



# Grassroots Community Report

## *Ballina, Cabbage Tree Island & Byron Region*

### Summary

#### Vision for a health community

*“Happy healthy families, drug and alcohol free, connected to our culture”*

A community who is healthy, active and keeping physically fit and eating healthy food, which is free from addiction to alcohol and other drugs. Where families and community feel supported, are strong and connected to each other and to culture.

#### Top priorities

Mental health and emotional wellbeing; alcohol and drug misuse; healthy lifestyle for all ages such as healthy eating, keeping active, and quitting smoking; dental health; family violence; and respite care.

#### What's working well

Aboriginal community-controlled services and organisations, and their regular communication with community, including Bunjum and Jarjum Bugal Nah Childcare & Family Centre, Bullinah Aboriginal Medical Service, Rekindling the Spirit; and Solid Mob smoking cessation program. Exercise programs for all ages such as gym and walking groups. Community events such as NAIDOC and Koori knock out sports carnivals.

#### Ideas that would have the biggest impact

Prevention and rehabilitation of drug and alcohol abuse; mental health of the community; local employment opportunities; increasing availability of health-related programs and activities; and more supports for youth.

#### Recommendations for Service Providers and Research Focus Areas

Addressing the use of alcohol and other drugs; youth activities and supports; more holistic services and programs; strengthened service relationships with community; employment.

## Northern Rivers Regional Community Vision for a Healthy Future

Health from the Grassroots is an Aboriginal community-led research project to improve health and wellbeing across the Northern Rivers region of NSW. It was initiated by Aboriginal staff at the University Centre for Rural Health (UCRH) Lismore. We asked communities living throughout Bundjalung and Yaegl country about their health vision for the region and priorities to reach that vision. Through five yarning circles and surveys with 192 community members, this information was made into the infographic below (Figure 1). We subsequently used this at community events and gatherings, yarning with people about whether the depiction was accurate and if anything was missing. On the whole, there was broad support and positive comments about it representing the community story well.

