NORTHEAST

HEALTH FOCUS

SPRING 2025



HEALTH COMMUNITY **CULTURE**



WELCOME

As we move into the warmer months, there's a renewed sense of energy and optimism here at Northeast Health Wangaratta (NHW). I'm delighted to share some exciting updates with our community as we continue to grow and evolve to meet your healthcare needs.

Firstly, please join me in warmly welcoming our new Chief Operating Officer, Rebecca Weir, back to NHW. Rebecca brings over 20 years of senior leadership experience in healthcare, combining clinical expertise with strategic vision. Having previously been part of our team, her return is a wonderful boost to our leadership as we work together to strengthen services for our region.

We're also thrilled to announce the arrival of new maternity cots, made possible thanks to the generosity of our recent community fundraiser. These cots will help ensure safe, comfortable care for our youngest patients and support our dedicated maternity team in providing the very best start for families.

There's truly a lot happening at NHW this season. From new infrastructure projects and innovative care models to community events and health initiatives, we are focused on delivering exceptional care while fostering strong community connections.

Thank you for your ongoing support and trust in NHW. Together, we look forward to a vibrant season ahead, filled with growth, collaboration, and continued commitment to the health and wellbeing of our community.

Libby Fifis

Chief Executive Officer

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Northeast Health Wangaratta acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work, the Bpangarang and Yorta Yorta people, and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. We respect and celebrate all forms of diversity. We welcome and value people from all walks of life to access our services and join our team.

BOARD UPDATE

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the Spring Health Focus. I have now been in the chair's role for four months and am always impressed by the excellence, care and dedication that I see and hear about at NHW.

I feel very fortunate that my family all live in the NHW catchment - my children, grandchildren, my mum, my siblings and their families. Because the people I love are part of this community, it's important to me that Northeast Health Wangaratta continues to be a high-functioning, compassionate health service that provides excellent care for all of us. I know this will be a view shared by everyone in our community who want the best possible care for their families too.

One of the projects that the NHW board and executive are working on, together with eleven neighbouring health services, to improve the provision of health across the Hume region, is to develop the Hume Local Health Services Network (LHSN).

- The Hume LHSN is one of Victoria's twelve Local Health Service Networks, officially established on 1 July 2025.
- The aim is to group public health services across the state, so they work more collaboratively: delivering care closer to home, better coordinating referrals, sharing expertise and back-office functions.
- For the Hume network, the grouping includes twelve health services, including (among others) Northeast Health Wangaratta, Albury Wodonga Health, Goulburn Valley Health, Benalla Health, Yarrawonga Health, Beechworth Health Service, Alpine Health and Mansfield District Hospital.



 Each health service retains its local identity, board and leadership, and contributes to the network through the CEO Committee, Board Chair's Committee, and other network wide specialty working groups.

Key Priorities and Focus Areas

As per the policy framework for Local Health Service Networks and NHW's strategic planning, the Hume network focus aligns to the following statewide priorities.

- Access, Equity and Flow: ensuring patients get timely care, closer to home, and that transitions between different services are smooth.
- Workforce: regional coordination of workforce planning, retention and support across member services.
- Safety and Quality: driving consistent standards of care across the region, embedding continuous improvement.
- Shared services/back-office efficiencies: procurement, digital systems, support services to reduce duplication and cost, freeing resources for patient care.



Strategic Implications and Opportunities

- From NHW's viewpoint the Hume LHSN presents the following opportunities.
- Geography and Scale: The Hume region covers a mix of rural, regional and some border (NSW) areas. Having a network means NHW can link with services that have complementary capabilities rather than acting in isolation.
- Digital/IT Integration: A key enabler is being able to share patient information, coordinate care across sites. For example, region-wide Patient Administration System rollout across Hume region which includes NHW.
- Local Autonomy and Regional Strength: NHW
 retains its local board, identity and community
 connection but benefits from the wider network
 support important in rural/regional settings where
 resources can be stretched.
- Challenges: While the network offers collaborative opportunities, these regional models also require coordination, governance, sharing of control, and managing differences in services, location, and community needs. NHW's strategic plan acknowledges partnership obligations and shared mutual accountability.

The NHW Board and executive team are looking forward to contributing to the Hume LHSN and the potential benefits to healthcare for our community.

