

Southern Inland Health Initiative

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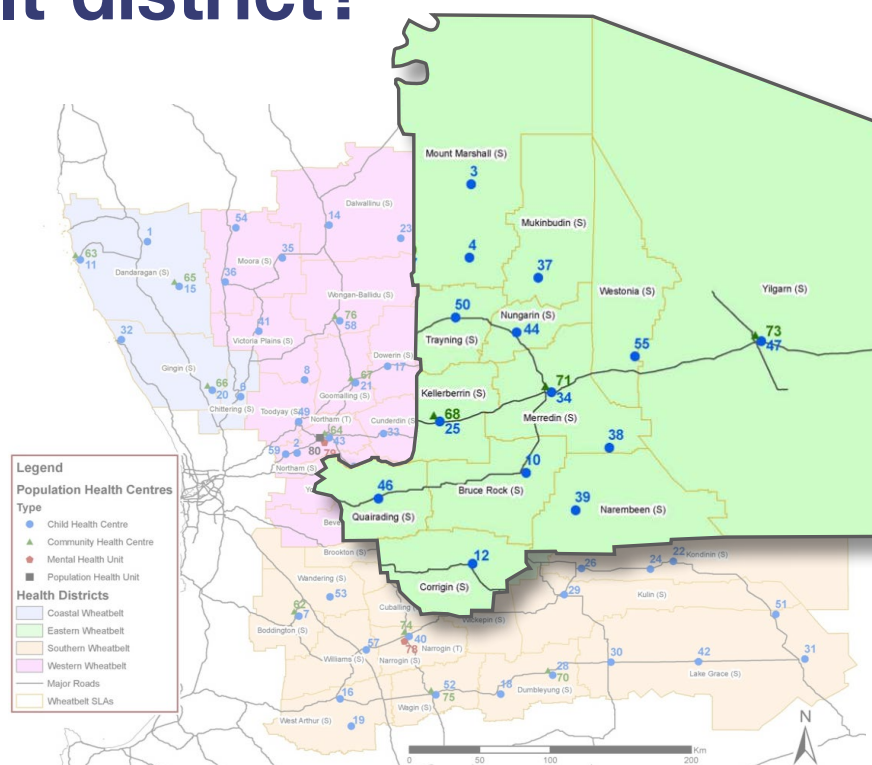
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What is SIHI providing in the eastern Wheatbelt district?

The Southern Inland Health Initiative (SIHI) is a half a billion dollar investment by the State Government's Royalties for Regions program that's transforming health care throughout the southern inland region of WA, including towns in the Wheatbelt, South West, Great Southern, Midwest and Goldfields.

Delivered by the WA Country Health Service, SIHI is the single biggest investment in country health in the State's history. A recent evaluation report shows country people in the regions covered by SIHI are receiving safer, better and more reliable health care, with significant improvements in emergency care and access to GPs.

To read the **SIHI Program Evaluation – Preliminary Key Findings March 2016** report, [click here.](#)



Residents in eastern Wheatbelt towns and surrounding communities are now benefiting from the following health initiatives and improvements thanks to this historic health investment:

Providing better access to doctors and emergency care

SIHI is significantly improving emergency medical care by using modern technology and supporting more doctors to live and work in the country. There has been a demonstrated 67 per cent improvement in the GP retention rate at the SIHI four year mark, indicative of the program's success in supporting and retaining GPs in regional communities (Rural Health West data).

SIHI is also improving the safety and quality of rural health care by improving medical coverage in WA Country Health Service (WACHS) hospitals and health services and better supporting the medical workforce.

In the eastern Wheatbelt region, the following SIHI initiatives are contributing to communities having better access to GPs, improved emergency care and a more robust country health service:



Emergency Telehealth Service

Doctors and nurses treating critically ill and injured patients in emergency departments (EDs) at Merredin, Bruce Rock, Corrigin, Kellerberrin, Kununoppin, Naremben, Quairading, and Southern Cross now have access to highly trained emergency specialists in Perth via videoconference, thanks to the Emergency Telehealth Service (ETS). **Find out more about the ETS here.** [👉 Watch a video where a former patient describes how the ETS helped to save his life.](#) [👉](#)



Incentives to attract GPs to country towns and participate in Emergency Department rosters

Eligible GPs can receive financial incentives to encourage them to work in the SIHI region and take part in ED rosters at local WACHS facilities, including in the eastern Wheatbelt. These incentives are in addition to the support packages provided by local government.