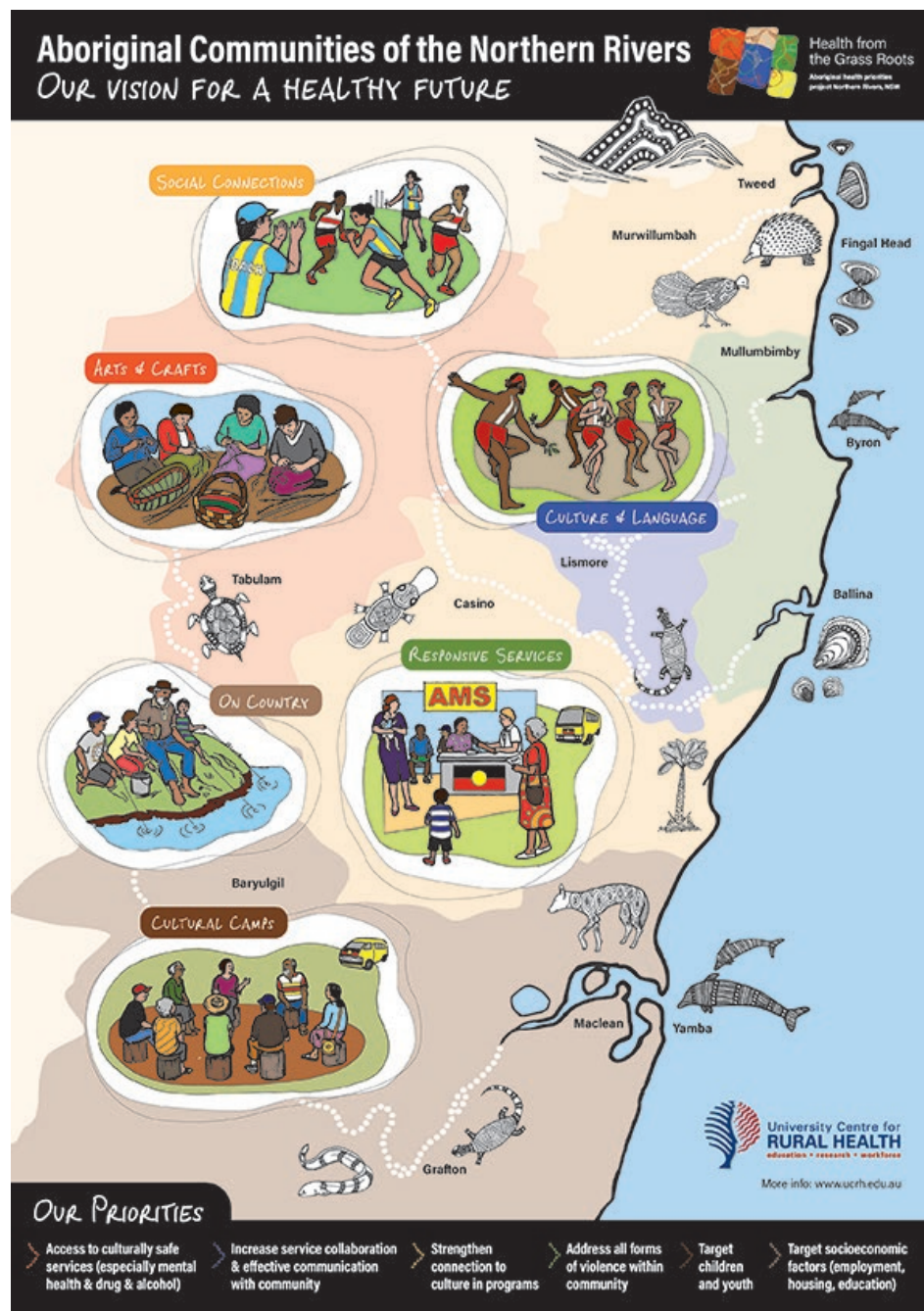


Figure 1: Vision and priorities for a healthy future – Bundjalung and Yaegl country.

## Ballina, Cabbage Tree Island & Byron Communities - Vision & Priorities

### Vision

Results from the survey and yarns revealed a shared vision for community in the region where people are happy, resilient and free from sickness. A healthy community is a community who is active and keeping physically fit and eating healthy food, a community which is free from addiction to alcohol and other drugs.

It's also where families feel supported, are strong, respectful, care for each other, and where community is well connected to each other and to culture, attending social community events together such as sports events.

*"A Healthy Community to me is one that is healthy as a whole mentally and physically"*

*"Happy healthy families, drug and alcohol free, connected to our culture"*

*"People in the community being active and getting involved with community events"*

*"Where everyone can feel comfortable to ask for help and feel safe and work with others that are keen to help, working together"*

*"Happy healthy employed and educated"*

*"Great bush tucker gardens and community gardens for all to maintain and benefit from"*

### Top Priorities

Respondents from the Ballina/Cabbage Tree and Byron areas strongly viewed mental health and emotional wellbeing as a key community-based issue, contributing to a variety of social issues such drug and alcohol abuse, gambling, family violence, misuse of finances, unemployment, housing issues including overcrowding. Alcohol and drug misuse; healthy eating; keeping active; quitting smoking; dental health; family violence; and Elder respite care were all reported as being top priorities for the Ballina/Cabbage Tree/Byron communities. Greater support and education for young people on making healthy choices, to have more opportunities for sport, and having access to activities that would keep them safe, engaged and "off the streets" was highlighted as essential for the region.

Respondents consistently mentioned the incorporation of culture into solution design for these top priorities, e.g., improving diet through bush tucker and teaching youth about bush medicines as a way of staying strong and healthy. In addition, culturally appropriate services were important for community to feel comfortable and welcomed.

*"Exercise, eating well, taking care of yourself"*

*"Quitting smoking, quitting drinking and drugs, healthy diet"*

*"Bush tucka, cultural activities, walking on country"*

**Table 1: Health and wellbeing priorities raised by Ballina, Cabbage Tree Island & Byron Region respondents (n=66) compared to broader regional survey responses.**

Health Topic	Ballina, Cabbage Tree Island & Byron region (% respondents)*	Northern Rivers (% respondents)*
Mental and emotional health	26	26
Alcohol and other drugs	21	26
Diet and healthy eating	20	17
Physical activity	17	19
Smoking	17	7
Dental health	14	13
Support for youth	14	13
More accessible programs and activities	14	8

\*Number does not add to 100% as individual respondents provided multiple priorities

### What's working well?

There were many Aboriginal services and organisations that the community acknowledged as working well within the region, with special mentions of Bunjum and Jarjum Bugal Nah Childcare & Family Centre, Bullinah Aboriginal Medical Service, Rekindling the Spirit; and the Solid Mob smoking cessation team. PCYC was also specifically mentioned for its youth activities. In particular, the level of promotion and regular communication that is received from services keeping the community feeling informed and also engaged and connected to local service providers.

Programs already addressing some of the community's top health priorities were positively noted, including exercise programs for all ages such as gym and walking groups, access to sporting events, play groups and men's and women's groups. Respondents suggested holding more regular community events such as NAIDOC and Koori knock out sports carnivals throughout the year.

*"Access to health programs for men and women activity a for all ages and support"*

*"Aboriginal AMS"*

*"Access to Community Health Service & Facebook advertising what is available  
i.e. Solid Mob Smoking Program, Mums and Bubs"*

*"Community health events, early intervention, KO carnivals, sponsorship of local sporting teams"*

Table 2: What is already working well in the Ballina, Cabbage Tree Island & Byron Region from survey respondents (n=67).

