



CASE STUDY

Healthy Hearts in Long Flat

Practice Name: Long Flat Outreach Clinic • **Location:** Long Flat, NSW • **MM:** 5

Context

Long Flat Outreach Clinic has been providing primary health care to the local rural community since 2010, with the support of The Grange Medical Centre. Long Flat is a small town approximately 50 kilometres from Port Macquarie, with a significant farming community. Long Flat Outreach Clinic provide general practice activities including immunisations, wound care, women and child health, skin checks, ECGs, health assessments, cardiovascular checks, and diabetes education.

Extreme weather has been a challenge in the community, and recent flooding impacted many patients access into town, damaging to roads and other infrastructure.

Registered Nurse Fiona Day is passionate about ensuring the Long Flat community can access the healthcare they need, regardless of these barriers, and as a participant in the Building Nurse Capacity Project, Fiona established a Healthy Heart Nurse Clinic.

A clear plan

Due to the Long Flat patient population living in a rural setting (MM5), access to primary health care can be limited, with more people suffering from cardiovascular diseases in rural areas than metropolitan areas¹.

Fiona's Healthy Heart Clinic aimed to address this by increasing the number of cardiovascular assessments for people with one or more risk factors by 25%.

Funding

Alongside funding from participation in the Building Nurse Capacity Program, Fiona uses MBS item numbers 699, 701-707, and 715. Chronic condition management items including 10997 are also utilised when relevant.

Location and facilities

The clinic runs out of the same building as the local General Store which is a community hub and meeting point. The clinic operates as a satellite service to The Grange Medical Centre located in Port Macquarie, and patients also have the option to travel into town for care if needed.

Staffing and HR

Fiona is well supported by her colleague Dr. Debra King and receptionist Tracey to run the Healthy Heart Nurse Clinic. One of the key challenges Fiona faces is finding other nurses to assist in the clinic due to the rural location.

¹ Mansour, M. (2025). *Understanding the Impact of Heart Disease*. [online] Rural Doctors Foundation. Available at: <https://ruraldoctorsfoundation.org.au/heart-disease/>.



We acknowledge the Birpai people as the traditional owners of the lands featured in this story and pay our respects to Elders past and present.



Best-practice care

Fiona utilised the Building Nurse Capacity payments to purchase much-needed equipment for the clinic, including an ECG machine. Where pathology is needed, Fiona encourages patients to access this service on-site, rather than taking pathology forms away with them. This avoids delays if patients are not travelling into town for some time.

Patient engagement

In Long Flat, building trust and rapport with community members is a key aspect of care provision and as Fiona notes:



I wouldn't have been doing this after 15 years if it was about dollar value.

The local area has been affected by flooding over the past few years and being able to adapt to these conditions to support patients is important to Fiona.

Fiona is conscious of the impact of natural disasters on community well-being and mental health. During recent flooding, some people were unable to get into

town to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables. Fiona's commitment to providing consistent healthcare to this small community is reflected in patient satisfaction to seek health care locally, rather than travel 40 minutes to the next closest GP clinic.

Supporting systems and processes

Data is reviewed in advance of patient attending and if required they are flagged for the cardiovascular clinic



Patient is booked in for time with the nurse before GP appointment



Healthy heart check is conducted



Follow-up appointment is booked to check-in and see if modifiable changes have been made – e.g. reduced salt intake, diet changes etc.

Evaluation and improvement

By focusing on improving clinic equipment and resources, Fiona has improved the self-sufficiency and sustainability of the Healthy Heart Nurse Clinic, and the outreach clinic. Fiona was also able to move the project into a phase of quality improvement by checking if modifiable changes had been made by patients after their healthy heart check. During the operation of the Healthy Heart Clinic, Fiona has sent seriously unwell patients to hospital from the clinic via ambulance as a result of their checks. The Long Flat Clinic is providing an essential service to a community that requires a tailored and holistic approach to health care.

APNA's Building Nurse Capacity Program is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing under the Nursing in Primary Health Care Program.