



# North Coast **Allied Health Association**

## February 2026

We show respect for the traditional owners across all the nations of the North Coast New South Wales and their custodianship and connection to country. NCAHA acknowledges the important role Aboriginal people have played in the health and well-being of these communities.



### [Current Issues](#)

- SARRAH National Rural & Remote Allied Health Conference – November, Coffs Harbour
- Primary Health Care Impact Grants, Healthy North Coast
- Thriving Kids

### [What's Happening at NCAHA](#)

- CPD Events

### [From the Field](#)

- Primary Care Impact Grants: Julian White

### [SARRAH Update](#)

- Thriving Kids Program

### [CPD Alert & Upcoming Events](#)

- The Pain Game: Tackling Chronic Challenges with Clinical Confidence – A forum for AHPs
- SARRAH National Rural & Remote Allied Health Conference - Call for Abstracts

- The Cervical Spine & Shoulder (Wauchope)
- Stepping On Training (Kempsey)
- Professor Stephen Lee Lecture in Ethics (Lismore)
- Welcome 2026! - NORDOCS Northern Rivers Meet & Greet (Lismore)
- About Carers NSW (Webinar)

#### [Additional Resources](#)

- New Health Pathways
- 



#### News Update

Welcome to 2026, which we are hoping will be a productive and eventful year for allied health professionals on the North Coast, despite the many challenges you are familiar with.

I would like to remind you of **SARRAH's National Rural & Remote Allied Health Conference** scheduled for November in Coffs Harbour. Do not miss this important national event – it is always a great conference with outstanding presenters and great opportunities for networking in your field. There has been a call for abstracts – don't be shy. For more information, see **CPD Update section**.

I also alert you to the new round of **Primary Care Impact Grants** from Healthy North Coast. If you're an AHP working in the field of chronic disease management and prevention, these grants are substantial and offer great opportunities for innovative projects for better health care. See Julian Whites article at the **From the Field section**.

Finally, the New Year sees the release of the much anticipated **No Child Left Behind** report introducing the **Thriving Kids Program** to sit beside NDIS. There are some concerning and controversial recommendations in the report, notwithstanding opportunities for enhanced allied health provision and better outcomes for children with mild to moderate disability. Consider the issues raised by SARRAH CEO, Cath Maloney, and Port Macquarie private occupational therapist, Pip Cullen – see **SARRAH Update section**.

Thank you,  
Rob Curry – Executive Officer, NCAHA

---



#### [NCAHA CPD Events](#)

- **The Pain Game: Tackling Chronic Challenges with Clinical Confidence – A forum for AHPs** Scheduled for 28<sup>th</sup> March, Coffs Harbour (more information at CPD Alert section)
- **Webinar on Mental Health for Under 12s:** Date to be determined and more info to follow.

For further details, contact Rob 0429 999005 or [NCAHAExecutive@hotmail.com](mailto:NCAHAExecutive@hotmail.com).



### [The Primary Care Impact Grants are Back - Julian White](#)

Julian White is the Senior Manager, Primary Care Advancement at Healthy North Coast, joining the organisation two years ago from private practice physiotherapy. With over 10 years' experience working in the health sector in both clinical and operational roles, Julian brings a diverse background to innovation and quality improvement in primary care and is passionate about growing the role of allied health in the wider health system. Julian holds a Bachelors of Psychological Science and Masters of Physiotherapy.



On behalf of Healthy North Coast, Julian is proud to announce the return of the **Primary Care Impact grants**. In 2025, 48 grants were awarded, totalling near \$2.35 million. These grants were awarded to solo general practitioners, small and large medical centres, allied health practices, community groups and universities, recognising the diversity and passion of primary care providers across the North Coast - over \$800,000 was awarded to allied health providers alone. Proposed interventions have included education, training, services and community engagement amongst others, but all models of care have been the creations of the clinicians that work in our

community.

