Aboriginal mental health workers pioneer new career pathway  
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From the Chief Executive Officer

Welcome to the winter edition of The Country Link newsletter.

This is an exciting time to be working in health with a number of changes afoot including the 1 July move which saw WA Country Health Service represented by two new entities.

The Northern and Remote Country Health Service (NRCHS) and Southern Country Health Service (SCHS) each have their own high-level Governing Council made up of community members and clinicians, selected by the Minister for Health.

This is extremely good news, not just for those working in healthcare but also for local communities, as it will see WA Health become even more responsive and accountable. You can read more about these changes inside this edition and read about who is on the Governing Council for your region.

You will also find a snapshot of what’s going on in rural and remote regions and meet some of the people who are making a difference to the health of country West Australians. I am very pleased that a number of articles focus on people who are motivated and dedicated to improve their skills and experience by furthering their education.

I am also once again inspired by the stories that focus on how teams are committed to improving health in their communities through innovations developed locally.

A key focus is our $1.4 billion capital works program which continues to bring world class health care closer to home for people living in regional and remote WA.

In this edition you will find updates on many of our key capital projects across the state.

One of the many interesting aspects to my role as CEO is the opportunity to meet people across the state who work in health and related fields. I am particularly proud of the outstanding efforts of our 8000 staff and would like to thank you all for your continued commitment.

It is with some regret that I announce this will be the last edition of The Country Link and I hope you have found the articles over the past three years as informative and enjoyable as I have.

We will continue to keep you up to date with key initiatives and inspiring stories through a dedicated country section in the Department of Health’s Healthview newsletter so please continue to send in your ideas using the details provided on the back page.

Ian Smith, Chief Executive Officer
Northern and Remote Country Health Service
Southern Country Health Service

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New mental health chief for Goldfields

A social worker with a lifelong professional interest in mental health issues has taken up a key leadership role in the Goldfields.

Donnie Martin was recently appointed regional manager for the Goldfields Mental Health Service. She brings to the role more than 20 years’ experience in mental health, both in Australia and overseas.

After studying Social Administration at Flinders University, Ms Martin began her career at the Royal Adelaide Hospital providing social work services in the psychiatric inpatient ward.

She then spent two years in England at a major hospital in Leeds.

After returning to Australia, Ms Martin expanded her area of interest to include child protection and providing therapy for children who had experienced sexual abuse, which in the 1980s was a relatively new field. This included innovative therapies such as group treatment and parent support at the Adelaide Children’s Hospital Department of Psychiatry.

She has spent the last four years as District Director for Child Protection, working across the vast Goldfields region.

Ms Martin’s decision to move to regional WA was a deliberate choice to embrace the quality of life and after five years in the Goldfields, she is still enjoying it.

“When I first moved to WA, Kalgoorlie was my adventure of choice. I love the beauty of the Goldfields and being able to make a difference in regional and remote mental health,” Ms Martin said.

“I feel privileged to be able to help people in remote areas get the mental health care they need, and I am always in awe of the dedication and commitment shown by staff.”

Nickol Bay Hospital raises $34,500 for Cancer Council

Nickol Bay Hospital raised more than $34,500 at its Australia’s Biggest Morning Tea event, thanks to administration assistant Sandy Sampson’s remarkable tale of beating lung cancer and the generosity of a local business.

Mrs Sampson, a non-smoker, was diagnosed with lung cancer in July 2011 after seeking medical assistance for a persistent cough she thought was a result of a recent flu jab. She had surgery that October and made a wonderful recovery.

After hearing Sandy’s story from her husband, the Slipway Team at Mermaid Marine Australia Limited in Dampier generously donated their safety bonus of approximately $15,000 to help her raise money for the Cancer Council.

Impressed by his team’s support, Mermaid Marine Managing Director Jeff Webber matched his staff’s contribution, bringing the total donated to $30,000.

The generous staff at Mermaid Marine Australia Limited joined Mrs Sampson and her colleagues from Nickol Bay Hospital and representatives of the Cancer Council at the Australia’s Biggest Morning Tea event to celebrate Sandy’s recovery and the generosity of Slipway Team.