NEW FACE AT NHW

Welcoming NHW's new COO, Rebecca Weir

NHW is pleased to announce the appointment of Rebecca Weir as its new Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Interim Chief Nursing & Midwifery Officer.

Rebecca brings over 20 years of senior healthcare leadership experience across acute, emergency, and subacute services both in Australia and internationally. A Registered Nurse with a Master of Nursing and postgraduate qualifications in Critical Care, Trauma, Emergency Management, and Health Leadership, Rebecca offers a unique blend of clinical credibility, strategic insight, and operational expertise.

Deeply connected to the Northeast Victoria region, Rebecca combines her professional expertise with a strong personal commitment to the community she serves. Her leadership is grounded in a deep understanding of regional health needs, ensuring operational decisions are both strategically aligned and locally responsive.

In her role as COO and Chief Nursing & Midwifery Officer, Rebecca will be responsible for managing day-to-day operations and providing professional oversight of nursing, midwifery, and allied health services across NHW. Key areas of responsibility include clinical leadership and standards of practice, nursing credentialing, resource management, service and strategic planning, as well as clinical risk management and quality improvement.

Rebecca has a proven record of delivering system-wide improvements and leading complex change in high-stakes environments.



She has successfully driven initiatives from concept to execution under tight timelines and complex conditions, demonstrating agility, strategic foresight, and a results-driven approach.

Known as a values-led leader, Rebecca fosters cultures of collaboration, accountability, and kindness. She champions NHW's core values of Courage, Excellence, Fairness, Integrity, Kindness, and Respect, ensuring these principles are lived across teams and systems. Her leadership style balances innovation with pragmatism, encouraging teams to explore new solutions while maintaining a strong focus on safety, quality, and governance.

Rebecca is passionate about advancing integrated care, driving operational sustainability, and strengthening regional healthcare networks to improve access and patient outcomes. Her return to NHW after five years away brings fresh perspectives and renewed dedication to shaping the future of healthcare in the community she proudly calls home.

"We are thrilled to welcome Rebecca back to NHW," said NHW CEO Libby Fifis. "Her extensive experience, deep community ties, and values-driven leadership make her ideally suited to lead our teams and support our mission of delivering exceptional care."

ENHANCING CLINICAL TRIALS

NHW has officially opened a dedicated Clinical Trial Clinic Space, marking a significant step forward in expanding local research opportunities and access to cutting-edge treatments.

The space was formally opened on Monday 9 September by Michelle Butler, Executive Director of Clinical Governance, Aged Care, Education and Research.

Located on Clark Street within the Dorevitch building, the clinic provides the Clinical Trial Team with a purpose-built environment to support a growing portfolio of research studies free from the constraints of shared clinical spaces.

Two rooms have been fully refurbished for trial use:

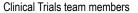
- One designed for participant discussions and data collection
- · The other equipped for clinical assessments

This setup allows for a seamless and efficient trial visit, with all necessary procedures conducted in a single location.

The space will soon be further enhanced, with clinical equipment to be procured through a recent grant from the Australian Teletrial Program, supporting NHW's capacity to participate in national research networks.

With 12 clinical trials currently open to recruitment, and 8 more due to launch in the coming months, the new clinic will play a key role in supporting innovation, advancing medical knowledge, and improving patient care across the region.

The Clinical Trial Team is excited to welcome participants and maximise the use of this new facility as they continue to grow NHW's research program.







PREPARE FOR THE SEASON AHEAD

Spring Health Reminder: Managing Respiratory

Illness and Thunderstorm Asthma

As spring arrives, so too does an increase in respiratory illnesses such as colds, flu, and the seasonal risk of thunderstorm asthma.

People with asthma or hay fever should take extra care during this time, as high pollen levels and sudden weather changes can trigger severe symptoms. We encourage the community to:

- Check and update asthma or allergy action plans
- · Ensure medications are on hand and in date
- See your GP or pharmacist early if symptoms worsen.

We are continuing to see respiratory illnesses in the community. Please help protect yourself and others by staying home if you're unwell, practising good hand hygiene, and keeping up to date with your vaccinations.

If you are unable to access our services or your regular GP, you can seek health advice and care through the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department (VVED), available online at: www.vved.org.au



STAFF HOUSING PROJECT UNDERWAY

NHW is proud to share the exciting progress of our new staff housing development, a significant project that will directly support the recruitment and retention of healthcare workers in our region.