Now, with the announcement of this 4<sup>th</sup> round of grants, there will be further opportunities for innovation allied health projects in the field on the North Coast. From February 2nd, the Primary Care Impact grants team will be accepting applications for two programs:

- The **Chronic Disease Prevention Grants Program** is open to primary care providers working in and around the North Coast region of NSW. From a total funding of \$1,650,000 (excl. GST), organisations will be able to apply for \$20,000 – \$50,000 (excl. GST) per grant to support an initiative designed to prevent the future burden of chronic disease and improve health related quality of life in our community.
- The **Capability Building in Skin Cancer Early Intervention Program** will award one-off grants to primary care providers to increase their capacity to deliver skin cancer early intervention. The North Coast has significantly higher melanoma rates than the state average. From a total funding of \$150,000 (excl. GST), organisations will be able to apply for a grant of \$10,000-\$15,000 (excl. GST). Providers previously awarded a Primary Care Impact grant (either a Chronic Disease Prevention or Multidisciplinary Team Care grant) are eligible to apply for this program.

Round Four will close on **March 13th**. Head to the [Primary Care Impact Grants webpage](#) for more information and to apply.

Julian advises that If you are an allied health provider with a desire to do more to prevent poor health outcomes in your community, you are strongly encourages to apply for this grant.

*"You don't need to be an academic to complete the application process, and there is guidance provided on the grants webpage. The successful applications have shown a good understanding of the needs of their community, a plan to meet those needs and an obvious passion for what they wish to achieve."*

If you have queries, there is contact form to submit your questions and a time can be arranged to discuss your idea or your application. Keep an eye on the PCI Grants webpage or [sign up to our newsletter](#) for updates.



### [Thriving Kids Program: No Child Left Behind](#)

Following changes to NDIS pricing arrangements announced in June 2025, the Commonwealth announced the Thriving Kids Initiative in August 2025. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Disability was then charged with examining the effectiveness of programs and initiatives "... that identify children with development delay, autism or both, with mild to moderate support needs to support them and their families." The Standing Committee's **No Child Left Behind** report was published just before Christmas - [read the full report here](#).

Cath Maloney, SARRAH CEO, has expressed concern about aspects of the Report, for example the comment made by the Standing Committee Chair, Dr Mike Freeland, who states:

*"We have, since the advent of the NDIS, developed a burgeoning private system that is very transactional, and therapy based and is very good at fostering its own business model. In this regard the NDIS is little different from the Medicare Benefits Scheme upon which every general practice bases its business model. I guess that's what happens when you treat essential services as a "market".*

Cath's concern with regard to services in rural areas is that, having initially underestimated the limited depth and scope of allied health workforce markets in these areas, and then having sought over years to promote the development of viable allied health workforces in rural Australia to meet the needs of NDIS clients, the Commonwealth may now be turning away from support for private allied health providers in favour of "..... a commissioned service model for the Thriving Kids initiative to ensure appropriate and quality services are delivered across all jurisdictions." A recommendation from the Report suggests: "Increasing funding and resources to already existing organisations to deliver therapies through a hub-and-spoke system to improve equitable access for (rural and remote) children and their families, thereby ensuring that cost and distance is not a barrier."

Although Cath concedes that commissioned service models do need to be considered for rural and remote areas where thin provider markets persist, she fears that local allied health service providers, many of whom have recently established businesses in rural Australia to meet NDIS needs, may now be disadvantaged again by commissioning of larger organisations to deliver the new Thriving Kids services on a FIFO basis. Cath argues that allied health businesses located in rural areas must continue to be supported as they employ local people and benefit local economies in ways that FIFO services cannot. She states:

*"As a minimum, commissioners must consider the rurality of the provider as part of the process. And it's likely that a combination of local and remotely-located services will be required to ensure consumers continue to have effective choice and control over their preferred providers."*

This discussion has considerable relevance for the North Coast NSW, where newly established allied health businesses, already struggling under the new pricing arrangements for NDIS services, may also be disadvantaged by a proposed commissioning model under the Thriving Kids Program. Local private practice OT (and NCAHA member), Pip Cullen, concurs with Cath Maloney's concerns. She asserts that North Coast private allied health practices have played a critical role in building the regional allied health workforce,

improving access, and delivering early intervention services to children and families in their own communities. She states:

*"With rollout from October this year, there is a real risk that proposed commissioning models may favour larger organisations over established local providers. This could undermine workforce sustainability, reduce continuity of care, and limit genuine choice for families."*



Macquarie

Following the agreement reached on the 30th of Jan 2026, between the Federal and State Governments, Thriving Kids will be delivered by states and will support more than 120,000 children with mild to moderate developmental delay and disability currently accessing NDIS supports that will be transitioned to Thriving Kids by January 2028. For more detail Pip refers us to the final report from the Thriving Kids Advisory Group which was released on the 3rd of Feb 2026 and outlines the proposed model for Thriving Kids. <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/thriving-kids-advisory-group-final-report?language=en>

Pip Cullen, Occupational Therapist and private practitioner, Port

NCAHA will provide more information on Thriving Kids in coming months.



