

Cyclone Debbie

remembering 28 March 2017
and the days ahead



*A tribute to our
healthcare workers
for going above and
beyond to care for
their community*



**Queensland
Government**



A message from Jo Whitehead Chief Executive

Mackay Hospital and Health Service facilities were battered and tested when Cyclone Debbie made landfall near Airlie Beach on 28 March 2017. Proserpine, Cannonvale, Bowen, Collinsville, Moranbah, Mackay and Sarina were all affected with the Whitsundays bearing the brunt of the Category 4 system.

A year later it's fitting to take time to reflect on the efforts of our capable and heroic staff who sprung into action in the days leading up to Cyclone Debbie, working as a team to prepare for the storm and keep services available to our community. Every hospital remained open during the cyclone and the following storm despite varying degrees of infrastructure damage. Many staff worked long hours, going above and beyond their normal roles. Operational impacts from the cyclone were significant, with record Emergency Department presentations to Bowen, Proserpine and Mackay hospitals.

Although almost 12 months have passed we are conscious of the impact of Debbie had on some staff, many of whom are still suffering from damaged homes and property as well as living with the emotional impact. Support for staff personally affected by the cyclone continues to be provided through the Staff Employee Assistance Scheme. Community mental health services have also been expanded over two financial years to provide early intervention mental health support.

Thank-you to our community who supported us at this time and a special thanks to staff who were living examples of our values - Collaboration, Trust, Respect and Teamwork.

Relief staff from other hospital and health services were welcomed with open arms by exhausted locals, many who had been bedded down at their facilities for more than 24 hours. We welcomed 156 staff members from other hospital and health services included a mix of clinical, public health, mental health and building engineering and maintenance services support.

I'm proud to say that Mackay HHS is willing to pay this kindness forward should another health service feel the brunt of a natural disaster. Just last week we had more than 20 staff from our rural facilities and the Base Hospital volunteer to support colleagues in the far north with Cyclone Nora. Our help, while very gratefully acknowledged, was not needed.

Please enjoy this encore edition of our original Cyclone Debbie newsletter along with some additional photos.



My bed for the night on the eve of Cyclone Debbie.



A selfie with some of the Public Health Team.

A flooded Pioneer River - March 2017



The flooded Pioneer River broke its banks, submerging the Mackay Base Hospital helipad.

The view from the top of Mackay Base Hospital



Mackay HHS staff worked long hours and extra shifts to continue to provide patient care when flooding and wild weather prevented colleagues from getting to work.

Proserpine Hospital - battered but not broken

It took a resourceful and brave team to treat a Proserpine man critically injured during the height of Cyclone Debbie.

As the eye of the storm passed over Queensland Ambulance officer Gavin Cousens went out to retrieve the man who was critically injured by a falling wall and flying debris.

With a severely lacerated arm, broken ribs and a collapsed lung the man went straight to theatre.

DON Nicola Young said her staff and community members all played a role in his survival as well as another seriously injured person brought in at the same time.

"Everyone did what they needed to do where they needed to do it," Nic said.

"For example local fireman Todd Marshall who was in hospital with his wife having a baby came to the rescue as the fire alarm was going off constantly.

"He spent time isolating the sections and keeping nurses informed so they could continue working in ED treating the trauma patient," Nic said.

"Our midwifery manager Annie Eaton was also working in Emergency, so you can see everyone was pitching in where they needed to do.

"I want to say thank-you. To look around here and see people who came in during and after the cyclone. There's not one person I can single out.

"We were supported by Executive. They listened to what we said we needed and they got it for us, and they have continued to support us afterwards.

"Thank you to my amazing team who goes above and beyond every day, whether it's a bus crash or a cyclone. The Townsville staff will be part of our family for ever, we made such great friends with them (and had lots of fun camping!)

"Debbie has brought us so much, she might have taken away a lot but she really has brought the community together and made a bigger family for all of us, and made us all be part of one organisation regardless of where we work in health or even ambulance, police, fire and the army."

