

# Caring for the Coast Awards

Recognising our people  
for their outstanding  
contribution

25

*Sponsored by*

UNIVERSITY OF  
NEWCASTLE 

## A message from our Chief Executive Scott McLachlan

### Welcome to the Caring for the Coast Awards

Across every corner of our organisation, individuals and teams are giving their all to care for our community, but there is not always time to reflect on their achievements as we move onto the next task or welcome the next patient into our care.

The Caring for the Coast Awards give us an opportunity to pause and recognise the efforts of the quiet achievers, the everyday heroes and the dedicated volunteers, all playing a vital part in providing trusted care to our community.

Our finalists represent the very best of who we are. They are researchers pushing boundaries, clinicians reimagining care, teams building stronger systems and individuals going above and beyond to care for our community with kindness and compassion. Congratulations to our outstanding finalists and to all those who were nominated for these awards.



I would also like to acknowledge our sponsors – your partnership enables us to honour these achievements and share these stories with our community. Thank you.

Let tonight be a moment of joy and reflection as we celebrate our people and their amazing achievements. I hope their stories inspire us all and remind us of the collective difference we make, each and every day, to our patients, to our colleagues and to our community.

# Thank you to our sponsors

## GOLD SPONSOR



Guided by the values of equity, excellence, sustainability and engagement, the **University of Newcastle** has built a strong reputation as a world-leading university making an impact within their regions, in Australia and across the globe. We're proud to be ranked in the top 1% of universities in the world and in the top 40 universities globally for impact.

The University of Newcastle enrolls more than 37,000 students from diverse backgrounds, with a focus on equity and developing the world's next generation of socially-oriented leaders, entrepreneurs, and innovators.

For over 30 years, the University of Newcastle's Central Coast campus has been providing world-class education and research. Now expanding its presence in the region, the University will open a new facility on Mann Street, Gosford, with teaching set to begin in Semester 1, 2026. This new facility will enhance access to higher education in the region.

Alongside the Ourimbah site and the Central Coast Clinical School and Research Institute (CCCSRI), the Gosford location will strengthen the University's commitment to local education and economic growth, ensuring more people can live and study on the Central Coast.

[www.newcastle.edu.au](http://www.newcastle.edu.au)

## SPONSORS



[www.salarypackagingplus.com.au](http://www.salarypackagingplus.com.au)



[www.spectacularballoons.com.au](http://www.spectacularballoons.com.au)



[www.tristel.com](http://www.tristel.com)



# Our finalists

## Excellence in Improving Equity in Healthcare Award

*Recognising exceptional health care that is responsive to the needs of our local Aboriginal community, people from multicultural backgrounds or other diverse needs.*



### Allied health seamless care: enhancing adult mental health

This initiative started with a clinical redesign project which considered how vacant allied health positions could be used to address gaps in care for adult mental health consumers in the community.

The team identified that following a brief period of crisis support, many adult mental health consumers were not able to access the care they needed in the community. In response to this, the Brief Intervention Mental Health Service (BIMHS) was developed to improve patient experience and outcomes through immediate delivery of allied health brief intervention for adult consumers experiencing psychosocial crisis to prevent escalation and to facilitate smooth transitions to primary care services.

The BIMHS service was launched in January 2025 and early outcomes show reduced psychological distress and positive feedback, positioning BIMHS as a scalable, sustainable model for improving equity and access to mental health services.



### Increasing vaccination access for CALD communities on the Coast (I-VACCC)

I-VACCC is a public health program designed to overcome vaccination barriers among culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations on the Central Coast.

Working with local TAFEs, the pilot initiative in 2024 delivered 15 education sessions to 302 participants speaking more than 21 languages, followed by vaccination clinics that administered 271 vaccinations. The project used health care interpreters to overcome language barriers, while providing opportunistic health screening and immunisation record updates.

By combining culturally appropriate education with practical access to free vaccination services, I-VACCC built community trust while addressing immediate public health needs. After the success of the pilot, I-VACCC was replicated in 2025.



### Gosford spinal pathway satellite clinic

The spinal pathway satellite clinic has significantly improved healthcare equity for Central Coast patients with back pain by providing a local clinic at Gosford Hospital, rather than patients having to travel to Royal North Shore Hospital.

Key benefits include an 80% reduction in wait times, with 93–95% of patients managed conservatively, avoiding unnecessary surgeries and specialist consultations. The initiative saved over 3,000kg of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and 761 hours of patient and carer time annually, while also generating substantial healthcare cost savings.