Donnie is pictured with Clinical Director Roland Main.

The Cancer Council’s Fiona Paice with Bob Dowell (Mermaid Marine), Sandy Sampson and Ewan Dickson (Mermaid Marine).
The reforms are part of changes announced by the Minister for Health last year under the National Health Reform Agreement 2011. They are designed to ensure the needs and interests of communities are better reflected in health services.

WA's Health Service Governing Councils will improve community input to the planning and delivery of local health services.

The five Health Services are:
- Child and Adolescent Health Service
- North Metropolitan Health Service
- South Metropolitan Health Service
- Northern and Remote Country Health Service
- Southern Country Health Service.

The reforms have seen the WA Country Health Service retained as the legal entity but represented by two new Health Services.

**Northern and Remote Country Health Service:**
- Kimberley
- Pilbara
- Midwest
- Goldfields

**Southern Country Health Service:**
- Wheatbelt
- South West
- Great Southern

There are no changes to existing regional boundaries with the exception of Ravensthorpe and Hopetoun which have become part of the Great Southern.

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**Who will lead the two new Health Services?**

CEO Ian Smith will continue to lead the delivery of health services across country WA. Each Health Service will be led by a Chief Operating Officer: Shane Matthews (Northern and Remote) and Tina Chinery (Southern).
Who are the Governing Council members?

Southern Country Health Service Governing Council

Ms Nola Wolski, Chair. Former Kalgoorlie deputy mayor. Chairperson of the Goldfields District Health Advisory Council.

Mrs Marani Hutton, Deputy Chair. Senior physiotherapist with experience servicing Kimberly communities.

Ms Maureen Carter, one of the Kimberley’s inaugural Aboriginal District Officers.

Mr Mark Casserly, community development and planning specialist.

Mr Sandy Davies, Chair of Geraldton Regional Aboriginal Medical Service.

Dr Tamara Mackean, Australian Indigenous doctor.

Dr Phillip Montgomery, senior medical administrator with long clinical background, including 20 years working with people with a disability.

Dr Jay-Mien Phang, Senior Medical Officer at Nickol Bay Hospital. Board director of the Pilbara Health Network Division of General Practice.

Mr Brian Wall, A former pharmacist who has consulted on major government projects and chaired committees across many areas including health policy.

For more information on your local Governing Council, visit www.health.wa.gov.au/governingcouncils/home/
Aboriginal mental health workers pioneer new career pathway

The Pilbara’s Katie Papertalk and Yvette Kelly made history recently when they became the first Aboriginal people from the Northern and Remote Country Health Service to graduate from Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga, NSW with a Bachelor of Health Science (Mental Health).

Following their success, more than 20 Aboriginal mental health workers throughout Western Australia have enrolled in the same university course.

Both Ms Papertalk and Ms Kelly now hold high-level professional roles within the mental health service and are having a significant impact on mental health services in the Pilbara.

Ms Papertalk and Ms Kelly were supported in their studies by scholarships through the Pilbara’s Indigenous Employment Program (IEP) which aims to help Aboriginal people pursue health-related employment opportunities within their local communities.

The IEP is funded under the $38.2 million Pilbara Health Initiative – a partnership between the State Government’s Royalties for Region’s program and the Chamber of Minerals and Energy’s Pilbara Industry’s Community Council (PICC) Health Initiative members (BHP Billiton Iron Ore, Chevron Australia Pty Ltd, North West Shelf Joint Venture, Rio Tinto and Woodside Energy), which aims to boost health services in the region. BHP Billiton Iron Ore is the principal industry sponsor for IEP.

Pilbara’s Acting Aboriginal Mental Health Coordinator Katie Papertalk was the driving force behind the new career pathway.

By her own admission, she has championed the university course to “anyone who will listen”, using word-of-mouth and more formal methods such as presentations at conferences, in a personal crusade to get other Aboriginal mental health workers to embrace further education.

“Aboriginal mental health is an emerging specialty which needs strong Aboriginal input to be relevant to the people it endeavours to help,” Ms Papertalk said.