**- Nicola Young
Director of Nursing**



Health and Ambulance Services Minister says thank-you

Health and ambulance leaders visited cyclone affected hospitals to meet with staff who survived Cyclone Debbie.

Minister for Health Cameron Dick, Ambulance Commissioner Russell Bowles, Director General Michael Walsh, Chief Health Officer Dr Jeannette Young, Board Chair Tim Mulherin and Chief Executive Jo Whitehead visited Collinsville, Bowen and Proserpine hospitals.

Mr Dick said it was the first time he had travelled with the full team but they wanted to meet the staff supported through the State Health Emergency Operations Centre.

"All of the health and ambulance leaders are here to say thank-you for responding to Cyclone Debbie, it was an extraordinary weather event and we know that Proserpine felt the brunt of it. The response of this hospital was impressive, it was remarkable what you were able to do to protect patients and to care for them even though your own homes and families were under threat," Mr Dick said.



"The flooding and inundation made the operation of the hospital very difficult. You are the best of the best. Terry Johnson and Nicola Young. You were a tower of strength. SMOs Sally Baines and Deb Simmons and Hannah Trimble, Davina and her husband Lloyd, Kevin and Jan Nolan, Dr Derek and midwife Demelza Griffin who assisted with a high risk birth at Cannonvale Police station.

"You were all courageous people. I don't want to single anyone out but you are all legends."

Cameron Dick
Health and Ambulance
Services Minister

A basket of sweet treats to say thanks!



Proserpine DON Nicola Young accepts a basket of goodies from CE Jo Whitehead on behalf of the Executive Leadership Team and the Board.



Angels fly in to help



by Townsville Hospital nurse Leone Lovegrove who worked in Proserpine

The nurse who cried when we arrived because it meant she could go home to see her kids - she hadn't seen them since #cyclonedebbie, leaving for work before they woke and coming home from the hospital after their bedtime

The nurses caring for the elderly man found dehydrated and confused after #cyclonedebbie - his home destroyed

The nurse who came to work despite losing the roof from her bedroom during the night - a wild storm in the aftermath of #cyclonedebbie

The nurse who has been here for 72 hours - along with many other staff

The nurses who had to talk to the patient about not using the staff microwave to dry his marijuana - another #cyclonedebbie drama

The nurse who chose to leave her home at the beach to stay in town knowing she would be needed at the hospital during #cyclonedebbie and who, at the time of our arrival, had no idea if her home was intact or not

The nurse who stayed with an elderly patient who was discharged from hospital before #cyclonedebbie, knowing that she would be scared and alone if the storm hit them - she spent 90 minutes using all of her strength to keep the back door closed after it flew open during the cyclone - waiting for a break to move the fridge there instead

The nurse who drove patients home before #cyclonedebbie and then had to drive back through rising flood waters - in her words, the scariest drive of her life

The nurses who managed the patient who jimmied the hospital door open during #cyclonedebbie so he could have a cigarette - and in doing so interrupted the airlock causing rain and debris to blow into the hospital

The nurse who is staying at the hospital because her Shute Harbour home was destroyed by #cyclonedebbie

The nurse who drove to the hospital during the eye of the cyclone knowing her colleagues and patients needed her more than her husband and children - her husband reluctantly and unselflessly giving her his blessing to go and care for others

The nurses who continued to care for their labouring patient while her husband went home to rescue his mother after their roof caved in - water damage from torrential rain after #cyclonedebbie

The nurse who helped pump 500 litres of fuel in a wild storm at 3am because the fuel pump to the emergency generator was broken - the night after #cyclonedebbie

The nurse who had to sleep at the hospital after her night duty because she didn't have enough fuel to get home and then back again for her next shift - hoping she could buy some later in the day but no, fuel sold out within a few hours of the pumps opening

The nurses and their despair when they thought they had lost a colleague to a flooded creek - later found to be safe

These are some of the people I worked with for a few days in Proserpine last week. We were the medical relief team providing support for a few days. They all having heart-wrenching stories of hardship and sacrifice.

They are nurses. Some call them angels. Mostly they are unsung heroes.

