What is SIHI providing in the western Wheatbelt district?

The Southern Inland Health Initiative (SIHI) is a half a billion dollar investment by the State Government’s Royalties for Regions that’s transforming health care throughout the southern inland region of WA, including towns in the Wheatbelt, South West, Great Southern, Midwest and Goldfields.

Delivered by the WA Country Health Service, SIHI is the single biggest investment in country health in the State’s history. A recent evaluation report shows country people in the regions covered by SIHI are receiving safer, better and more reliable health care, with significant improvements in emergency care and access to GPs.

To read the SIHI Program Evaluation – Preliminary Key Findings March 2016 report, click here. 😊
Residents in western Wheatbelt towns and surrounding communities are now benefitting from the following health initiatives and improvements thanks to this historic health investment:

**Providing better access to doctors and emergency care**

SIHI is significantly improving emergency medical care by using modern technology and supporting more doctors to live and work in the country. There has been a demonstrated 67 per cent improvement in the GP retention rate at the SIHI four year mark, indicative of the program’s success in supporting and retaining GPs in regional communities (Rural Health West data).

SIHI is also improving the safety and quality of rural health care by improving medical coverage in WA Country Health Service (WACHS) hospitals and health services and better supporting the medical workforce.

In the western Wheatbelt region, the following SIHI initiatives are contributing to communities having better access to GPs, improved emergency care and a more robust country health service:

**Emergency Telehealth Service**

Doctors and nurses treating critically ill and injured patients in emergency departments (EDs) at Northam, Beverley, Cunderdin, Dalwallinu, Goomalling, Wongan Hills, Wyalkatchem and York now have access to highly trained emergency specialists in Perth via videoconference, thanks to the Emergency Telehealth Service (ETS). Find out more about the ETS here. Watch a video where a former patient describes how the ETS helped to save his life.

**Incentives to attract GPs to country towns and participate in Emergency Department rosters**

Eligible GPs can receive financial incentives to encourage them to work in the SIHI region and take part in ED rosters at local WACHS hospitals, including in the western Wheatbelt. These incentives are in addition to the support packages provided by local government.

In Northam, SIHI funds a full-time salaried doctor who is employed at the Northam Health Service as well as funding local GPs to be available on the floor in the ED during the day and on call after hours.

**New district medical model to encourage GPs to stay in country towns**

SIHI is supporting collaboration between GPs, enhanced flexible work options, education and training and collegiate support to encourage attraction and retention of doctors providing services in WACHS facilities, including in the western Wheatbelt region.

**Strengthened medical workforce**

SIHI supports the medical workforce to enable continuous service reform and delivery of effective and efficient emergency support to WACHS facilities, including in the western Wheatbelt region.

**Incentives for GPs to provide primary care services and Aboriginal health services**

SIHI offers financial incentives to GPs to deliver primary care services and Aboriginal health services to the community in various western Wheatbelt towns.
Providing health care closer to home

SIHI has significantly increased the range of local health services that bring care closer to home and help people to avoid hospital.

In partnership with non-government and community organisations, SIHI is building a more sustainable rural health system. In the western Wheatbelt region, the following can now be accessed thanks to SIHI:

**Community Midwifery Service**

A community midwife based in Northam provides shared antenatal care with local GPs where possible, including visiting and outreach services to expectant women throughout the western Wheatbelt. Women can plan their birth to enhance the safety and well-being of their babies. The service has an average case load of 20-30 women per month, including Aboriginal women and clients with complex care needs.

In addition, SIHI funded the purchase of fetal monitoring equipment used by the community midwife for antenatal appointments, decreasing the need for pregnant women in the western Wheatbelt to travel to Perth for fetal monitoring.

**Newborn Hearing Screening Program**

Parents and newborn babies living in the western Wheatbelt region can now access newborn hearing screening provided by community midwives in Moora, improving the rate of early detection of hearing issues in newborns. SIHI has funded $18,000 for a portable newborn hearing screening device used by community midwives.

**Primary Health Nurse Practitioner**

A nurse practitioner works closely with GPs and provides home visits, care plans and delivers primary care, including for mental health clients, throughout the western Wheatbelt. Nurse practitioners conduct clinics in small towns where there are no GPs or limited access to GPs.

