

## Balranald MPS: showcasing the successful synergy of government and community engagement

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There are many challenges in delivering appropriate health and aged care services in small rural communities, particularly where they are located long distances from larger centres. The services required are often of a scale that is less than optimal in terms of efficiency and this sometimes means mainstream services are not viable. For families living in these small remote areas the lack of health services can have a major impact on the overall quality of their lives.

The Multipurpose Service (MPS) Program, established in 1993, has seen a capital investment by the NSW Government of over \$350 million. The program is a partnership between the Commonwealth and state governments aimed at addressing the problems of access to, and the sustainability of, health services in small rural communities. NSW currently has 52 MPS facilities operational across the state, with more under construction and in planning.

This poster profiles the Balranald MPS, which represents a great example of the strong community support for the program across NSW. It demonstrates governments and communities working together to ensure rural towns continue to have access to a range of health services and ensures older residents are treated closer to home, in a more home-like environment, where they have the support of friends and loved ones. The recently completed MPS cost approximately \$14 million and was facilitated by the Council of Australian Government (COAG) health reforms initiatives (older patients longer stay initiative). It includes a 24-hour emergency service, eight acute beds, 15 aged care places, respite and palliative care, dental, self-care renal dialysis and imaging services, and a range of primary and community health services.

Community participation was essential to the successful health planning and ongoing service delivery for Balranald. When it came to determining the most effective mechanism to ensure community involvement in the MPS development, the area involved the Local Health Advisory Council. The membership of the committee included stakeholders who appropriately reflected the community. It incorporated representatives of the local community, recognising the different cultural and ethnic groups.

NSW Health wants community members engaged in the MPS development to ensure a service is tailored to meet their local and cultural needs. The expectation of staff and management is reflected in the NSW Health policy, which recognises that embracing such cultural needs can significantly contribute to the overall health and wellbeing of patients.

For people living in rural communities an MPS means that a range of services will be provided under one roof and closer to home.