Sarina Hospital braves the leaks and the wind



RN Susanne Murray

I live in Mackay so when I got here on the Monday afternoon I worked my shift and stayed overnight in the nurses quarters so I could be there for my shift the next day which was cyclone day. It was a busy day but we all got in to get things done. There were two RNs, an EN, an AIN, two doctors, one cook and a cleaner. The physio also came in and Ivan came from the Base to check on us and he was here for a few hours. I wasn't really worried about the cyclone but I was more worried about patients being able to get in and out safely. Of course I hoped nothing bad would happen but we had two doctors and telehealth support so we weren't too worried.



EN Janelle Finley

I only live about 10 minutes drive but halfway through coming in it got really wild, the rain and the wind was blowing branches down off the trees. The last five minutes was a nightmare. I got to work and the rain was pouring down the steps like a waterfall, the rain was sideways, it felt like a movie. I looked like a drowned rat by the time I walked from the car to the hospital. I felt good there was other staff here with me and felt confident, two of our doctors were here and we put our own personal things aside and looked after patients for the day and did extra bits that weren't our role. We got through it and the patients were all ok.



CE Jo Whitehead visited Sarina Hospital after the cyclone to thank staff for their efforts. "It was a very busy week for Sarina Hospital but you have played your part during a very difficult time for many of you personally. We appreciate everything you did and continue to do for the health service," she said.

Cyclone snapshots ...

RN Tammi O'Shea showed us what a true leader is, not only working hard herself but supporting her colleagues.

CN Karen Dawe lives in Mackay but slept at Sarina Hospital for three days because she knew colleagues wouldn't be able to get in.

Cook Heather Wright came in on Tuesday even though she wasn't rostered. She worked well into that evening to ensure that everyone was fed. Heather ran the kitchen by herself (normally she would also have a kitchen hand).

Mackay Public Health Unit

Twenty-six Public Health officers entered post cyclone disaster zones to ensure that communities had potable water to hydrate, safe food to consume and sound environmental conditions to live in.

by Brigid Fenech
Environmental Health Manager

Our team worked with local governments of Mackay, Whitsunday and Isaac, Workplace Health and Safety, Department of Energy and Water Supply, Safe Food Production Qld and Environment and Heritage Protection to help keep the community safe as it recovered from Cyclone Debbie.

Tasks included:

- Ensuring food retailers and manufacturers, on reopening, were preparing sound and safe food
- Drinking water quality - testing to ensure that what was being delivered from the pipes was safe to drink
- Vaccine providers in the community were contacted to determine cold chain and the integrity of vaccines
- Pharmacies were inspected to ensure medicines and vaccines were secure
- Monitored sewerage systems and overflows
- Sanitation and hygiene
- Guidance was given to councils in relation to the disposal of asbestos
- Worked with councils to train waste officers regarding environmental hazards
- Our officers jumped in light planes and helicopters and spent days checking the Whitsunday Island facilities and their populations with regard to foods/water/waste/sanitation and environmental hazards
- Drafted plans with local governments regarding vector control
- Worked with the Army in the community on the mosquito front
- Brought in our entomologist to work with councils
- Evaluated Emergency and Disaster Shelters.

As a team we worked long hours and were on call 24/7 for two weeks, and the list of jobs seemed to grow every day.

A huge tribute and thanks to our colleagues from Cairns, Metro North, Townsville, Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast who dropped what they were doing and focused on the needs of our beautiful region for two weeks. In the most trying of circumstances, dedicated professionalism won the day and significant outcomes were achieved for the communities we live and work in.



Did you know ...