Thanks to funding from the Victorian Government's Regional Worker Accommodation Fund, the project will deliver nine new dwellings within close proximity to the hospital. These high-quality, modern homes, comprising both one and two-bedroom units, will provide a total of 16 beds dedicated to accommodating NHW staff. Construction is already well underway. The concrete slabs have been completed, and the framing is now nearing completion, marking a major milestone in the build. The project is on track for completion by June 2026.

The introduction of these homes will help ease pressure on Wangaratta's tight rental market, which can often be a barrier to attracting skilled professionals to the area. By offering affordable and convenient housing options, NHW is enhancing its ability to draw in much-needed clinical and support staff, ensuring ongoing access to quality healthcare services for the community.





CARING CLOSER TO HOME

Enhancing Recovery and Access Across the Region

At NHW, our commitment is to provide specialised, high-quality care to the most seriously ill and vulnerable members of our community. To best serve patients across Northeast Victoria, NHW works in close collaboration with regional hospitals, which are well-equipped to provide ongoing general health care while patients continue their recovery closer to home.

As part of this coordinated approach, some patients may be transferred to regional health services once their condition stabilises and specialist care is no longer required.

These transfers enable patients to recover in a familiar environment, surrounded by family, friends, and support networks, an important factor in overall wellbeing and healing.

"Ensuring patient care is seamless and centred on individual needs is our highest priority," said NHW Chief Executive Officer, Libby Fifis. "By partnering with regional hospitals, we can focus our specialist resources on those who need them most, while patients benefit from being closer to home as they recover."

NHW's Chief Operating Officer, Rebecca Weir, added: "These transfer processes are carefully managed to ensure patient safety and comfort at every step. We continue to improve our patient flow systems so that more members of our community have timely access to the right care in the right place."



This collaborative model supports not only the wellbeing of individual patients but also helps improve access to care across the region. By freeing up specialist beds at NHW for acute cases, the broader health system can respond more effectively to demand, providing care where it's needed most.

NHW is dedicated to refining these processes and working alongside regional partners to deliver a sustainable, patient-centred health service for Northeast Victoria.

"We thank our patients, their families, and partner hospitals for their support and cooperation," said Ms Fifis. "Together, we are strengthening the future of healthcare in our community."

IMPROVING CARE FOR CHILDREN

NHW is pleased to announce the arrival of two state-of-the-art neonatal resuscitation cots, known as Panda Warmers, for its Maternity Unit. These essential pieces of equipment were made possible through the generous support of our local community.

Thanks to the collective efforts of our community, the appeal reached its \$70,000 target, enabling the purchase of these critical units and strengthening NHW's capacity to deliver high-quality neonatal care. This achievement highlights the power of community spirit and the meaningful impact that local generosity continues to have on the care we provide to our smallest patients.

The Panda Warmers provide advanced neonatal care by stabilising newborns immediately after birth, ensuring they receive the best possible start in life. These units are a vital addition to NHW's Maternity Unit, replacing aging equipment and supporting the delivery of high-quality care to newborns in the region.

NHW extends its heartfelt thanks to the Szeligiewicz family and the entire Ava Milawa team for their dedication and hard work in organising the fundraising dinner. The Ava Milawa Fundraising Dinner raised an impressive \$17,000, significantly contributing to NHW's Neonatal Fundraising Appeal. The support from local businesses, suppliers, and individuals who contributed to the event has made a lasting impact on the care provided to newborns and their families.

Kim Bennetts, NHW Executive Director of People and Corporate Operations, expressed her gratitude, stating, "We are truly overwhelmed by the outpouring of support from our community. We also want to thank Local community fund Give Wangaratta who matched community donations of \$10,000. Reaching our fundraising target means we can now provide even greater care for newborns in our region. On behalf of NHW, I want to thank everyone involved."

NHW also thanked media partners EdgeFM and The Chronicle for their support of the campaign.

The arrival of the Panda Warmers marks a significant milestone in NHW's commitment to providing exceptional healthcare services to the community. These units will play a crucial role in ensuring the health and well-being of the region's most vulnerable patients.