By offering care closer to home, the program enhanced patient satisfaction and aligned with state and national health and environmental goals. The program has now received ongoing funding.

# Our finalists

## Volunteer of the Year

*Recognising a volunteer who provides excellent support for staff, patients, carers and families.*



### Susan Quinton-Jones

Susan is a beloved and inspiring volunteer at Wyong Hospital's Emergency Department.

Known for her warm smile, colourful attire and the tasty homemade fudge she brings for staff each week, Susan goes above and beyond in every aspect of her role – mentoring new volunteers, supporting staff with behind-the-scenes tasks and even encouraging friends to join the volunteer team.

Susan is an ambassador for volunteering – she embodies kindness and respect and her presence lifts everyone around her. Susan always carries a few handmade hearts with her, ready to offer one to someone who may need a little kindness.



### Melissa Jones

Melissa is warm, proactive and a wonderful example of what it means to be a volunteer.

Melissa volunteers in Wyong Hospital's Emergency Department and the Palliative Care Unit at Gosford Hospital, where she brings joy and comfort through simple yet meaningful acts – offering a listening ear at a patient's bedside, encouraging patients outdoors to enjoy the sunshine and quietly supporting those who are struggling.

Melissa actively supports, and volunteers with, other organisations and palliative care is particularly close to her heart. As President of Elsie's Project, Melissa leads fundraising efforts to support palliative care on the Central Coast with our Palliative Care Unit directly benefiting from this. Her passion for helping others has also inspired other volunteers to join our team.



### Robyn Dawes

Robyn is known for her tireless dedication, compassion and versatility since joining our volunteer team.

Robyn volunteers several times a week, greeting visitors, assisting with wayfinding and supporting teams across many departments including ICU, Maternity, ED and Revenue. She is an extremely committed and dependable volunteer and regularly steps up to fill gaps, support staff, train volunteers and ensure every job gets done.

Her background in medical administration has been invaluable in streamlining processes and taking on technical tasks, while her kindness, warmth and empathy shine through in every interaction.

Robyn is an indispensable and deeply valued member of the volunteer team.

# Our finalists

## Innovation and Sustainability Award

*Recognising innovations in models of care, systems or services, or achievements to reduce our environmental footprint or improve our financial efficiency, whilst continuing to deliver high quality healthcare and patient experience.*



### CADD Solis pump in Hospital in the Home

The implementation of the reusable CADD Solis pump in the Hospital in the Home (HITH) program has delivered significant environmental, clinical and economic benefits.

By replacing single-use elastomeric infusors, the project has reduced pharmaceutical waste and carbon emissions, saving approximately 245.76 kg CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent for the first 71 patients, while also improving the accuracy and consistency of antibiotic delivery. This has led to better patient outcomes, including faster hospital discharges, fewer nursing visits and enhanced patient satisfaction.

Financially, the initiative has already saved around \$50,000 and is projected to exceed \$100,000 in savings, demonstrating strong value for money and scalability across other health services.



### NWAU dashboard

The NWAU (National Weighted Activity Unit) dashboard has delivered significant benefits by transforming complex Activity Based Funding (ABF) data into an accessible, user-friendly platform that supports informed decision-making across Central Coast Local Health District.

By integrating nine data sources into a single automated tool, it has improved operational efficiency, reduced manual data handling and enhanced ABF literacy.

The dashboard has become a strategic asset embedded in performance monitoring, education and planning, safeguarding ABF funding and supporting efficient allocation of resources. Its scalability, high usage and sustainability underscore its potential for broader adoption across health services.



### The potassium challenge

The potassium challenge project significantly improved patient experience, clinical practice and environmental sustainability by reducing unnecessary intravenous (IV) potassium use. The project team considered whether IV potassium could, when clinically appropriate, be replaced with oral potassium. The initiative led to a 13% monthly reduction in IV potassium usage, saving 1,688 bags, cutting 112.4kg of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and reducing waste by 38kg and resulting in cost savings.

It enhanced patient comfort by addressing infusion-related pain, empowered staff with evidence-based education and promoted safer prescribing practices. The project's scalable model has been recognised through national presentations and publications, with potential for statewide adoption and further fiscal and clinical benefits.

## Our finalists

# Keeping People Healthy Award

*Recognising work with the community to provide community-based health services, raise awareness of healthy choices, prevent ill health and improve the overall health and wellbeing of the community.*



### Partnering with carers – what do dogs, chocolate crackles and Zooper Doopers have to do with it?

The Carer Support Unit (CSU) has increased staff engagement in carer support and enhanced carer visibility through a combination of innovative, evidence-based strategies.