Environmental Health Officers seized over 40kg of sausages and rissoles prepared with unsafe water

Destroyed a truck load of food that was unsafe to eat

Oversaw the disposal of a large quantity of mouldy rice

Seized the cold cabinet at a supermarket

Stopped a hotel serving lunch to about 150 people because the food was prepared with unsafe drinking water

Closed a street because of asbestos containing debris

Moranbah Hospital - a team effort

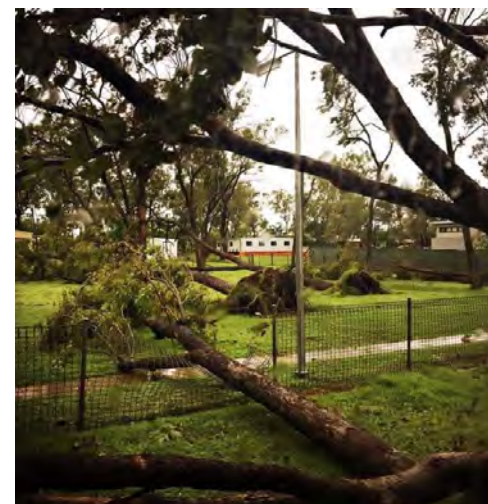


Cyclone snapshots ...

Cyclone preparation was a team effort. Groundsman Tony Batchelor (pictured far left) did amazing work to secure the grounds before the cyclone. Tony spent two days saturated and kept working.

Nurses Moniqua Northrop, Robyn Whitehead, Ginny Newman and Beth Bell stayed overnight so they wouldn't be isolated at their home and could work the next day.

DON Michelle Esler found new skills as a trades assistant when the generator needed repairs!



The Whitsunday's own MacGyver

Lloyd Linneweber found plenty of action and adventure during Cyclone Debbie and needed more than a paper clip to save the day. The husband of Community Indigenous Liaison Officer Davina turned troubleshooter when the hospital's generator ran dangerously low on fuel.

The Linneweber family had bunked in at the hospital during the cyclone in order to be able to lend a hand if needed.

"It was Tuesday morning, we'd been on generator power since Monday night and Davina woke me to say there was a chance the generator would run out of fuel, and we had to find a way to refuel it," Lloyd remembered.

While adequate fuel supplies had been delivered, the pump from the fuel pod to the generator tank wasn't connecting.

With the generator's low fuel alarm sounding the hospital came close to losing power.

"Nic Young and I went out during the storm to the groundsman's shed to see what we could find to move fuel in to the generator and at first there was nothing.

"Just as we were about to leave I noticed there was a weed spraying tank in the corner that had a 12 volt pump on it. I took the pump off that and we went out to hook up the hose so we could keep the generator going.

"We kept doing that a few times a day – every few



hours to check it was still pumping ok. Nic and I were both being blown around in the wind and the rain, particularly Nic because she's half my size and weight.

"The hardest thing was keeping the generator door closed as it was facing the wind. We managed to keep the tank full and the hospital kept power. I'm glad I was here because I don't know how else they would have kept the hospital going. I've got a background as a fitter and I'm just glad Hector had that little spray pump in his shed I could use.

"I think anyone put in the same situation would have done the same thing if they had a mechanical background. They would know a pump is the quickest way to fill a tank, but yes MacGyver they keep calling me," he laughed.

RIGHT: Davina and Lloyd Linneweber with CE Jo Whitehead.



FAR RIGHT: The "Linneweber Room" where the family bunked down during Cyclone Debbie.



Cannonvale - where primary and acute care came together

Proserpine Hospital Senior Medical Officer Dr Chris Gill rolled up his sleeves to work with his GP colleagues in Cannonvale in the aftermath of Cyclone Debbie.

Whitsunday Family Practice became a makeshift emergency department, treating hundreds of people who couldn't attend hospital due to flooding.

Dr Melissa McCann opened her practice without mains power, relying on a generator to maintain the cold chain for vaccines and ultimately depending on the community to donate fuel when her supplies ran out.

A neighbouring pharmacist offered his supplies and medications for free during an intense 48 hours until people could access the hospital and other surgeries for care.

Chris knew his skills would be needed and that Airlie and Cannonvale would be isolated from Proserpine for two days. "I knew the ambulances were coming to Mel's practice so I thought this was the best place to

be, where the acuity was and the trauma patients," he said.

"When I first pulled up I was in board shorts and a tank top and there were ambulances all out the front and effectively the patients were being triaged. The place was full. The waiting room was full of injured people and all of these beds were full," he said looking around.