**Aged Care**

Under SIHI, there is a focus on clinical improvement in residential aged care facilities including reducing falls and improving care for people with dementia. There is a priority to improve access to community care options to enable people to stay in their homes as long as possible.

**Mental Health**

A shared-care approach between GPs, mental health services and nurse practitioners has enabled the physical health care needs of patients to clients to be comprehensively assessed and managed, in particular in areas where there are limited GPs.

**Health Navigator**

A free telephone and videoconferencing service that supports people living with diabetes, heart disease, heart failure, and long-term lung conditions, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) to manage their chronic conditions and get their health on track.
Providing health care closer to home (cont.)

Shared electronic records
Health Navigator clients can now choose to share their health records with all those involved in their care. This means the client’s goals and health history are available so everyone works to the same health goals.

Outpatient services via telehealth
Free outpatient service for public patients via videoconference for burns, wounds, pain management, speech pathology, dietetics, gastroenterology, neurology, urology, paediatrics and more can be accessed from eight western Wheatbelt hospitals and health services with participating specialists in Perth.

Tele-mental Health
Western Wheatbelt clients can have appointments with their psychiatrist and/or therapist (psychologist, social worker etc.) from their home towns via videoconference, instead of having to make the journey to the regional health centre at Northam.

Diabetes Telehealth
A partnership between WACHS and Diabetes WA to enhance diabetes education services for people in regional WA, including the western Wheatbelt district, using videoconferencing. Phone 1300 136 588 or visit the Diabetes WA website.

Antenatal telehealth classes
Regular antenatal education classes are now available via videoconference, linking expectant parents throughout the western Wheatbelt with a range of specialists and experts without having to travel to their delivery hospital. Join the Facebook page: Facebook/BabyBumpsWA

Lactation telehealth service
New mothers in the Wheatbelt can go to their local hospital or health service and link via videoconference with specialist midwives at King Edward Memorial Hospital who provide specialists breastfeeding advice.
Providing upgrades to hospital and health service facilities

SIHI is investing $300 million to upgrade 37 hospital and health service facilities across the Wheatbelt, South West, Midwest and Great Southern. Upgrades will support the delivery of health care services that will better match the needs of their communities and conform to all current compliance and security standards.

Building activity currently underway or planned in the western Wheatbelt region as part of the SIHI capital works program:

- Northam Health Service is about to undergo a $42 million plus upgrade with construction expected to commence in the third quarter of 2016 and be completed in mid-2018. Upgrades to Northam Health Service will include a new main entrance, an outpatient centre for child health, mental health and occupational therapy services, specialist consulting rooms, an upgraded and expanded emergency department, ambulance bay and surgical and sterilising department as well as new renal and expanded chemotherapy services.

- Health services in the western Wheatbelt towns of Beverley, Dalwallinu, Goomalling, Wongan Hills, Wyalkatchem and York will be upgraded, with construction on the various sites due to commence in the second half of 2016.

- A new Cunderdin Health Centre will be built, delivering primary health services and 24/7 emergency care.

Existing services

Services introduced under SIHI are provided in addition to existing WACHS Wheatbelt services including Aboriginal health, child health nursing, school health nursing, immunisation, occupational therapy, speech pathology, physiotherapy, social work, dietetics, diabetes education and mental health services which are available (primarily outreach/visiting) throughout the western Wheatbelt through scheduled visits and telehealth.
Age appropriate accommodation for Cunderdin

Planning is underway to develop new age appropriate accommodation to support older people in Cunderdin, funded by SIHI and built, owned and managed by the Cunderdin Shire.

New primary health centre to be built in Cunderdin

An innovative new primary health centre is being developed in Cunderdin, to deliver primary health services such as early childhood checks, immunisation and home and community care to local residents to keep them healthy and living well in the community. The Cunderdin Health Centre will also provide 24/7 emergency care, including via the Emergency Telehealth Service during operating hours.

Design planning by architectural firm Iredale Pedersen Hook is underway with input from local community members, health providers and WACHS Wheatbelt staff. Construction on the new Cunderdin Health Centre is due to commence in mid-2017.