IMPROVING ACCESS TO MEDICAL IMAGING

Across NHW we strive to deliver exceptional care for our patients and our Medical Imaging department is no exception. We understand that recent difficulties in contacting our Medical Imaging department via phone have caused frustration, both for patients and healthcare professionals. We take this opportunity to acknowledge this issue, apologise for the inconvenience caused and reassure the community that we are working hard behind the scenes to improve the service for patients, clinicians and the broader community.

Steps We Are Taking to Resolve the Issue

We are working closely with our IT team on a campuswide phone system upgrade, which is expected to roll out in early 2026. This upgrade will bring technological improvements that will ultimately enhance the phone experience for our consumers, making it easier for you to reach us. To enhance our phone service, we are currently recruiting additional staff to help with answering calls more efficiently.

Alternative Ways to Book an Appointment

In the meantime, to avoid long wait times on the phone, we encourage patients and their families to email their imaging requests directly to medical.imaging@nhw.org.au.

Our administrative team will contact you within 48 hours to schedule an appointment. Please note that some requests may require clinician review, which could take a little longer.



We understand there are concerns around email security, and we want to assure you that we are aware of the limitations. While email may not be as secure as other communication methods, it is currently the best option for managing the high volume of requests. If you have any concerns or require further information, please don't hesitate to reach out.

X-Ray Studies at NHW

For patients requiring an X-ray, we want to remind you that no appointment is necessary. You can simply present at the NHW Medical Imaging department at our main Wangaratta campus with your imaging request between Monday and Friday, from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm.

We truly appreciate your patience as we work to improve our services. Thank you for your continued understanding and support as we continue to enhance the care we provide to our community.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact us via email or visit our website for more information.

DISCOVER FLEXIBLE MATERNITY CARE OPTIONS

We continue to provide high-quality, compassionate maternity care to women and families across the region, with 77 births recorded in October alone. The service offers a wide range of options tailored to meet different needs, ensuring women receive expert support at every stage of their pregnancy journey.

From pregnancy through to birth and post-discharge care, NHW delivers specialist services through a dedicated team of obstetricians, midwives, and paediatricians. Women from surrounding areas including Benalla, Mansfield, Yarrawonga, and Alpine can access antenatal care either locally through their community health services or directly with NHW.

NHW has also introduced a flexible self-referral system, allowing women who plan to give birth in Wangaratta to choose the care model that best suits them. This approach enables families to stay close to home while benefiting from NHW's specialist expertise when it matters most.

Families can also participate in free childbirth education classes held at the University Teaching & Learning Centre in Wangaratta. The dedicated maternity ward and Mother & Baby Centre provide safe, professional care during birth, while lactation support clinics and the Victorian Infant Hearing Screening Program offer ongoing support in the early days of parenthood. NHW also provides specialist services such as a gestational diabetes clinic for women requiring higher-level care.

Rebecca Weir, NHW Chief Operating Officer, said the maternity service focuses on meeting the individual choices and needs of each woman. "Every pregnancy journey is unique. Our aim is to ensure women have access to the care they want, where they want it, with the confidence that NHW's full support and specialist backup is always available," she said.

Ms Weir emphasised the importance of accessible care across the region. "Pregnancy is a significant time in women's lives, and being able to access care close to home is vital. By working closely with local health services, we ensure women don't have to travel for every appointment but still have strong connections to our team here in Wangaratta if they choose to birth here."

She also highlighted NHW's ongoing commitment to women-centred care. "We are proud of our longstanding partnerships with regional health services. Our commitment is to continue delivering maternity care that respects women's choices, supports families, and provides safe, compassionate care for every birth. By strengthening these connections, families can access high-quality care in their own communities while remaining connected to NHW as their birth hospital."

For more information about NHW's maternity services, care options, or to make a referral, visit northeasthealth.org.au/having-a-baby.



AMOUR ILLOURA

Earlier this month at our residential aged care facility - Iloura was transformed with the sights and sounds of French culture during our Cultural French Day celebration.

Staff and residents were treated to live music from local French band C'est Si Bon, creating a lively and authentic atmosphere. The event was a great opportunity to come together, enjoy some cultural connection, and celebrate diversity across our organisation.

Thank you to everyone who joined in and helped make the day a success.





SEEKING INDEPENDENT MEMBER AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE AT NHW

The Northeast Health Wangaratta Board is seeking an Independent member for its Audit and Risk Committee.