Topic	% respondents*
Aboriginal services and organisations	21
Sport and exercise programs for physical activity	15
Community awareness and being kept up-to-date	10
Men's and women's groups	9
Community events	9
Playgroups	7
Services' engagement with community	7

\*Number does not add to 100% as individual respondents provided multiple priorities

### Improvement ideas that would make biggest impact

When asked about what issues, if improved, would likely have the biggest impact for the Ballina and Byron regions, there was majority focus on prevention and rehabilitation from drug and alcohol misuse. Closely linked to this were suggestions addressing the mental health of the community and critical socioeconomic factors, particularly having access to local employment opportunities.

There were recommendations from community about increasing availability of programs and activities, such as those that target dental health and provide supports for youth. Focus on youth was particularly around prevention of alcohol and other drug misuse as well as increasing engagement in education, keeping busy and physically active, all leading to living healthier lives and having more positive futures.

Generally, there was a call for more activities and opportunities to support healthier lifestyle choices for the community, including eating healthier foods and being more active, through exercise groups as well as sporting teams.

*"Drugs... Drugs... Drugs"*

*"Drugs and alcohol are the biggest issue because you wouldn't have mental health issues and money issues with families"*

*"Drugs - especially ice epidemic in our community"*

*"Teaching people to eat more healthier and be more active and fit in life"*

*"Jobs, drug rehabilitation, housing, youth activities"*

*"Re-engagement services for teen education or access to appropriate alternative services, leading to increased well-being, sense of self, employment and health outcomes"*

Table 3: Improvement ideas suggested by Ballina, Cabbage Tree Island & Byron Region survey respondents (n=65).

Topic	% respondents*
Alcohol and other drugs	42
Mental and emotional health	12
Employment	11
Support for youth	9
Dental health	9
Diet	8
Physical activity	8

\*Number does not add to 100% as individual respondents provided multiple priorities

## Potential Service Provider Actions and Research Focus Areas

Much of the consultation with community in both surveys and yarning circles focused on recommendations for action moving forward. These are summarised below. They vary in size and complexity but provide a useful guide for service provider actions and potential research topics that can be done in partnership with community.

### 1. Transport

- Increase availability of affordable transport to access Aboriginal Medical Services (AMSs) and other service appointments, in particular Elders' transport to meet their needs

*"Better access of transport ... for Aboriginal Elders to get to medical appointments."*

*"Transport from east Ballina to town and Cabbo"*

### 2. Alcohol and other drugs

- Support more alcohol-free community events inclusive of all community members
- Increase access to rehabilitation and detox facilities
- Early interventions and youth education to avoid alcohol and other drug misuse from an early age
- Increase availability and accessibility of culturally appropriate services to support mental health and reduce the use of alcohol and other drugs e.g. healing circles
- Increase men's groups support for drug and alcohol use
- Employment of more family support health workers that specialise in mental health and substance abuse

### 3. Youth activities and supports

- Increase availability of community driven youth activities such as sporting competitions
- Youth activities with a focus on connecting with culture and learning from community Elders, encouraging young people to participate and building future leaders
- Availability of health education programs targeting youth



*“More youth activities to keep them busy and connecting back to their culture”*

*“Getting our youth off the street and busy”*

*“Community engagement to encourage our people and their children about eating healthier [and] exercising creates a healthy body and longer lifespan”*

#### 4. Holistic services and programs

- Increase availability and access to a wider range of services especially: dental health, mental health, drug and alcohol services and rehabilitation, youth early interventions
- Strengthen service support for individuals and families as a whole, in all aspects of their lives, as ‘one stop shops’ rather than compartmentalised care
- Increase access to adequate and affordable housing

*“Keep the programs ongoing not 1 off programs”*

*“Facilitating a wrap-around service inclusive of drug & alcohol services, homelessness, financial assistance, etc”*

*“It would be great to have face-to-face consults with health workers who can walk you through health-related service providers in helping you manage your challenges and issues like; drugs and alcohol services, dental, housing providers, employment services, chronic disease management, social services etc.”*

#### 5. Employment & workforce development

- Increase employment of Aboriginal staff through increased employment opportunities and career pathways in health as well as other service sectors such as social work and youth work
- Improve workforce skills cultivating respectful workplaces for all staff and service users
- Access to culturally appropriate services where community feel safe and confident to attend
- Cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous health professionals

*“More employees Aboriginal, employees with cultural awareness going to communities”*

*“Help and support without judgement and help from Aboriginal workers”*

*“Employment strategy to support and encourage Aboriginal jobs”*

#### 6. Building relationships with communities

- More on-the-ground engagement and stronger communications between service providers and community members to work together towards solutions
- More education in the community around where to get help and what service providers do, so people can keep up to date on changes

*“Community input on issues that matter”*

*“People getting out here and talking about the issue”*

## Intersecting health and education in the Northern Rivers region: input from the Upper North Coast Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG)

