement with general practice for better integration of healthcare and in areas of health challenge for the community.

