

Southern Inland Health Initiative



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What is SIHI providing in the Great Southern?

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 Great Southern towns and surrounding communities are now benefitting 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 by supporting more doctors to live and work in the country. The success of the SIHI program is clear – in the community, there has been a 67 per cent increase in the number of GPs staying in regional communities in the four years since SIHI began. In local hospitals and health care centres, SIHI is improving the safety and quality of care by improving support for the medical workforce.

In the Great Southern region, the following SIHI initiatives are contributing to communities getting better access to GPs, improved emergency care and a stronger country health service:



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 parts of the Great Southern. These incentives are in addition to the support packages provided by local government.

At Katanning and Ravensthorpe health centres, SIHI funds GPs to be on call for after-hours emergencies.



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 Great Southern region.



Strengthened medical workforce

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



ED Nurse Practitioner

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



Emergency Telehealth Service

Doctors and nurses treating critically ill and injured patients in emergency departments (EDs) at Bremer Bay, Denmark, Jerramungup, Mount Barker, Ravensthorpe, Gnowangerup, Katanning and Kojonup now have access to highly trained emergency specialists in Perth via videoconference, thanks to the Emergency Telehealth Service (ETS).



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 in the Great Southern at Ravensthorpe, Gnowangerup, Hopetoun and Kojonup.


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 Great Southern region, the following can now be accessed thanks to SIHI:



Diabetes Educator

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



Community Midwifery Service

Community midwives provide shared antenatal care with local GPs where possible, including visiting and outreach services to expectant women throughout the Great Southern. Women can plan their birth to enhance the safety and wellbeing of their babies. The service has an average case load of 20-30 women per month including Aboriginal women and clients with complex care needs.



Primary Health Nurse Practitioner

A nurse practitioner works closely with GPs and provides home visits, care plans and primary care, including for mental health clients, throughout the Great Southern. Nurse practitioners conduct clinics in small towns where there is a limited number of 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.



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.



Health Navigator

This free telephone and videoconferencing service 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.

Providing health care closer to home (cont.)



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 Bremer Bay, Denmark, Jerramungup, Mount Barker, Ravensthorpe, Gnowangerup, Katanning, Kojonup and Tambellup health services with participating specialists in Perth and regional centres.



Tele-mental Health

Great Southern 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 Albany.



Diabetes Telehealth

A partnership between WACHS and Diabetes WA to enhance diabetes education services for people in the Great Southern, using videoconferencing. Phone 1300 136 588 or visit the Diabetes WA website at www.diabeteswa.com.au 🖱️



Antenatal telehealth classes

Regular antenatal education classes are now available via videoconference, linking expectant parents throughout the Great Southern with a range of specialists and experts without having to travel to their delivery hospital. **Join the Facebook page: Facebook/BabyBumpsWA** 🖱️



Kindergarten Oral Speech and Language Program

This innovative primary health program developed by WACHS Speech Pathologists in partnership with the YMCA targets speech development in young children attending kindergarten across the Great Southern. All schools involved observed a marked improvement in the number of children achieving language benchmarks.



Existing services

Services introduced in the Great Southern under SIHI are provided in addition to the WA Country Health Service (WACHS) programs that were already available. WACHS and continues to offer Aboriginal health, child health nursing, school health nursing, immunisation, occupational therapy, speech pathology, physiotherapy, social work, dietetics, diabetes education and mental health services throughout the region 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 ensure these facilities continue to be equipped to deliver contemporary models of care now and into the future.

In the Great Southern region, the Katanning Health Service (artist's impression below) is undergoing a \$32 million upgrade as part of the SIHI capital works program. Forward works are now complete and construction started on the main works in August 2016.

The upgraded facilities are expected to open mid-2018.

The work includes a new a new state-of-the-art emergency department and medical imaging department, a new outpatient care facility, refurbished surgical services and associated sterilising department, a new laundry and morgue.

Also under the SIHI capital works program, upgrades to Gnowangerup, Tambellup and Kojonup health services are now complete and are providing enhanced facilities to these local communities.

Visit the WA Country Health Service website  for more information about all the SIHI capital projects in the Great Southern.





Supporting regional people living with chronic conditions

People with chronic health conditions can become overwhelmed by the system and struggle with looking after their health needs. Having a number of conditions means multiple medical appointments, repeating information to different clinicians, duplication of tests, inconvenience and stress.

That's where Health Navigator comes in, providing support for people in the Great Southern and Wheatbelt with diabetes, heart disease, heart failure and long-term lung conditions to help them find services that will improve their health and keep them out of hospital.

Great Southern client 'Mary' had frequent admissions to her local hospital and Royal Perth Hospital as a result of her Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). She was also having difficulty managing her diabetes and was experiencing hypoglycaemia.

Mary wasn't monitoring her blood glucose levels and wasn't sure if she should adjust her insulin. She was referred by the Health Navigator Nurse on site at Albany Health Campus to a Health Navigator coordinator.

The Health Navigator coordinator linked with Mary's GP and arranged a referral to a Diabetes Educator. The coordinator also supported Mary to achieve health goals and to develop a simple action plan. The Health Navigator coordinator also provided Mary's plan to her GP to ensure Mary was supported.

