



# Report from UnitingCare Queensland

## Summary

UnitingCare Queensland's (UnitingCare) commitment to delivering the mission of the Church as an agency of the Synod continues to drive our service to communities and those in need. Like others in our sectors of service, UnitingCare is experiencing ever-increasing regulatory and compliance requirements, intense scrutiny, tough competition and tighter financial constraints.

We face these challenges with unwavering dedication to our purpose, honouring our legacy and living out the calling of Christ to serve so that people may have life in all its fullness (John 10:10).

UnitingCare commenced a 10-year transformation journey in 2020, focussed on a vision to be Australia's most trusted and respected health and community services provider, delivering exceptional, values-based care to Queensland families in every corner of the community. During the first phase of this journey, we worked hard to become financially sustainable, more disciplined at executing strategy and proficient at sustaining our success.

Our priorities are around scaling-up services and driving significant improvements in the experiences of the people we serve; with an intense focus on making it easier for our staff and volunteers to deliver high-quality, compassionate and holistic personalised care.

With UnitingCare's Mission Framework as our blueprint, we have continued to embed our mission practices in everything we do. Through Mission Shaped Leadership Formation, spiritual and pastoral care, being intentional about staff and volunteer wellbeing, cultural awareness and appreciation programs, and intentional partnerships, we embed and reinforce ways of working, culture and relationships that are deeply informed by our mission and values.

[Click here for a preview to UnitingCare's Synod 37 presentation](#)

## Context

UnitingCare Queensland (UnitingCare) provides health and community services to thousands of people every day of the year through our hospitals, aged care, disability and community services as part of the mission of the Uniting Church in Queensland.

Our mission arises from Christ's purpose that all people might have "life in all its fullness" (John 10:10). The role of UnitingCare is to be an agent of God's healing power to the whole person, not just for individual ailment or disability, but to enable each individual to play their part within the wider human family and live life their way.

## Priorities

At the heart of our services, is the belief of our people and our work of healing, growth, renewal and reconciliation as part of the Mission of Christ. UnitingCare's priorities are about ensuring we have the people, systems and processes to continue growing our footprint, extending our reach and increasing social impact for those we serve. To this end, we have focussed on establishing the workforce, systems and processes we need to manage ongoing change and leverage reforms to continue in our purpose of helping people in need.

## **Our people**

UnitingCare's workforce of more than 16,000 employees and 7,000 volunteers is the key to extending our reach and delivering our mission for greater social impact. Here is how we are working to enable their dedicated efforts:

- With a number of enterprise agreement negotiations, we are improving wages and conditions to establish UnitingCare as a competitive provider who acknowledges and values employees in the aged care and hospital sectors.
- United in Safety, our revitalised workplace safety and wellbeing program, has elevated our focus on the safety of our people in ensuring consistent and high-quality holistic care.
- Initiatives like an expanded reward and recognition program to include a new employee benefits platform to ensure high-performance in-service delivery, strengthening inclusivity in our workforce designed to attract and retain employees we need to serve our communities, and nursing scholarships for First Nations students in conjunction with Griffith University in order to better provide culturally appropriate care.

## **Our residents, patients, customers and clients**

UnitingCare brings new hope and better lives to more than 430,000 individuals, families and communities each year. Here is how we have maintained the centrality of our mission in everything we do:

- We have renewed the operating model for delivering community services. BlueCare Neighbourhoods places each client at the heart of a neighbourhood of care, strengthening the connections and relationships between them and the people there to serve them.
- We are also optimising our residential aged care services to meet standards related to care minutes and Star Ratings. Our new premium residential aged care development at Sunrise Beach and a new innovative Food and Nutrition service are strongly aligned with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.
- We have accredited Centres of Excellence at The Wesley Hospital for robotic, bariatric, orthopaedic and minimally invasive surgery, and St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital has recently been accredited for orthopaedic surgery. The Wesley Hospital and St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital both again gained international recognition for cardiac care.
- We have extended our reach and impact in delivering the Escaping Violence Program, which provides wrap-around support to people leaving unsafe domestic environments; and extending Project SEARCH to enable more young people with a disability the opportunity to receive support to secure long-term employment options.