"There was no standing room left but thankfully another hospital doctor and doctors from other practices also came to volunteer their time.

"There were lots of fractures, lacerations, cuts from flying debris, lots of chainsaw injuries to people cleaning up and not knowing how to use a chainsaw properly. There was a chap who fell through a roof, a skylight, so he had a head injury. Lots of trauma patients basically."



Chris said it was good to help out on the ground and deal with the trauma from the cyclone.

"This was a private business willing to help the public at no cost, it just shows how the community can pull together, it's a really good thing to be part of."



All creatures great and small

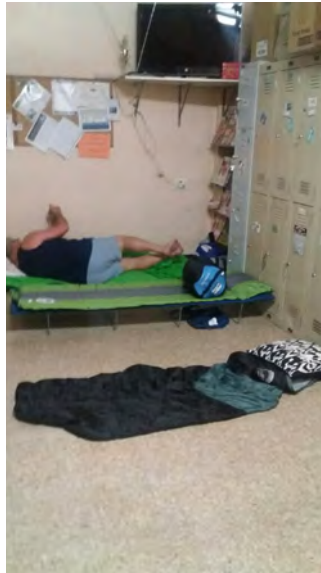
This pair of rainbow lorikeets took refuge under a window eve at the height of the cyclone.

Even the littlest hands were at work as Proserpine Hospital recovered from Cyclone Debbie. This little guy was staying in hospital with his mum who was expecting a baby and couldn't risk birthing at home due to the cyclone. Hospital staff say he was an absolute delight and even helped with the clean up.

Whitsunday repairs - thanks building and maintenance staff



Mackay BEMS staff welcomed support from their Townsville colleagues for three days as they worked to get Whitsunday Health facilities repaired. Our visitors slept on the floor and even brought their own food with them. The relief effort included food, water, generators and medication as well as electricians, fitters, plumbers and carpenters.



Proserpine Hospital ambulance bay and helipad



Bowen Hospital feels full force of the wind

Bowen Hospital DON Julie Minogue has thanked her staff for their work during and after Cyclone Debbie.

The hospital was kept busy with a high number of Emergency Department presentations for cyclone-related injuries including more than 60 the day after.

Julie said she was very proud the hospital had remained open during the cyclone and praised her staff for going above and beyond to provide care.

"We are all locals so we felt the cyclone professionally and personally as 70% of my staff had damage to their own homes, and some of this was significant," she said.

The hospital suffered minor damage including loss of some roof flashing, gutters, external blinds and fences from falling trees.

"At the height of the bad weather we had water blow in under the doors so we were kept busy mopping the floor," she said.

"From Monday lunchtime we had 10 staff stay at the hospital to ensure the inpatients and outpatients were being looked after. They slept on mattresses on the floors in some areas and some of these staff stayed until Thursday," she said.

Julie said some local staff remained at the hospital as flooding or damage prevented their return home.

"We were so relieved when 24 staff arrived from Townsville by bus to help us out. This included five doctors, eight nurses, two radiographers, three social



DON Julie Minogue and SMO Dr Michael Berkley.

workers, five operational staff and an administration officer.

"As soon as they arrived they rostered themselves on duty and went to work."

Many Bowen staff were then released to attend to their own families and properties.

"The social workers met patients as they arrived in Emergency and also assisted many of the elderly patients with housing and moving to the shelter. They also lent their shoulders to the many staff who were exhausted and needed someone to talk to who wasn't affected.

Bowen was also supported by two Proserpine nurses who were unable to travel to work due to flood waters.

"The response to Cyclone Debbie was true teamwork. Everyone put the needs of their patients first and worked together to keep our community safe and well.

"We kept the hospital going despite the cyclone and the bad storm that followed.

"It's been an incredibly busy and stressful time but I am proud we continued to provide care and showed how well we can pull together in a crisis," she said.

Cyclone snapshots ...