Visit the Bigger Picture Health website for more information on all the SIHI capital projects in the Wheatbelt.

You can keep updated on the latest SIHI news by signing up for the SIHI e-newsletter, which will be issued monthly.

If you have any queries about SIHI, please contact us by emailing southerninland@health.wa.gov.au.

You can also visit the SIHI website at www.health.wa.gov.au/southerninland.
SIHI enables 24/7 ED coverage by doctors at Northam Hospital

A Wongan Hills resident provides an insight into how SIHI funding has improved access to doctors in Northam's ED.

“It was a weekend; my husband had a chronic chest infection and was struggling to breathe. We live in Wongan Hills and there is no doctor in town over the weekend, so we decided to travel to Northam ED about an hour away. Charlie looked visibly unwell and when he started to outline his symptoms, including chest pain, the ED nurse triaged him as needing urgent attention and he was taken through to the treatment area immediately.

The doctor on the floor attended to Charlie straight away, ordered tests and set him up on monitors to ensure that he wasn’t having a heart attack.

Charlie was monitored for around 45 minutes and the tests and monitors ultimately showed that he was suffering a severe dose of the flu. However it was extremely reassuring that the ED staff treated his symptoms seriously and that he was attended very quickly.

It was also reassuring to know that when you do present to hospital with potentially serious symptoms, there is a doctor available to order tests and monitor results instantly, rather than having to wait for a doctor to be called in over the weekend, which may delay life-saving treatment. Charlie was discharged with medication to help relieve the congestion in his chest. We returned home with peace of mind that he had been thoroughly assessed.

We now have access to the Emergency Telehealth Service at Wongan Hills Hospital which works incredibly well, and the local people and staff really rave about it. It makes such a difference having specialist medical care just a video call away.”

Your local District Health Advisory Council (DHAC)

The local District Health Advisory Council (DHAC) works with the WA Country Health Service to improve the delivery of health services in their health district.

As consumers, carers and community members, DHACs are able to share their and others experiences with local health service providers to help them make better health service decisions and deliver consumer centred care and services. To find out more, visit www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au and search ‘District Health Advisory Councils’.

Your western Wheatbelt DHAC Chairperson is Irene Mills who can be contacted on mobile 0427 621 033 or home 08 966 111 44 or email irenem@bigpond.com.
New telehealth lactation service for Wheatbelt mums

New mothers in the Wheatbelt can now access specialist breastfeeding advice thanks to a new telehealth service developed by the WA Country Health Service (WACHS) and King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEMH).

Mothers experiencing issues with breastfeeding can now connect with specialist lactation consultants via videoconference from their local health service. The service has been developed as part of the Maternal Health Service Improvement Project, introduced under the Royalties for Regions funded Southern Inland Health Initiative (SIHI).

SIHI Maternal Health Project Officer Tarryn Sharp said the new lactation service will be extremely valuable in supporting women in regional and remote areas to establish and maintain breastfeeding.

“It’s common knowledge that breast milk is the best source of nutrition for new babies, and that establishing breastfeeding can take time, energy and support,” Ms Sharp said.

The new lactation telehealth service links new mothers with specialist midwives at KEMH who are professional lactation consultants trained to help tackle issues such as attachment difficulties and pain, breastfeeding a premature or small baby and low milk production.

“In Australia, 92% of babies are exclusively breastfed for the first month of their life, however this number drops off sharply by three months (56%) and by six months only 14% of babies are exclusively breastfed. This indicates that many mothers start out wanting to breastfeed their babies, but may experience issues and switch to formula feeding,” Ms Sharp said.

“This may be due to ongoing discomfort with feeding due to poor positioning and attachment, or fears that their baby isn’t receiving enough milk, or simply because they are becoming tired and lacking in energy due to not looking after their own health.

“Our WACHS community midwives and child health nurses already offer support and advice to breastfeeding women to help them address issues they are having. This additional link to experienced lactation consultants will help more women become happy and confident breastfeeding their babies.”

The telehealth lactation consultant service and other initiatives introduced under the Maternal Health Service Improvement Project, such as community midwives and telehealth antenatal education are contributing to safer pregnancies, births and infant care, and better outcomes for babies and their mums.