## [The Pain Game: Tackline Chronic Challenges with Clinical Confidence - A forum for AHPs](#)

**When:** Saturday 28 March, 9.00am - 3.00pm

**Where:** Southern Cross University, Coffs Harbour campus

**Convenor:** North Coast Allied Health Association

**Cost:** Members: \$100; Non-members: \$120; Students: \$30

This workshop brings together a wide range of expertise on the topic of chronic pain, all with high relevance for AHPs working in the multi-disciplinary response to this challenging field. Hear about recent research initiatives into chronic pain, and gain insights into GP management of pain. The forum will also consider mechanisms at work in chronic pain, cognitive interventions, and the use of manual therapies and exercise to interrupt the negative neural loops that can be a feature of chronic pain conditions. Then join with your colleagues in an exercise with case studies and clinical reasoning. Get this important event into your diaries. **More details and how to register to follow.**

## **SARRAH National Rural & Remote Allied Health Conference (Coffs Harbour) - Call for Abstracts**

The SARRAH 2026 Conference Scientific Committee is thrilled to invite submissions of Abstracts for the SARRAH 2026 Conference scheduled for October 2026 in Coffs Harbour. Abstracts should address the below conference theme and subthemes.

**Theme: A sense of place: Embracing Local Knowledge**

Subthemes:

- Cultural Responsiveness and Sustainability
- Local Wisdom in Action
- Improving Access to Care

The 2026 theme **A sense of place: Embracing Local Knowledge** marks the 16th National Conference for Rural and Remote Allied Health. SARRAH 2026, to be held in Coffs Harbour, NSW, In November, will bring together health leaders with a shared vision of growing a fit-for-purpose rural and remote health workforce committed to caring for rural and remote Australians, so that they have access to the healthcare they need to stay whole, healthy, and fully participating in society.

We encourage you to join in the conversation - be a part of the movement to nurture sustainable and resilient rural and remote communities!

Submit your Abstract by downloading the **Call for Abstracts** document [Here](#)

## The Cervical Spine & Shoulder (Wauchope)

**When:** Saturday and Sunday, March 21-22, 9.00am – 5.00pm each day

**Where:** Wauchope Physio & Sports Rehabilitation Centre, 107A, Cameron St, Wauchope,

**Cost:** \$799

**Convenor:** Wauchope Physiotherapy & Sports Rehabilitation Centre

Pre-learning available 2-3 weeks prior to course.

### Course content

- Epidemiology and facts and myths of the neck
- Red flags
- Pain science and biopsychosocial practice
- Predictive processing: exploring perception and action
- Common sense model to illness perception
- Facts and myths of the shoulder
- Practical communication skills
- Exercise and activity prescription

This course is accredited for 15 ESSA CPD points or 16 hours of equivalent CPD. This course has the British Journal of Sports Medicine (BJSM) international tick of approval

[Join us in Wauchope for the course](#)

## Stepping On Training (Kempsey)

**When:** 4 March, 8.45am - 4pm

**Location:** Dughutti Elders Council 17/23 South St South Kempsey

**Convenor:** Mid North Coast LHD

**Facilitator:** Megan Swann, Occupational Therapist and co-author of the Stepping On Program

**Cost:** Free\*, places are limited

**Stepping On** is an evidence-based program that aims to reduce the risk of falling, combining strength and balance exercises and information for older people to stay active and independent.

If you are an allied health professional, nurse, community worker (with an aged care certificate) or qualified fitness instructor (with aged care experience, or interest working in this space) you are eligible to become a Stepping On facilitator on the Mid North Coast.

### What the training involves:

- How to plan and implement the Stepping On program
- Key evidence-based falls prevention strategies to reduce their risk of falling
- How to resource and up-skill providers and incorporate other community resource

- Importance of building trust and cohesiveness among group participants
- How to support participants to practice and implement targeted behaviours every day

Scan the QR code to register your interest in being trained by 24 February 2026.