“If we are to adequately integrate traditional and western medicine, and initiate culturally appropriate training in our mental health services, Aboriginal people need to increase their qualifications in the field and have their voices heard.”

In 2009, Ms Papertalk became the first West Australian to win the Dean’s award at Charles Sturt University.
Young patients in Kalgoorlie Hospital were cheered up recently by a visit from an internationally famous ventriloquist.

Funny man David Strassman, in town from the United States for performances across Australia including the Goldfields Arts Centre in Kalgoorlie, popped in with his alter ego Ted E. Bare for an impromptu chat.

Mr Strassman, a stage and comedy veteran of more than 20 years, and Ted E. Bare, one of his best loved ‘puppets’, proved a huge hit with patients and staff alike.

Operations Manager at Kalgoorlie Hospital, David Bowdidge, said it was wonderful to have an entertainer such as David Strassman spend time with young patients.

“They say laughter is the best medicine, and our paediatrics team would agree it’s especially true for children,” Mr Bowdidge said, noting many of the adults present were laughing as well.

“This is David’s second visit to the children’s ward in recent years, and it shows his generosity and commitment to kids. It was an obvious treat for all present and he’s a really nice bloke as well, so hopefully we will get to welcome him back again.”

The visit was arranged by the Variety Club of Western Australia, which sponsors the children’s ward.

24-hour emergency services for inland communities

Communities in and around the towns of Collie, Northam, Narrogin, Katanning, Esperance and Merredin now have guaranteed access to emergency medical care 24 hours a day, seven days a week through the new Southern Inland Health Initiative (SIHI) district network model.

Under SIHI, private General Practitioners will be rostered to work on the hospital floor for a 12-hour shift in Merredin, Northam, Esperance and Narrogin and be rostered for after-hours on-call.

Close on-call arrangements have been established in Collie, Warren/Blackwood and Katanning, where doctors are rostered to be available at the hospital within 10 minutes if required.

Executive Director of Clinical Workforce and Reform Dr Felicity Jefferies said the benefits would be far-reaching.

“The medical model is a completely new and unique approach to the provision of emergency medical care for regional Western Australia,” Dr Jefferies said.

“Local doctors in these towns have been given incentives to join the roster, in addition to their General Practice duties.

“The premise of the model is to provide safe, effective and sustainable emergency care for the community by providing doctors living and working in these towns with the opportunity to find a better work-life balance. The model will also help to attract additional doctors to the towns.

“Doctors will have greater peer support through networked leadership, mentoring and professional training and development opportunities, and the chance to serve the community in the long term.”

Other network towns will have a doctor available within 10 minutes, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Read about more milestones at the Southern Inland Health Initiative website www.health.wa.gov.au/southerninland.
Education a family affair

Seeing her two daughters and husband successfully complete the Indigenous Community Management and Development Program at Curtin University was all the motivation Kimberley Aged and Community Services Remote Area Support Worker Cheryl Ozies needed to do the same.

“I thought if my daughters can study, work full-time and look after their children, then I could do it too,” Mrs Ozies said. The program focused on Aboriginal history, which Mrs Ozies said was painful at times; however, she felt it was important to acknowledge it to be able to move forward. She added that her studies helped her improve her planning and communication skills, and increased her ability to empathise. “To understand the historical factors and the impact they had, and still have, on the lives of Aboriginal people today gives me a better understanding which I can apply to my work,” Mrs Ozies said.

“My goal is to encourage people to achieve their full potential, build relationships in communities and support community groups to be independent. “Changing old habits is quite a challenge and what is even more challenging is for those people who have developed dysfunctional behaviours to make positive changes and move forward in life.

“Staff from Margaret River and Augusta hospitals assisted in the relocation of 40 residents from Mirrambeena Nursing Home to Busselton aged care facilities,” Mr Higgins said. “The following week, Augusta Multipurpose Service had to evacuate 25 residents and patients amidst similar frightening conditions.

“It was a privilege to work closely with these staff and see first-hand the calm, caring and organised way they helped residents, patients and each other in a time of crisis. “I wish to acknowledge all the staff who worked so well in difficult circumstances, as well as the supportive network of health professionals in the South West who assisted the Augusta and Margaret River bushfire response.”