Robbie Russell and Aaron McDonald put up shutters and boards to protect windows. They worked until 6pm Sunday and on Monday purchased more to board up the admin building and exposed windows. They worked tirelessly to clear the grounds. The added bonus of their work? Patients slept through the cyclone because they couldn't hear the wind!

SMO Michael Berkley stayed through looking after patients, including a child suspected of eating fertiliser (fortunately he hadn't).

PHOs Ilina Iordanova, Diane Wang and Darius Dastoui stayed on site and did whatever was required, from treating patients to mopping and vacuuming.

Cook Lisa Burgess came in on her days off so the other cook could go home. Lisa stayed throughout the cyclone and cooked every meal.

Operational officer Cheryl Throssel stayed the whole time emptying bins, cleaning and helping in the kitchen.

Four RNs stayed on site - Michelle Lamont, Di Waters, Christie Burns and Kate Atkinson. Michelle and Di live at Cannonvale and Airlie Beach and knew they wouldn't get home.

EN Louisa Osborn lives on a property and knew she would be flooded. Louisa left her horses and other animals to work and could only return home on the Sunday after the cyclone. EN Elizabeth Schulz also left her family at home to work.

Collinsville MPHS opens its doors and hearts



Rebecca Sibbick is proud that the Multi Purpose Health Service she manages not only cared for patients and aged care residents but also supported the wider community during Cyclone Debbie.

"We are more than the MPHS on the hill, we are part of the Collinsville community and our care and concern extends beyond our walls," she said.

The hospital provided emergency accommodation to one resident who lost a roof and to another man who had no family in town.

The day after Debbie staff worked with the ambulance to do welfare checks on vulnerable community members and staff.

The MPHS also provided accommodation for relief ambulance and police officers sent to support Collinsville.

Once Rebecca heard the Meals on Wheels service was out of action she organised for the

hospital kitchen to take over.

"I happened to be at the police station catching up with Matt the officer in charge on Wednesday when word came in that Meals on Wheels was out until at least Monday.

"I knew there was no power in town so decided we would do the meals. We did meals for 11 people plus another man who wasn't on the list but we knew he was frail and without power.

"I'm really pleased the MPHS has been able to care not only for its patients and residents but provide some support for the wider community," she said.

Rebecca and Dr Myint Soe worked long hours before, during and after Cyclone Debbie



"I also want to thank my wonderful staff who have picked up extra shifts and worked overtime."

Relief staff from Charters Towers, Hughenden, Ayr and Torres and Cape health services who volunteered to assist were a welcome sight.

"Everyone is prepped for a cyclone but then the adrenaline wears off and you're fatigued. I was so relieved to see them arrive, it allowed local staff some down time to recover."



Operational Service Officers Teresita Illguth and Joy Whatuira.



Post Graduate RN Analyn Suyat.



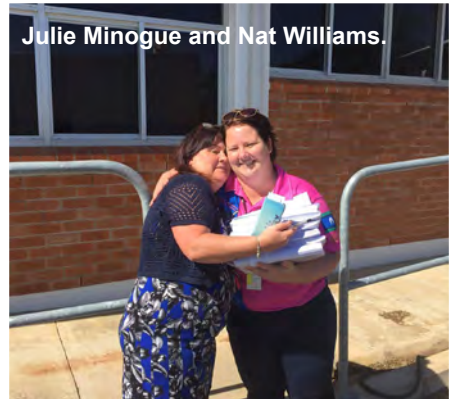
AIN Marie Bullock and ENAP Marlene Drinkwater.

Roadtrip north with hospital supplies



Bowen Director of Nursing Julie Minogue makes sure the men get it right!

A truck carrying food, water and medication to top up local stores in Bowen and Proserpine left Mackay Base after Cyclone Debbie. Food and Linen Manager Bonny-Jean Hunt and Rural Operations Manager Nat Williams were also armed with a camera and caught up with local and relief staff along the way.



Julie Minogue and Nat Williams.



Bonny-Jean Hunt.



Operational Officers Jill Collins and Coral Ferguson.



Nurse Unit Manager Lisa Milne unloading at Proserpine Hospital.