A regional yarning circle was held with the Upper North Coast Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) in November 2018 at the Lismore Workers Club, with 30 educators attending. Visions of a healthy future for the area closely aligned with data gathered from each of the regions. This included a community with more mental health supports led by an Aboriginal workforce, with access to culturally appropriate and holistic services, with children being kept safe and safe spaces available for youth; with drug and alcohol supports, more fitness programs, better ongoing partnerships between community and services delivering supports including staff engaging through community visits, improved transport, and increased training opportunities for youth. Acknowledgement was given to the great work that is already happening in communities, in particular the work of local AMSs. Priorities for service providers and research focus areas had a strong emphasis on youth. This included suggestions of: youth after-school activities, holiday programs and homework centres; TAFE courses on life skills and learning language; Aboriginal mental health services delivering school programs; AMS staff providing screenings and health education sessions at school; and strategies to increase recruitment of local community members to school positions.

### Where to next?

Respondents from the coastal communities of Byron, Ballina and Cabbage Tree Island have provided us with a roadmap for future research and service provision. This roadmap will be shared with service organisations across the region. Based on community priorities and ideas for what needs to change, UCRH are consistently seeking out funding opportunities to develop projects in partnership with service providers and community, facilitating local Aboriginal community-led action to improve health and wellbeing services across the Northern Rivers region. One avenue to continue this work is the medical and allied health students that rotate through UCRH on rural health placements. Working with communities and service providers is a valuable educational experience for them and will assist in the co-design of evidence-based actionable solutions to address one or more community identified priority health needs.

Further information will be provided to community as we commence projects. If you have a project idea or wish to get in touch with the Health from the Grassroots team, call UCRH on 6620 7570.



## Health from the Grassroots Project - background and methodology

Initiated by Aboriginal staff at the UCRH in Lismore, the *Health from the Grassroots* project adopted a 'bottom up' process of engagement, fostering community ownership and self-determination in guiding what topics health researchers investigate in partnership with community, health service providers and other relevant organisations.

Our objectives are to:

1. Document perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Bundjalung and Yaegl country on community health research priorities;
2. Hold community forums across the region (Grafton/Yamba/Maclean, Casino/Coraki, Lismore, Ballina/Cabbage Tree Island, Tweed Heads) to prioritise the top issues per region for action; and
3. Develop research ideas with community addressing the priority issues within and/or across the region.

Health from the Grassroots brings together culture and research. Centralising Indigenous perspectives in research processes, promoting a process of change, building on the limited evidence about how to develop processes for community-led systems change.

A community survey was distributed (paper-based and online) over November-December 2018 and five yarning circles were held across the Northern Rivers region (including as part of the Ngayundi meeting held at Ballina East Surf Life Saving Club). As a basis for discussion, we used the following questions:

1. What does a healthy community look like to you?
2. In your opinion, what are the top 3 priorities for the health and wellbeing of your community?
3. What things are working well to help keep our community healthy?
4. What things do you think need improvement to better support our community's health?
5. What issue, if improved, would have the biggest impact for your community?

During the project several community members were trained up to assist with facilitation of workshops and communicating with local participants. Overall, around 200 Aboriginal people participated in surveys and five workshops held across the region (Lismore, Grafton, Tweed Heads, Cabbage Tree/Ballina and the regional Aboriginal Education Consultative Group). The yarning circle at Casino was cancelled due to sorry business. A community project officer instead spoke with community members about visions of a healthy community within the Richmond Valley region and priorities for improved health and wellbeing. Community thoughts and ideas were gathered and summarised into a Northern Rivers community infographic (Figure 1, page 2).

## Ethics

This project received ethical approval by the AH&MRC Human Research Ethics Committee (reference 1457/18) as meeting the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*.

## Demographics

### Survey respondents by region

Region	Number	%
Ballina/Cabbage Tree/Byron	67	35
Clarence Valley	26	14
Lismore	66	34
Richmond Valley	14	7
Tweed Heads	19	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>192</b>	

### Survey respondents by gender

	Ballina/Cabbage Tree/Byron	Clarence Valley	Lismore	Richmond Valley	Tweed Heads	Total (number & %)	
Male	18	8	18	5	4	53	28
Female	44	18	48	9	15	134	70
No response	5					5	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>192</b>	

### Survey respondents by age

	Ballina/Cabbage Tree/Byron	Clarence Valley	Lismore	Richmond Valley	Tweed Heads	Total (number & %)	
< 15 years	1		5			6	3
15-24	11	1	13	3		28	15
25-34	21	7	17	3	3	51	27
35-44	17	5	12	5	8	47	24
45-54	12	6	9	2	3	32	17
55-64	3	2	9	1	5	20	10
≥ 65 years	2	5	1			8	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>192</b>	

## Contact Details

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