## **Our ways of working**

We are focussed on strengthening UnitingCare's market and financial position to enable us to achieve our strategic priorities. Here is how we are building strong, reliable partnerships, systems and processes to do this in the face of ongoing and anticipated challenges:

- The implementation of Consumer Advisory Groups comprising people we serve, our employees, senior leaders and members of the UnitingCare Board, provide reliable feedback on our services and directly inform relevant systems and process development.

- New platforms such as the Community Management System, the food and nutrition solution and Digital Medical Records are expediting our transition to being a truly customer-centric and innovative organisation.
- Through significant investment in rebuilding our entire technology landscape, we are future-proofing UnitingCare's technology backbone, enabling modernisation of our finance and procurement functions.
- Under the Better Together Program of work, we are simplifying and streamlining processes, improving governance and clarifying responsibilities and accountabilities to become more adaptable to current day requirements and make it easier for our people to work together and get work done across UnitingCare.

## Plentiful focus

In over 460 locations and with phone services that cover all of Queensland, we are active in every Queensland community, bearing Christ's offer of life in all its fullness.

## Discipleship, Innovation and Young People

As part of our commitment to a flourishing future we have built on our industry-leading reputation as one of the State's largest community service providers. Following on from our work in communities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of a series of natural disasters, we are now increasingly responding to the needs of individuals and families facing new challenges such as the rising costs of living and housing shortages. We provided additional domestic and family violence support, financial counselling, community mental health and homelessness services, crisis support and services for children in the child protection system. We created social impact through equipping parents with skills to keep kids safe in their homes.

Highlights from FY 22–23 include:

- Delivered leadership formation centred on the mission framework of UnitingCare, through team reflections, a specific Mission Shaped Leadership Formation program, and intentional leadership conversations,
- Project SEARCH, 12-month internship program for young people with disability to gain workplace skills and experience to gain employment, now operating in three UnitingCare sites,
- Delivered the Connection and the Men Sustaining Change pilot programs, and
- Delivered key programs including The Garden: Homelessness Services, Intensive Foster Care, Service Navigator and Targeted Rebuild Case Management Service, Hand Heart Pocket, Discovery Coast Community Support Program and the Financial Hardship Partnership Project.

In FY23

- 1146 children and young people were cared for in out-of-home-care
- 6349 persons received care in Early Childhood Approach
- 326,808 Family Services and engagement
- 928 persons received disability services through Family and Disability Services

- 40 Childcare attendees in Australian Regional and Remote Community Services (ARRCS)
- 254 children received meals across 2 locations in ARRCS (508 meals provided each school day)

## Transforming Communities

### Wellbeing and mental health

This year Lifeline Queensland celebrated 60 years delivering crisis support and the team attended a reception event hosted by Her Excellency the Honourable Dr Jeannette Young AC PSM at Government House in recognition of this legacy of care.

Lifeline crisis services expanded to offer 13YARN for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the Farmer to Farmer supports. In FY23, 124,790 calls were answered by Lifeline. Lifeline Community Recovery was deployed to support flood affected regions.

Our Foundations of Staff and Volunteer Wellbeing document, introduced in May, serves as the foundational cornerstone of our wellbeing approach. It informs and guides the wellbeing focus and strategies. It also shows wellbeing as a central contributor to, and outcome of, our day-to-day actions, practices and culture at UnitingCare, demonstrating how holistic wellbeing is both the inworking and outworking of our purpose. This document steps through the why and what of wellbeing, who has responsibility and agency in its enactment, how wellbeing is supported, and the social impact when personal, collective and corporate wellbeing is sustainable.

70 food hampers were given out over Christmas period from the Chermside Prison Ministry office. Food hampers are offered post-release, to those on parole, and to families impacted by incarceration throughout the year.

### Environmental sustainability

UnitingCare firmly believes that environmental stewardship is inseparable from our mission of enhancing health, wellbeing, and spiritual care for Queenslanders. We also recognise that our role and responsibility in healing Country is an important aspect of our reconciliation journey with First Nations Peoples. To this end, our environmental sustainability program weaves these threads together under the vision of a greener, healthier, fairer future.