By integrating therapy dog visits, nostalgic treats and the 'What's in it for me' (WIIFM) approach into their training sessions, the CSU achieved a 236% increase in staff participation, reaching one in six employees over 12 months.

These initiatives led to a notable rise in carer referrals and Carer Gateway registrations which contributes to better outcomes for patient and carers.

The sessions also generated goodwill with staff and provided opportunities to improve staff wellbeing and morale.



### Ward off winter! patient vaccination program

This opportunistic vaccination program has significantly improved vaccine access for high-risk populations by offering influenza, COVID-19 and other essential vaccines to hospital inpatients, outpatients and their carers.

An innovative authorised nurse immuniser (ANI) model streamlines vaccination and reduces the burden on other clinical staff and the model is also gaining traction with other local health districts. Evaluation shows the program reaches under-vaccinated individuals and achieves high consent rates when vaccines are offered during routine care.

It has now received additional NSW Ministry of Health funding and is supported through to 2028.



### Youth health pop-ups

This mobile outreach program is designed to improve healthcare access for vulnerable young people aged 12–24 by delivering services directly to schools and youth refuges.

By addressing common barriers such as transport, stigma and limited health literacy, the program ensures timely access to psychosocial assessments, health education and specialist referrals.

Key benefits include increased engagement with healthcare services, strengthened referral pathways between schools and health providers and enhanced community capacity to support youth wellbeing.

The model is agile, scalable and sustainable, making it a valuable approach for extending equitable healthcare access across diverse settings.

## Our finalists

### Maree Gleeson Award for Excellence in Research

*Recognising outstanding achievement in research, positively improving patient experience and outcomes, our health decisions, policies and practices.*



#### Enhancing guidewire efficacy for transradial access: The EAGER randomised controlled trial

The EAGER Randomised Controlled Trial evaluated the effectiveness of a smaller 1.5-mm guidewire, known as the Baby J, in transradial coronary procedures compared to the standard 3-mm guidewire.

Conducted across Gosford and John Hunter hospitals with 330 patients, the study demonstrated that the Baby J wire significantly improved technical success rates, reduced fluoroscopy time and minimised complications such as pain, radial artery spasm and bleeding — particularly benefiting women, who often face higher procedural risks due to smaller artery size.

The trial not only influenced local clinical practice by promoting safer, more efficient procedures but fostered a collaborative research culture and achieved wider recognition through publication in a leading cardiology journal and presentation at an international conference.



#### Dispensing of take-home naloxone to individuals at risk of opioid overdose

The take home naloxone (THN) program is a pioneering initiative aimed at reducing opioid-related deaths by providing naloxone nasal spray to patients at risk of overdose upon discharge from our emergency departments.

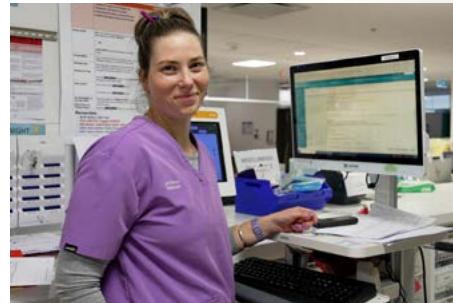
Recognising that only a small fraction of overdose patients had access to naloxone before arriving at the hospital, the program addresses a critical gap in community access to this life-saving medication.

Through collaboration with ED staff, pharmacists and the Drug & Alcohol Service, the program integrates naloxone distribution into standard discharge procedures, supported by educational materials and follow-up care.

# Our finalists

## Patient Safety and Experience Award

*Recognising a commitment to quality improvement to safe, patient-centred care that leads to better health outcomes or an improved experience in acute care, community or other settings.*



### Partnered pharmacy medication charting in Wyong Emergency Department

The partnered pharmacist medication charting initiative at Wyong Emergency Department significantly enhanced patient safety, workflow efficiency and interdisciplinary collaboration by embedding pharmacists directly into the medication charting process.

Medication safety and accuracy are critical to ensuring optimal patient care. This innovative model has reduced medication errors and delivered substantial cost savings by streamlining care while also saving doctors and nurses time and allowing them to focus on patient care.

The program's success has led to it becoming business as usual in our emergency departments and informed a statewide rollout.



### CoordiNation: development of a professional certificate in care coordination

The *Professional Certificate in Coordinated Care* is a collaborative, cost-effective initiative developed by Central Coast Local Health District, the University of Newcastle and the Central Coast Research Institute to address a critical gap in care coordination training.