Since the bushfires, a debrief has been held with the support of the Disaster Planning and Preparedness Unit, resulting in a range of recommendations for future incidents.

For an update on the bushfire recovery, including FAQ, visit www.amrshire.wa.gov.au/community/bushfire-recovery-information/
Improving waiting times for patients

Simple yet effective changes to the way some patients are treated at Geraldton Hospital continue to have positive effects on waiting times.

Staff celebrated a range of key initiatives implemented over under the Four Hour Rule program at a recent event held to mark the transition to coincide with national targets.

Northern and Remote Country Health Service Midwest Regional Director Marg Denton said the event was a way to thank staff for their hard work and ingenuity at delivering solutions designed to reduce waiting times, while focusing on quality patient care.

“Geraldton Hospital has seen some major accomplishments throughout the Four Hour Rule program and we were pleased to recognise them,” Ms Denton said.

“Particular standouts were the implementation of the Discharge Lounge, where patients who are going home can have their discharge completed.

“Benefits to the patient include visits from allied health, pharmacy and having outpatient arrangements made whilst in the comfort of the lounge.

“Transferring patients to the lounge for discharge means that inpatient beds become available. Therefore, patients needing an admission arrive to their destination on the ward, to a comfortable bed in a timely manner.”

Ms Denton also acknowledged the Short Stay Unit, developed for patients needing a short hospital stay. It provides a safe clinical area for assessment, course of therapy or observations for patients who no longer require active emergency department care.

“The flow-on effect will see a positive improvement on patient wait times, department flow, discharge process and overall patient management,” Ms Denton said.

Other initiatives acknowledged at the event included the Consult Stream, where streamed patients who fit a clinical criteria can be seen in order of priority without having to be assessed in the main emergency department. This means the patient can be seen in an area free from high acuity presentations and high activity levels.

The Electronic Bed Manager is a visual bed display system that provides information on hospital bed status as well as patient management to all areas of the hospital including pharmacy and catering. It improves communication between staff and patients, allowing all areas of the hospital to respond better to patients’ needs.

“This is an excellent achievement and further proof that initiatives like the Four Hour Rule Program are making a positive difference in our hospitals,” Ms Denton said.

“As we move to align ourselves with national targets we will ensure we continue to deliver improved care for our local communities across the region.”

Dr Zaw Soe (left) and Dr Suresh Palaniyappah in Geraldton Hospital’s emergency department.
Wheatbelt team benefits from national training program

Senior staff in the Southern Country Health Service Wheatbelt are now able to bring the nation’s best ideas in public sector management practice to their teams, thanks to a national leadership program.

The Public Service Management program is a prestigious program aimed at managers across all levels of government. Delivered in Perth through the Curtin Business School, the program is endorsed by leading public policy organisations and has grown to become one of Australia’s pre-eminent qualifications in public sector management.

Suzanne Taylor, Belinda Robinson, Bronwyn Pitter, Chris Stilian, Jenny Menasse and Tim Free completed the challenging postgraduate course over 12 months, which included four blocks of two-day intensive studies in Perth along with self-directed learning and assignments.

According to the Wheatbelt’s Coordinator Executive Services Belinda Robinson, the experience was valuable not only for the content of the course, but for how it has made the small Wheatbelt management team more effective.

“We were able to learn from top quality lecturers who covered everything from the history of our system of government to ethical decision making to career management,” Ms Robinson said.

“As well as the theoretical knowledge, we were able to develop case studies applying what we learned to real-world scenarios from our own workplace.

“For example, I was able to create a local Aboriginal employment strategy for my major project.”

New Broome Mental Health Unit opened

Mental health services for the Kimberley and the Pilbara got a significant boost recently with the official opening of the $9.4million Broome Mental Health Unit, Mabu Liyan.

Premier Colin Barnett and Mental Health Minister Helen Morton jointly opened the unit, which will provide acute psychiatric inpatient care to people in the regions.

“People who have had to previously travel thousands of kilometres for treatment will receive care locally with the support of their loved ones,” Mr Barnett said.