At the Merredin Health Service, SIHI funds GPs to be available on the floor in the ED during the day and on call after hours. SIHI also incentivises a local GP to be on close-call availability to attend the ED at the Southern Cross Health Service.



New district medical model to encourage GPs to stay in country towns

SIHI is supporting collaboration between GPs, enhanced flexible work options, education and training and collegiate support to encourage attraction and retention of doctors providing services in WACHS facilities, including in the eastern Wheatbelt region.



Strengthened medical workforce

SIHI supports the medical workforce to enable continuous service reform and delivery of effective and efficient emergency support to WACHS facilities, including in the eastern Wheatbelt region.



ED Nurse Practitioner

SIHI funds an ED nurse practitioner position in Merredin. ED nurse practitioners are advanced-practice nurses who specialise in emergency care and service model development.



Incentives for GPs to provide primary care services and Aboriginal health services

SIHI offers financial incentives to GPs to deliver primary care services and Aboriginal health services to the community in various eastern Wheatbelt towns.

Providing health care closer to home

SIHI has significantly increased the range of local health services that bring care closer to home and help people to avoid hospital.

In partnership with non-government and community organisations, SIHI is building a more sustainable rural health system. In the eastern Wheatbelt region, the following can now be accessed thanks to SIHI:



Diabetes Educator

A credentialed diabetes educator is available for appointments once a month at Merredin. Pregnant women can now access diabetes services with King Edward Memorial Hospital via telehealth from their own town, with support of the local midwife and a diabetes educator. The Diabetes Telehealth service is also available (if required) in this area via videoconference (see next page).



Community Midwifery Service

A part-time community midwife, based in Merredin, provides shared antenatal care with local GPs where possible, including visiting and outreach services to expectant women throughout the eastern Wheatbelt. Women can plan their birth to enhance the safety and well-being of their babies. The midwife has an average case load of 20–30 women per month, many of whom are Aboriginal women and high acuity clients.



Newborn Hearing Screening Program

Parents and newborn babies living in the eastern Wheatbelt region can now access newborn hearing screening provided by community midwives in Merredin, improving the rate of early detection of hearing issues in newborns. SIHI has funded \$18,000 for a portable newborn hearing screening device used by community midwives.



Primary Health Nurse Practitioner

A nurse practitioner works closely with GPs and provides home visits, care plans and delivers primary care, including for mental health clients, throughout the eastern Wheatbelt. Nurse practitioners conduct clinics in small towns where there are no GPs or limited access to GPs.



Aged Care

Under SIHI, there is a focus on clinical improvement in residential aged care facilities including reducing falls and improving care for people with dementia. There is a priority to improve access to community care options to enable people to stay in their homes as long as possible. In Merredin, SIHI funds a Senior Aged Care Clinician who works with GPs, provides clinical assessments and coordinates services for patients awaiting placement in an aged care facility.



Mental Health

A shared-care approach between GPs, mental health services and nurse practitioners has enabled the physical health care needs of clients to be comprehensively assessed and managed, in particular in areas where there are limited GPs.

Providing health care closer to home (cont.)



Health Navigator

A free telephone and videoconferencing service that supports people living with diabetes, heart disease, heart failure, and long-term lung conditions, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) to manage their chronic conditions and get their health on track.



Shared electronic records

Health Navigator clients can now choose to share their health records with all those involved in their care. This means the client's goals and health history are available so everyone works to the same health goals.



Outpatient services via telehealth

Free outpatient service for public patients via videoconference for burns, wounds, pain management, speech pathology, dietetics, gastroenterology, neurology, urology, paediatrics and more can be accessed from nine eastern Wheatbelt hospitals and health services with participating specialists in Perth.



Tele-mental Health

Eastern Wheatbelt clients can have appointments with their psychiatrist and/or therapist (psychologist, social worker etc) from their home towns via videoconference, instead of having to make the journey to the regional health centre at Merredin.