Delivered online and accessible to a broad range of health professionals, the course enhances patient safety and experience by equipping clinicians with the skills to deliver integrated, person-centred care. It is sustainable, scalable and already embedded in postgraduate offerings, with strong evidence of improved patient outcomes, professional development and value for money through reduced hospitalisations and more effective community-based care.



### Sweethearts project

The Sweethearts project, developed by the Cardiovascular Unit at Gosford Hospital, addresses anxiety and improves patient experience through a patient-centered video that guides people through what to expect during their cardiac procedure.

Filmed from the patient's perspective, the video helps demystify the hospital environment, introduces staff and explains the admission process.

Distributed via a link before admission and reinforced during pre-admission calls, the video has received positive feedback for reducing anxiety and improving patient confidence.

# Our finalists

## Staff Member of the Year

*Recognising a clinical or non-clinical staff member who makes an exceptional contribution, inspires others and supports effective teamwork.*



### Donna Moore

*Immunisation Coordinator and Clinical Nurse Consultant*

A passionate authorised nurse immuniser, Donna is a tireless advocate for the health of her community. She is an innovator and has championed multiple successful vaccination initiatives that have provided vital immunisations to inpatients, outpatients and community members.

As Central Coast Local Health District's Immunisation Coordinator, Donna provides expert immunisation and nursing advice to LHD staff, vaccination providers across primary care and patients and their families.

Donna provides exceptional care to patients and is a caring colleague and role model, inspiring many nurses to become nurse immunisers. A highly valued and respected member of the Public Health Unit, Donna exemplifies kindness and compassion in all her interactions.



### Sarah Rawlings

*Suicide Prevention Peer Worker*

With a calm, compassionate presence and deep understanding of distress, Sarah supports people in mental health crisis seeking help at Safe Haven.

Sarah connects meaningfully with guests, offering hope and safety when it matters most. Whether she is holding space for someone in acute distress or gently encouraging a colleague, her warmth, patience and empathy shine through. She makes others feel seen, heard and respected—qualities that are especially powerful in suicide prevention and recovery work.

Sarah's dedication to suicide prevention is particularly impactful on the Central Coast, where she has become a trusted figure among clients, colleagues and community members.



### Dr Amy Birtwistle

*Staff Specialist Palliative Care*

Amy is a compassionate and dedicated Staff Specialist in Palliative Care and Director of Physician Education for Wyong Hospital. In her palliative care role, Amy demonstrates excellence in providing care focused on dignity, comfort and support for patients and their families.

Amy goes above and beyond to enhance both patient care and medical education. She works closely with junior doctors and international medical graduates ensuring they receive high-quality training and support.

Through her humility, generosity and leadership, Amy has been a driving force for positive cultural change. She creates an environment of respect, inclusivity, continuous improvement and kindness.

# Our finalists

## People and Culture Award

*Recognising a team or project that supports our workforce to deliver safe, reliable, person-centred care that drives the best outcomes and experience for patients and staff.*



### AHLO Team (Aboriginal Hospital Liaison)

The AHLO Team provides culturally safe support to Aboriginal patients and their families in our hospitals. Despite being a small team, they have significantly improved patient outcomes by reducing rates of Aboriginal patients leaving without waiting for care or discharging against medical advice.

The team has a powerful sense of unity, supporting one another through the emotional demands of their work while extending that same empathy and care to patients, families and staff.

Their commitment to cultural safety and respectful engagement not only strengthens trust in our healthcare services within the Aboriginal community but also inspires broader cultural change across the District.



### Health Promotion

The Health Promotion team has created a vibrant and positive workplace culture grounded in collaboration, innovation and care. This diverse team works cohesively across portfolios to deliver impactful initiatives which support healthier behaviours and create healthier communities on the Central Coast.

The team fosters a supportive environment through team-building activities, open communication and shared recognition. Initiatives like gratitude cards, cultural immersion days and social events strengthen team bonds. Their inclusive, respectful and empowering culture not only enhances staff wellbeing but also drives excellence in community health promotion.



### PACER

The Police Ambulance Clinical Early Response (PACER) team is a pioneering mental health crisis response unit that brings together experienced mental health clinicians and NSW Police to deliver immediate, trauma-informed care in the community.

Based at local police stations, PACER is able to intervene early, de-escalate situations, reduce unnecessary emergency department presentations and ensures individuals in crisis receive compassionate, person-centred support in the least restrictive environment.

PACER has created a strong, respectful team culture grounded in clinical excellence, mutual support and shared purpose. Nurses operate with autonomy while maintaining seamless collaboration with police and health partners, modelling a professional standard that inspires others.