Voluntary patients have already started treatment at the unit and over the coming months services will be expanded to include involuntary patients.

Aboriginal mental health staff are also on hand to help bridge the gap and support the cultural needs of patients.

The unit is fully integrated with Broome Hospital and managed by the Kimberley Mental Health and Drug Service.
Melody flies out of her comfort zone and gains new skills

Balancing a busy office job in a Broome health facility with regular trips to Sydney for an intensive management course is something Nyul Nyul woman Melody Dia is taking in her stride.

A clerical officer at Kimberley Aged and Community Services, Ms Dia is the only Western Australian in her group of 12 Indigenous people completing a Diploma of Management through the Australian Government’s Indigenous Remote Service Delivery initiative.

Ms Dia flies to Sydney every six weeks to complete a one-week, two-module block of training in areas such as project management and finance. She must then complete competency-based workplace assessments in Broome, and also prepare work for group assignments and presentations in time for the next Sydney visit.

According to Ms Dia, combining work and intensive study has proved an excellent way to grow skills and confidence.

“The course is very intense and I’ve been forced to step out of my comfort zone to achieve things I didn’t think possible,” Ms Dia said.

“It has been a real confidence builder. I’ve also enjoyed meeting Aboriginal people from other states who also work in health, and finding that we share similar challenges.”

Manager, Kimberley Aged and Community Services, Julie Johnston said the program, part of the National Partnerships initiative, was committed to improving employment opportunities for Indigenous communities and providing better delivery of aged and primary healthcare services in remote and rural Australia.

“These traineeships not only tackle the barriers to employment and training in remote areas, they provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with an opportunity to gain employment in their local community,” Ms Johnston said. The traineeships aim to halve the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

First Boodjari Yorga expo a success

A group of Noongar women gathered in Northam recently for the first Boodjari Yorga expo.

Organised by the Wheatbelt Aboriginal Health Service, the expo was the first in a series of 12 to focus on women (yorga) who are pregnant (boodjari) or have recently given birth.

Close to 30 women gathered at a bush location where they witnessed the traditional Welcome to Country by Noongar elder, Pat Davis.

In days gone by, this bush location was where many Noongars were born, prior to modern medicine practices and also in the early days when hospital doors were often kept closed to them.

The group then moved to the Aboriginal health service building in Northam where the women met with female doctors, nurses and Aboriginal health workers and heard about the range of health services available to them.

Event organiser and health promotion officer Jodi Davis said the expo was a great success and reinforced healthy practices in a culturally appropriate way for Noongar women and their babies.

“The expo provided a sensitive community space for the women to receive support and advice,” Ms Davis said.

“They were also provided with consultations, immunisations and medical checks while dietitians, occupational therapists, speech therapists, podiatrists and health referrers arranged activities to engage and involve the women.”

For information on future expos contact Jodi Davis on 9690 2888 or email jodi.davis@health.wa.gov.au
Donation aids X-ray services in Esperance and Ravensthorpe

Ravensthorpe and Esperance are benefiting from faster and more accurate X-ray services thanks to the donation of a mobile X-ray machine by mining company FQM Australia Nickel Pty Ltd.

The mobile, state-of-the-art X-ray machine allows for high-quality X-ray images to be taken anywhere within Esperance Hospital and previewed immediately, enabling fast referral to specialists or other hospitals.

Esperance Hospital’s previous X-ray machine, which is less than five years old, has been transferred to Ravensthorpe District Hospital, replacing older technology.

Esperance, Ravensthorpe and Norseman Operations Manager Peter Tredinnick thanked FQM for its donation, saying the one gift would greatly benefit two communities.

“Esperance Hospital is the direct recipient of this donation; however, the flow-on effect of this generosity to communities like Ravensthorpe cannot be underestimated,” Mr Tredinnick said.

“By inheriting Esperance Hospital’s former X-ray equipment, Ravensthorpe District Hospital now has its first digital X-ray machine providing a faster, more reliable and user friendly X-ray service for the local community.”

FQM Australia Nickel inherited the unused X-ray machine when it bought the Ravensthorpe Nickel mine from BHP in February 2010. The company recognised that rather than using the machine exclusively at the mine, it could provide increased service across the region if donated to a local hospital.