Diabetes Telehealth

A partnership between WACHS and Diabetes WA to enhance diabetes education services for people in the Wheatbelt, including the eastern district, using videoconferencing.

Phone 1300 136 588 or visit the [Diabetes WA website](#). 🖱️



Antenatal telehealth classes

Regular antenatal education classes are now available via videoconference, linking expectant parents throughout the eastern Wheatbelt with a range of specialists and experts without having to travel to their delivery hospital. Join the Facebook page: [Facebook/BabyBumpsWA](#) 🖱️



Lactation telehealth service

New mothers in the Wheatbelt can go to their local hospital or health service and link via videoconference with specialist midwives at King Edward Memorial Hospital who provide specialists breastfeeding advice.



Kids Health Link

Funded by SIHI, Kids Health Link runs kindergarten 'readiness to learn' programs and after school homework programs at Merredin District High School for local children and families with complex needs, to support them to build literacy and academic skills.

Existing services

Services introduced under SIHI are provided in addition to existing WACHS Wheatbelt services including Aboriginal health, child health nursing, school health nursing, immunisation, occupational therapy, speech pathology, physiotherapy, social work, dietetics, diabetes education and mental health services which are available (primarily outreach/visiting) throughout the eastern Wheatbelt through scheduled visits and telehealth.



Providing upgrades to hospital and health service facilities

SIHI is investing \$300 million to upgrade 37 hospital and health service facilities across the Wheatbelt, South West, Midwest and Great Southern. Upgrades will support the delivery of health care services that will better match the needs of their communities and conform to all current compliance and security standards.

In the eastern Wheatbelt region, the Merredin Health Service is about to undergo a \$24 million plus upgrade as part of the SIHI capital works program, with construction expected to commence in mid-2016 and be completed in mid-2018.

The upgrades to Merredin Health Service will include a new state-of-the-art emergency department, improved medical imaging and administration areas and a new

building for Aboriginal health, allied health, mental health and outpatient services like physiotherapy, occupational therapy, school and child health clinics, community health, telehealth consult rooms and new consulting rooms for visiting specialists.

Also under the SIHI capital works program, health services in the eastern Wheatbelt towns of Corrigin, Kellerberrin, Kununoppin, Mukinbudin, Narembeen, Quairading and Southern Cross will be upgraded, with construction on the various sites due to commence in the second half of 2016.

Visit the [Bigger Picture Health website](#) for more information on all the SIHI capital projects in the Wheatbelt.



Next steps for SIHI

SIHI is transforming the regional health landscape in the southern inland region of WA. The results of the first **evaluation** of SIHI are very encouraging. The program will continue to be evaluated and a business case is being developed proposing future funding strategies to continue critical programs beyond the end date of 30 June 2017.

You can keep updated on the latest SIHI news by signing up for the [SIHI e-newsletter](#), which will be issued monthly.

If you have any queries about SIHI, please contact us by emailing southerninland@health.wa.gov.au

You can also visit the SIHI website at www.health.wa.gov.au/southerninland

Rural nurse practitioners focus on physical and mental health

WACHS and Silver Chain nurse practitioners offer a wide range of health services to regional communities, including some who are widening the focus to include mental health care.

Residents across the Wheatbelt and Central Great Southern region are now benefiting from a holistic approach that includes mental health screening, thanks to local WACHS-Silver Chain nurse practitioners funded under the Southern Inland Health Initiative.

Silver Chain Eastern Wheatbelt Nurse Practitioner Laura Black's regular clinics in Southern Cross, Westonia, Narembeen and Bruce Rock give her the opportunity to screen patients for mental health issues in addition to diagnosing physical illnesses, writing prescriptions, ordering pathology tests, providing information about healthier diet and exercise, or managing wound care.

Laura is also qualified to screen for and diagnose physical illnesses that may be affecting a mental health client's overall wellbeing.

According to Laura, this holistic approach has resulted in some patients receiving the mental health support they needed when they might otherwise have fallen through the cracks.



Nurse Practitioner Laura Black.