After some more follow up, Health Navigator found Mary hadn't acted upon the action plan, so in liaison with the GP a referral was arranged to a Nurse Practitioner (NP).

The NP has helped Mary to gain control of her diabetes, reduced her risk of hypoglycaemia and enabled a more planned approach to manage her COPD.

Further discussions with Mary revealed that she wasn't participating in her hobbies and was becoming depressed as she didn't want to burden her husband. Health Navigator arranged for Home and Community Care (HACC) transport which allowed her to attend community activities.

New telehealth lactation service for Great Southern mums

New mothers in the Great Southern can now access specialist breastfeeding advice thanks to a new telehealth service developed by the WA Country Health Service (WACHS) and King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEMH).

Mothers experiencing issues with breastfeeding can now connect with specialist lactation consultants via videoconference from their local health service. The service has been developed as part of the Maternal Health Service Improvement Project, introduced under the Royalties for Regions-funded Southern Inland Health Initiative (SIHI).

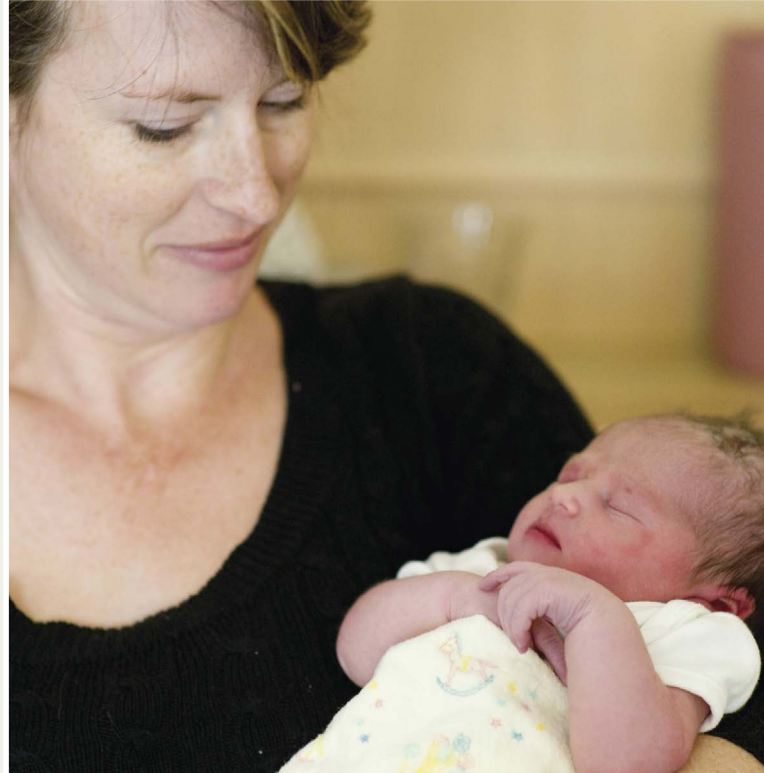
SIHI Maternal Health Project Officer Tarryn Sharp said the new lactation service would be extremely valuable in supporting women in regional and remote areas to establish and maintain breastfeeding.

“It’s common knowledge that breast milk is the best source of nutrition for new babies, and that establishing breastfeeding can take time, energy and support,” Ms Sharp said.

The new lactation telehealth service links new mothers with specialist midwives at KEMH who are professional lactation consultants trained to help tackle issues such as pain and attachment difficulties, breastfeeding a premature or small baby, and low milk production.

“In Australia, 92 per cent of babies are exclusively breastfed for the first month of their life, however this number drops off sharply by three months (56 per cent) and by six months only 14 per cent of babies are exclusively breastfed. This indicates that many mothers start out wanting to breastfeed their babies, but may experience issues and switch to formula feeding,” Ms Sharp said.

“This may be due to ongoing discomfort with feeding due to poor positioning and attachment, or fears that



their baby isn’t receiving enough milk, or simply because they are becoming tired and lacking in energy due to not looking after their own health.

“Our WACHS community midwives and child health nurses already offer support and advice to breastfeeding women to help them address issues they are having. This additional link to experienced lactation consultants will help more women become happy and confident breastfeeding their babies.”

The telehealth lactation consultant service and other initiatives introduced under the Maternal Health Service Improvement Project – such as community midwives and telehealth antenatal education – are contributing to safer pregnancies, births and infant care, and better outcomes for babies and their mums.



Your local District Health Advisory Council (DHAC)

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

DHAC members share experiences with local health service providers to improve consumer-centred care and services. To find out more, visit

www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au and search for 'District Health Advisory Councils'.

Your Lower Great Southern DHAC Chairperson is Irene Montefiore who can be contacted on 9892 2672.

Your Central Great Southern DHAC Chairperson is Hilary Harris who can be contacted on 9892 2672.

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 assessed and future possible funding models are being developed to continue critical programs beyond SIHI's completion in 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

W: www.health.wa.gov.au/southerninland **E:** southerninland@health.wa.gov.au