Both machines are now operational and servicing the people of the region.
Great finish for Albany’s ‘late starter’ mental health nurse

There is no ‘use-by’ date on tackling new challenges, as Albany mental health nurse Carol Scott has proved.

Ms Scott, who lives on a rural property north of Albany, has recently graduated as a mental health nurse through the Statewide Mental Health Graduate Registered Nurse Program.

Ms Scott’s success follows her decision, just before her 50th birthday, to build on her aged care and Nursing Assistant career by studying for a Bachelor’s degree in General Nursing. It was the clinical practice rotation on the Inpatient Mental Health Unit at Albany Hospital that sparked Ms Scott’s interest to work in this emerging health care field.

The 12-month program provides on-the-job training and experience for nursing graduates, giving them the chance to further their knowledge and explore the field of mental health as a career option.

Ms Scott undertook six-month rotations in Fremantle Hospital and Albany Hospital.

Since completing her training, Ms Scott has been working with the mental health team at Albany Hospital.

While the program itself was challenging and stimulating, Ms Scott said it brought additional challenges which she relished.

“I had to relocate from my beloved smallholding north of Albany, and leave behind my dogs, cats, horses and husband, find a place to rent in the ‘big smoke’ and deal with the heat of a Perth summer,” Ms Scott said.

“I spent three months on a psycho-geriatric ward and three months on an adult ward, both invaluable learning experiences.

“The staff were so supportive, which made it so much easier.”

Ms Scott said that the program was a valuable opportunity for registered nurses to gain skills in the area of mental health while learning from highly experienced professionals.

Midwest schools ready to ‘Take the Challenge’

The Canning Stock Route, Pipeline Route and Bibbulmun Track are a few of the colourful walking tracks Midwest school children are ‘virtually travelling’ by participating in the ‘Take the Challenge’ program.

The program focuses on physical activity and healthy lifestyle lessons relating to the key messages of eating healthy food, drinking water and being active to beat disease.

‘Take the Challenge’ is a competition-based program, run over eight weeks, designed to educate school children about healthy lifestyles, staying healthy and avoiding getting chronic disease.

The program can be run with minimal support upon receipt of a comprehensive package of resources for classroom-based activities.

Northern and Remote Country Health Service Healthy Schools Officer, Kumar Deep, said the challenge encouraged teachers to incorporate health and physical education messages across the curriculum.

“The students are provided with opportunities to build their confidence and make informed decisions about eating healthy food and being active,” Mr Deep said.

The Midwest challenge will run for eight weeks from the end of July.
Infrastructure update

The Northern and Remote and Southern Country Health Services’ $1.4 billion capital works program continues to bring world class health care closer to home for people living in regional and remote WA.

$117.9 million Busselton Health Campus Update

Four companies have been shortlisted for the construction contract of the Busselton Health Campus and submitted their final tenders in June.

Perkins Builders, Doric Constructions, BGC Constructions and John Holland and Pindan in a joint venture had been chosen from a field of six which responded to an expression of interest advertised late last year.

Albany Health Campus moves a step closer

Work is progressing rapidly on the new $170.4 million Albany Health Campus, with much activity visible from the site boundaries.

Walls are being sheeted throughout the Emergency Department, High Dependency Unit and the Observation Unit, as well as in the Inpatient Mental Health area.

The ambulatory care wing, for outpatient appointments and cancer care, is now under roof.

$31.3 million boost for Esperance Health Campus

Esperance health campus will be redeveloped thanks to a $31.3 million boost for stage one works.

Funding includes $18.8 million from the State Government’s Royalties for Regions fund, jointly funded by the Southern Country Health Service, which contributed $12.5 million.

Stage one will include expanding the emergency department from four to 14 bays and a new four-bed day surgery area.
CEO Ian Smith gets his annual influenza vaccination from South West Disease Control Coordinator Nancy Birch.

Karratha Health Campus

A new state-of-the-art $207.15million health campus to be built in Karratha represents the largest expenditure on a single health infrastructure project in country Western Australia to date.