“A nurse practitioner bridges the gap between the GP, mental health services and other health services,” Laura said.

WACHS has led the introduction of Nurse Practitioners across the southern inland area of our state in partnership with Silver Chain since 2012.

Innovative service helps people navigate the health system

People with chronic health conditions across the Wheatbelt and Great Southern are receiving help to improve their health from the innovative Health Navigator service.

Health Navigator is a free telephone and video-conferencing service offered by WACHS and the Silver Chain Group to help people with diabetes and long-term lung and heart conditions ‘navigate’ the often complex health system.

The Health Navigator service is part of the Southern Inland Health Initiative, a half a billion dollar program funded by the State Government's Royalties for Regions program.

Health Navigator works with local GPs to support people to keep their health on track. With the patient's permission, clinical information can be shared between their GP and any other health provider involved in their care to ensure everyone is working towards the same health outcomes.

Health Navigator project manager in the Wheatbelt,

Karen Beardsmore said people in regional areas have higher rates of diabetes and heart disease than people in the metropolitan area, and it can be harder for them to access advice and support services.

“In the Wheatbelt, 7.5 per cent of adults have diabetes of some form, compared to 6.3 per cent of adults Statewide. Complications from diabetes account for 3.8 per cent of all deaths among Wheatbelt residents, which is a staggering figure compared to the State average of 1%,” Ms Beardsmore said.

“The Wheatbelt also has one of the highest rates of heart disease, with 26.5% of adults experiencing some form of heart disease, which is significantly higher than the national average (21.5%) and the Perth metropolitan area (between 10.7%–20.9%).

“Both conditions are preventable and treatable if people have access to the right information, education and ongoing support – which is what the Health Navigator team aims to provide.”

Find out more about [Health Navigator here.](#) 

Upgrades to Merredin Health Service about to get underway

The redevelopment of the Merredin Health Service is gathering momentum and elevations showing the architectural designs are now available [here](#). 🖱️

WACHS Eastern Wheatbelt Operations Manager Brenda Bradley said Merredin Hospital was built pre-World War 2 and over the years, it has served the community well.

“The redevelopment will bring the grand old building into the 21st Century to create a contemporary hospital offering a wide range of health services in one convenient location, whilst maintaining its striking art deco façade.

“The original front entrance of the hospital will be re-instated and used as the main entrance with a new reception area, whilst the new emergency department will have its own dedicated entrance, which will greatly improve emergency patient flow.”

Upgrades will include a new state-of-the-art emergency department which includes a separate emergency entrance and dedicated triage area, a brand new building for Aboriginal health, allied health and outpatient services like physiotherapy, occupational therapy, school and child health clinics, community health and telehealth consult rooms and new consulting rooms for visiting specialists.

“There will also be dedicated mental health consult rooms and meeting rooms for group work like mothers’ groups, antenatal education and chronic disease, bringing services that are currently spread around town into one convenient location,” she said.

Ms Bradley said it is not just about bricks and mortar when upgrading a hospital.

“Merredin Hospital has a long history of providing care to the community. It was once a training school for enrolled nurses and over the years it has had a number of alterations and additions.

“But things change; there are now better and safer



Merredin District Hospital's art deco façade.

ways of designing health facilities that improve patient safety and their experience whilst providing staff with a more contemporary work place.

“This redevelopment will enhance compliance with modern health facility standards and ensure Merredin Hospital is well placed to service the community for many more years to come.” Ms Bradley said.

The Merredin Hospital redevelopment is funded by the State Government's Royalties for Regions program as part of the half a billion dollar Southern Inland Health Initiative.

Construction is due to commence around August 2016 and will be completed around mid-2018.

Your local District Health Advisory Council (DHAC)

The local District Health Advisory Council (DHAC) works with the WA Country Health Service to improve the delivery of health services in their health district.

As consumers, carers and community members, DHACs are able to share their and others experiences with local health service providers to help them make

better health service decisions and deliver consumer centred care and services. To find out more, visit www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au 🖱️ and search 'District Health Advisory Councils'.

Your eastern Wheatbelt DHAC Chairperson is Onida Truran who can be contacted on 90813220 or email bmmsx@bigpond.com 🖱️