Highlights 2022-23 include:

- 2.3 megawatts of rooftop solar installed across 19 BlueCare residential aged care facilities, achieving 25 – 40 per cent self-sufficiency at these sites and generating enough renewable energy to meet approximately five per cent of UnitingCare’s total electricity needs,
- New nutrition and food ordering systems introduced at The Wesley Hospital and BlueCare residential aged care facilities. As well as reducing food waste, these new systems are improving care quality, patient and resident satisfaction, and social connectedness,
- Continued electric vehicle (EV) roll-out, expanding our EV fleet to 16 vehicles and 20 chargers across South East Queensland, and our total passenger fleet now 72 per cent hybrid or electric vehicles, and

- Formation of UnitingCare’s cross-functional Climate Resilience Working Group, which has started work on climate risk assessment and adaptation planning.

### **Upholding and acting upon the Uniting Church covenant with First Nations Peoples**

Walking with First Peoples in respectful relationship is part of the missional heart of UnitingCare and central to delivering our services in the community equitably and in culturally appropriate ways. Our commitment to allyship continues to deepen, with our people motivated and empowered to grow their understanding of local and national history with meaningful partnerships with local Elders continuing to be strengthened across the state. Over the last 12 months:

- The Unite on Country program saw more than 220 staff and wider Synod members undertaking a Walk on Country with an Elder.
- “Allyship in Reconciliation” event held to mark the celebration of 10 years in partnership with Reconciliation Australia.
- The Kabi Kabi Aboriginal Peoples Corporation played a pivotal cultural heritage advisory role alongside members of the UnitingCare Property team at the Sunrise Beach BlueCare development.
- Pinangba Services provides aged care, family therapy, and drug and alcohol support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Pinangba Strategic Plan 2023-2026 was launched at Hollingsworth Elders Village in a ceremony that celebrated the rich culture of First Nations Peoples.
- The Coolamon Group in Family and Disability Services grew their online Yarning Café conversations designed to create a safe yarning space for those interested in building their professional cultural capacity.
- After cancelling during covid, the Coolamon group was able to once again host “Groundwater”, its annual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Conference for staff members delivering family, disability and community services.
- Family and Disability Services became a delivery partner of Lifeline Australia’s new dedicated Indigenous Crisis Support Line - 13 YARN. 13YARN is the first national “Mob caring for Mob” crisis support line and received two National LiFE (Living is For Everyone) awards at the National Suicide Prevention Conference held in Canberra.
- BlueCare launched Campfire, comprising a group of BlueCare staff who expressed an interest in coming together to share voice, learnings, and hope, as well as contribute to First Nations led and culturally appropriate strategy development across BlueCare services.
- The Wesley Hospital and Buderim Private Hospital launched Born on Country milestone cards within the maternity departments. This initiative serves to further embed the importance of connecting jarjums of all backgrounds to Country and honouring Eldership.
- Our Cultural Appreciation e-learning modules have now reached more than 6500 module completions. Wesley Mission Queensland has purchased the e-learning modules.
- Our prison chaplaincy operates in 15 of Queensland’s correctional centres, providing culturally sensitive pastoral care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners through First Peoples Chaplains. We currently have 28 duty chaplains who delivered 1,021 Mainstream and 235 First Peoples Prison Ministry visits.

- ARRCs continues its commitment to the people and communities of the Northern Territory, delivering a comprehensive range of residential and community aged care, and children’s services. All services are delivered in line with ARRCs’s values, in partnership with community members and the people we serve, and with deep respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their connection to Country.
- ARRCs’s strategic priorities are reflected in the development of Yutjuwala Djiwarr in Nhulunbuy, which began welcoming residents in December 2022. Developed in consultation with the Yolngu community, Yutjuwala Djiwarr is the first culturally appropriate residential aged care facility and future dialysis unit in Nhulunbuy, East Arnhem Land. It supports senior Territorians to age where they have lived, worked, and raised their families, helping residents to maintain their strong connections with Country.

## Fit for Purpose

The Uniting Church in Queensland embarked on Project Plenty following the 34th Synod in 2019. Its Shared life, flourishing communities report was accepted by the 35th Synod and forms the basis of actions designed with a view to renewal of the Church as a whole through discipleship, transforming communities, fit for purpose governance operations, mission and leadership, and life together through mission partnerships.

As a part of Project Plenty, Church institutions and agencies have engaged with questions of the extent to which the governance structures established in the 1970s remain fit for purpose in 2023 and beyond. In UnitingCare’s case, the existing structures are no longer compatible with and sustainable long-term in the context of the regulatory, operating and funding environments in which we operate, and in which we will need to operate in future.