The State Government approved an additional $57.15million funding to construct the new health campus in the city centre as part of its Pilbara Cities of the North vision.

The new health campus will replace the Nickol Bay Hospital and the Warambie community and population health centre.

$55.8 million Kalgoorlie Health Campus Redevelopment – Stage One

Construction of the new block reached lock-up stage just prior to Christmas.

Internally, progress is well toward the final goal with installation of walls and windows. Patient treatment areas and corridors linking departments can now clearly be identified.

It is anticipated that this new block will be completed in September 2012 with staff and patients able to use the new facility before the end of the year.

Construction works are well underway at Kalgoorlie.

CEO gets flu jab

Northern and Remote and Southern Country Health Services Chief Executive Officer Ian Smith led by example recently and had his annual influenza vaccination from South West Disease Control Coordinator Nancy Birch.

Mr Smith’s vaccination was part of an industry-wide program providing free flu vaccines to Health employees. “I now have the peace of mind of knowing I am protected from the flu before the worst of the season hits,” Mr Smith said.

The flu vaccine is also available free-of-charge to at-risk groups and for a fee to the general community through GPs, Aboriginal health services and community vaccination providers.

Children aged from six months to less than five years are also eligible for a free vaccine in WA.

Simple steps to stop the spread of flu include:

- Cover your face with hand or a tissue when you cough or sneeze
- Practise good hand hygiene by washing your hands thoroughly
- Stay home until you are well to avoid infecting others
- If you need to see a doctor, call ahead so the clinic can take precautions to reduce the risk.

WA Health provides an influenza fact sheet and other related information at: www.public.health.wa.gov.au
Kimberley residents embrace new eHealth records

Kimberley residents have enthusiastically embraced the new eHealth Record initiative, with more than 1100 people registering to take part.

The eHealth Record allows people to share their discharge summaries from hospitals in the Kimberley with other clinicians in the region and the Northern Territory.

The initiative is expected to decrease waiting times and provide clinicians with more timely access to patients’ medical backgrounds by eliminating the need for faxed or mailed paper records, or multiple telephone calls.

Northern and Remote Country Health Service Kimberley Regional Director, Kerry Winsor, said the positive response to the initiative was encouraging, particularly as it was still in its early stages in the Kimberley.

“We have only just begun to introduce this initiative in the Kimberley, but are confident of its effectiveness after seeing it work successfully for many years in the Northern Territory,” Ms Winsor said.

“In a short time, we have already reached one-third of our registration goal, which shows that Kimberley residents can recognise the benefits of connecting their health information – particularly if they often move between the Kimberley and the Northern Territory.

“The Kimberley eHealth team should be congratulated for its work in promoting this initiative.

“The team has worked hard to reach the community through radio advertising, operating stalls at the local shopping centre and the North West Expo, and even physically going out to remote areas, so that everyone in the Kimberley may benefit from this if they choose.”

The My eHealth Record system will feed Kimberley hospital discharge summaries for registered participants into the My eHealth Record, which already holds Northern Territory health information.

It is a part of a Federally-funded eHealth initiative which aligns with the national Personally Controlled Electronic Health Record (PCEHR). The National E-Health Transition Authority (NeHTA) is overseeing its development and implementation by a consortium partnership including Northern and Remote Country Health Service, eHealthNT of Northern Territory Department of Health, Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the Northern Territory, General Practice Network NT, and Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia.

Participation in the eHealth Record initiative is voluntary.

Changing times for The Country Link!

In line with improvements to delivery of health services in the regions, The Country Link will no longer be produced.

Health stories from regional WA will be featured within a dedicated country section in the Department of Health’s Healthview newsletter which is distributed quarterly in hard copy format and available on the Department of Health website www.health.wa.gov.au

Please continue to send your story ideas and contributions to wachscomms@health.wa.gov.au for inclusion in the Healthview newsletter.

Disclaimer

Views expressed in The Country Link are not necessarily those of the Country Health Services or the Department of Health. Contributions are welcome. Articles may be copied provided acknowledgment is given to the Country Health Services.

The Country Link is available in alternative formats upon request.