The Audit and Risk Committee (the Committee) has been established consistent with Section 3.2.1 of the Standing Directions 2018 under the Financial Management Act (1994).

The primary purpose of the Committee is to assist the Board to fulfil its obligations regarding effectiveness of the financial reporting framework and internal audit activities and recommendations.

The Committee also supports the Board in the review of annual financial statements, compliance attestations and annual report of operations. In addition to oversighting the external audit program, the Committee also functions to review and monitor compliance with risk and financial management laws and standards and monitoring of the NHW risk management framework.

The primary purpose of the role of Independent Member is to provide objective oversight, specialist expertise and impartial judgement to strengthen governance, financial integrity and risk management. The initial term of the role is 12 months with a view to a 3 year appointment. Enquiries about the role (including a copy of the position description) should be directed to Kris Cirulis on 03 5722 5454.

Applications, addressing the selection criteria from the PD should be emailed to kris.cirulis@nhw.org.au. Applications close, November 23, 2025



BOARD DIRECTOR OPPORTUNITIES AT NHW

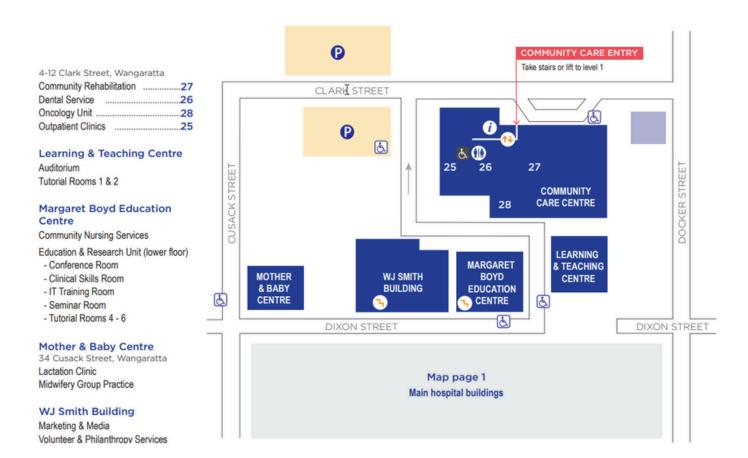
The Minister for Health, the Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas MP, is pleased to invite applications for part time board director positions at Northeast Health Wangaratta. The positions start on 1 July 2026, for up to three years.

These positions provide an exciting opportunity for persons with an interest in making a difference in the health sector and have the knowledge and skills for ensuring health care is delivered safely and effectively, with public money used to the benefit of all Victorians. As a director you will be doing more than just contributing your time or knowledge. Being appointed to a hospital board places you in a position of trust. You will play an important role in providing leadership, accountability and integrity in the delivery of healthcare across Victoria. Applicants are selected for their capabilities, including personal and professional experience, knowledge, and skills that contribute to the strategic leadership and oversight of healthcare for the Victorian community. It is preferable that applicants reside in Victoria or, within the border community of those hospitals near the New South Wales and South Australian borders. While Victorian public health boards are based on capabilities, boards are more effective when these capabilities also represent the richness of the diverse voices of Victorian communities. We encourage First Nations people, people living with a disability, people from culturally diverse backgrounds, people who identify as LGBTIQA+, gender equality, and upholding human rights.

Applications close Midnight Sunday 23 November 2025. Further information about Victorian health service boards and how to apply can be found at

www.health.vic.gov.au/board-applications







The Victorian Virtual Emergency Department (VVED) is a public health service for non-life-threatening emergencies.

You can access emergency care from anywhere in Victoria, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

You will be connected to doctors and nurse practitioners, who are trained to assist you.

Interpreter services are available for patients who prefer to speak in their own language.

To access visit www.vved.org.au

REMEMBER if your situation is life-threatening call Triple Zero (000)

GIVE YOUR FEEDBACK

We value any feedback about our service, whether it be a suggestion, a complaint or a compliment. To give feedback, you can:

- Speak with any member of staff or the Manager of the Department you are receiving the service from
- Call our Consumer Liaison Officer on (03) 5722 5202 between 8.00am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday
- Complete our online feedback form at www.nhw.org.au
- Email us at feedback@nhw.org.au
- Write to Manager Consumer Experience, Northeast Health Wangaratta, PO Box 386, Wangaratta 3676



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