We have been on a journey with the Synod Standing Committee (SSC) to determine how UnitingCare can operate efficiently and effectively in this new world. This work has considered current and future legal and regulatory requirements which are focussed on increasing accountability and transparency, tightened government funding requirements focussed on corporate structures and governance, simplification, efficiencies and best practice for responsible bodies and officers.

Central to this work is maintaining UnitingCare’s ethos, history, identity and vision and connection to the Church. The mission and purpose of UnitingCare remain as relevant or more relevant to the needs of the community than ever before, and any proposed change in structure must retain mission as the driver behind UnitingCare’s purpose. As such, any proposed fit for purpose structure will be based in the commitments below:

- It will be contemporary, sustainable and intrinsically aligned to UnitingCare’s mission and strategy.
- It will retain UnitingCare as a faith-based mission-led public benevolent institution of the Church with its purpose arising from the calling of Jesus Christ for people “to have life in all its fullness (John 10:10)” unchanged.
- UnitingCare will continue to believe that the work of healing, growth, renewal and reconciliation is in furtherance of the mission of the Church and our commitment to Christ’s mission in the world.

- UnitingCare's Board members will continue to be appointed by the Church (SSC).
- The Church will retain 100% ownership over UnitingCare.
- The Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust (Q.) (UCAPT(Q.)) continues to hold legal title to the assets used by UnitingCare.
- The Church would maintain ownership of UnitingCare and all property, with UCAPT(Q.) as the sole member of any new UnitingCare structure.
- The relationship with the Church at local, presbytery and Synod level would continue to be renewed and strengthened.

## Life Together

UnitingCare is focussed on building strong local connections through intentional relationships with internal and external partners. These community partnerships extend the reach of our services, support the local community and assist in raising awareness of our organisation and mission.

The Connect100 program is a vital part of this work. Across the last twelve months, Connect100 has further expanded across the State, strengthening the mission connections with congregations and presbyteries, providing support and pastoral care for UCQ staff, and creating innovative partnerships and activities that support local communities.

As at June 2023, there are 12 active Connect100 placements across the state, with a further five placements currently underway. These range from the Western Cape and Cairns-Mossman in the north, to Elanora on the Gold Coast, and in western Queensland through the Roma and Longreach districts. Since conception in 2021, the Connect100 program has connected with 98 congregations, with the wider Mission Group strengthening connections with a total of 109 congregations.

Over 12-month period, Connect100 and UCQ Community Partnerships have:

- Established 573 Pastoral Connections with UnitingCare staff
- Supported 101 new missional innovations (events, activities, programs, projects)
- Initiated 255 new UnitingCare staff connections
- Made 540 Congregation and Presbytery new contacts
- Participated in 201 significant UnitingCare-Uniting Church mission events

In addition, we have undertaken extensive community partnership work and pastoral care through our chaplains and Associate Directors of Mission.

## Proposals to the 37<sup>th</sup> Synod

It is proposed that the 37th Synod receive this report.



## Green Shoots - possibilities and opportunities

Among the many green shoot possibilities and opportunities for UnitingCare are:

- Embedding a holistic care offering within BlueCare community care, focusing on meaning, purpose and connectedness, including an explicit integration of spiritual care.
- Expanding the Care and Wellbeing program and deliver a high quality and compassionate model of holistic care in community palliative care. We will continue to recruit and equip End of Life and Vulnerable In-patient Compassionate Companion volunteers in our hospitals and expand our Grief and Loss Program.
- Building stronger relations with First Nations community, leaders and Elders to help increase First People chaplaincy numbers and prison visit numbers, helping us better support and develop our existing and future First Peoples Chaplains. We will further develop the Western Cape Chaplaincy Project, working with Carpentaria presbytery, Napranum community Elders and UAICC.
- Working through our mission partners, chaplains and connectors to continue our work with presbyteries and congregations, bearing Christ's offer of life in all its fullness and commitment to a flourishing future for church and community.

## Contact for report questions

Name	<b>Rev Dr Peter Armstrong</b>
Position	Director of Mission, UnitingCare Queensland
Email	<a href="mailto:peter.armstrong@ucareqld.com.au">peter.armstrong@ucareqld.com.au</a>
Phone	0418 433 193

Presentation preview

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