If you have any enquires, contact [mnlhd-hp@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mnlhd-hp@health.nsw.gov.au).

Find out more about the program: [www.steppingon.com](http://www.steppingon.com)

## Professor Stephen Lee Lecture in Ethics

**When:** Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1.00 – 4.00

**Where:** UCRH, Lismore

**Convenors:** Sydney Health Ethics and UCRH

An afternoon discussing ethical insights and practice in rural health.

The program honours the legacy of Professor Stephen Lee, whose guiding principle for 50 years was 'Patients First', and extends to a panel discussion on ethics and equity in rural health, followed by networking.

UCRH is delighted that the Lecture will be given by **Professor Jenny May AM**, Australia's National Rural Health Commissioner. Professor May's portfolio focuses on strengthening rural health policy, workforce pathways and equitable access to safe, quality health care.

Following the Lecture, a panel discussion will consider the topic Ethics in Place - health equity in rural communities. Joining us for this panel discussion will be:

- Associate Professor Claire Hooker (SHE)
- Dr Rebecca McNaught (UCRH) and
- Associate Professor Emma Walke (UCRH)

You are invited to join the lecture [in person](#) or [online](#).

## Welcome 2026! - NORDOCS Northern Rivers Meet & Greet (Lismore)

**When:** Saturday 21 February

**Time:** 6:00pm - 9:00pm

**Where:** The Sherwood Hotel, 75 Molesworth Street, Lismore

**Convenor:** NORDOCS Northern Rivers Doctors

NORDOCS warmly invites colleagues from across the Northern Rivers to kick off 2026 with a relaxed evening of connection and conversation. This informal meet & greet is a chance to catch up with familiar faces, meet new colleagues, and hear a few short updates on local hospital and primary care services - all over drinks and nibbles.

**Who should attend?** We welcome doctors (hospital and private practice), allied health professionals, students and registrars. *Kids welcome on the night.*

**This is a great opportunity to network and connect across the disciplines**

Please RSVP for catering: <https://www.trybooking.com/events/landing/1517970>

## About Carers NSW (Webinar)

**Venue:** Webinar

**Date/Time:** Mon 02 Feb 2026, 02:00 pm - 02:45 pm AEST

**Event Organiser:** Carers NSW

**Email:** [education@carersnsw.org.au](mailto:education@carersnsw.org.au)

Carers NSW is the peak NGO for carers in New South Wales. A carer is any individual who provides care and support to a family member or friend who has a disability, mental illness, drug and/or alcohol dependency, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail.

Our vision is an Australia that values and supports all carers.

This session is designed to give carers and service providers an understanding of Carers NSW and the programs and supports it delivers. You will require access to a computer with speakers (a microphone and video camera are a bonus).

Training is delivered using the ZOOM platform. Carers NSW will send you instructions about how you can join the session on the day before each session. The duration for this session is 45 minutes. To find out more email [education@carersnsw.org.au](mailto:education@carersnsw.org.au)



### [Mid and North Coast Health Pathways](#)

HealthPathways is an online portal which aims to guide best-practice assessment, management of common medical conditions and local referral pathways. [Mid and North Coast HealthPathways](#) Username: **manchealth** - Password: **conn3ct3d**

#### [Reviewed and Updated HealthPathways](#)

##### [Clinical](#)

Acute Scrotal or Testicular Pain in Adults  
 Cervical Screening  
 Enuresis in Children  
 Guide to MBS Items  
 Intrauterine Devices (IUDs)  
 Miscarriage and Ectopic Pregnancy  
 Physical Assault and Injury Recording  
 Practice Incentives Program – Indigenous Health Incentive (PIP-IHI)  
 Preparing a General Practice for a Disaster  
 Previous Bowel Polyp Surveillance  
 Scrotal Lumps in Adults  
 Vaping in Youth  
 Weight Management in Adults

#### [Referral](#)

Falls Risk Assessment and Management  
 Interpreter Services

If you want to know more about NCAHA, please contact us at [rob.curry1@outlook.com](mailto:rob.curry1@outlook.com) or [NCAHAExecutive@hotmail.com](mailto:NCAHAExecutive@hotmail.com)



---

*Copyright © 2026 North Coast Allied Health Association, All rights reserved.*

Want to change how you receive these emails?  
You can update your preferences or unsubscribe from this list.