Operational officers Lyn Maas and Davina Brown.



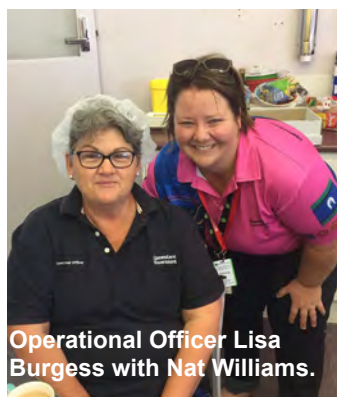
Medical Records Administration Officer Katie Lingard, with Kaylene Cartwright from Townsville and Bowen Hospital Administration Officer Joanne Rerekura.



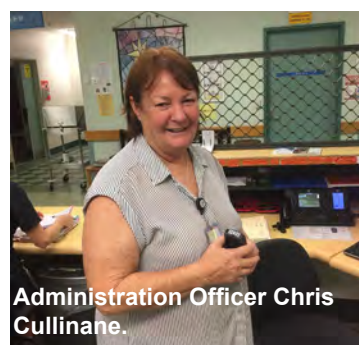
Bonny-Jean Hunt and Operational Officer Bonny Soden.



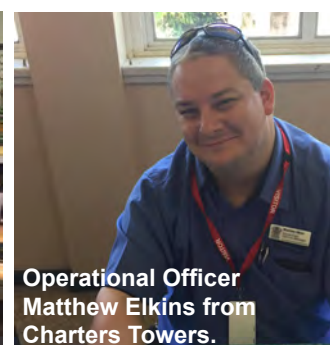
RN Montana White from Ingham Hospital and AO Rosemary Schulz from Townsville Hospital.



Operational Officer Lisa Burgess with Nat Williams.



Administration Officer Chris Cullinane.



Operational Officer Matthew Elkins from Charters Towers.

Mental Health working in community recovery hubs



Annie Lynch, Margie McLean and Martin Brookes.



Annie Lynch and Donna Chapman.



The team at the Andergrove Recovery Centre.



Mark Scanlon welcomes relief mental health workers from Brisbane.



Recovery Team at the Mackay Entertainment and Convention Centre.

Need help? The Post Disaster Mental Health Recovery Team provides support to people of all ages who are experiencing, or are at risk of developing, a mental health illness (this can include pre-existing mental health conditions) as a result of the impact of Cyclone Debbie.

Referrals are accepted from all areas in the Mackay Hospital Health Service catchment area (includes Sarina, Proserpine, Bowen, Collinsville, Moranbah)

Phone 4868 3893 or email MHDisasterRecovery@health.qld.gov.au

Funded by the Australian and Queensland Governments through the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements.

Emergency Operations Centre (EOC)



Our Emergency Operations Centre stood up for a Code Green response to Cyclone Debbie and was open 24/7 throughout the disaster. The EOC's role is to co-ordinate support for affected facilities and to liaise with the State Health Emergency Operations Centre in Brisbane and request support where needed. EOC also liaises with local and district disaster management groups to coordinate support and receive reliable information briefings.

Mackay Base Hospital staff pitch in



Mackay Base Hospital staff and relief workers



Cyclone snapshot ...

Imagine hand folding all of Mackay Base Hospital's linen! A power surge after the cyclone blew up the ironer meaning staff had to hand fold all linen.

Staff worked hard to deliver 20 tonnes of clean laundry to patients and staff - well up from the average 12 tonnes a week. Supervisors of food and linen Lenore Borg and Melissa Lang and Manager Food and Linen Bonny-Jean Hunt stayed at the hospital from Monday to Wednesday. They were vital for the operations of the laundry and kitchen during the cyclone.

Mackay girl Laura Harris, below right, returned to her roots as part of the ex TC Debbie recovery team from Princess Alexandra Hospital. Now working in Brisbane as an Intensive Care Nurse, Laura jumped at the chance to help her family's community. "We've come to help out our fellow Queensland Health employees and make sure they are all safe, can get home to their families and can actually have some sleep," she said.

