

Joint media release

23 April 24

Weipa birthing is BACK baby!!

Twenty-five years after its closure, and now more than a year after the redevelopment of the birthing facilities, doctors and nurses at Weipa Hospital are finally preparing for the first (planned) birth in the new suite.

Dr RT Lewandowski, President of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA), said it was exciting to see a birthing service reopen.

“Weipa has this amazing new birthing facility but staffing challenges have delayed its opening,” Dr Lewandowski said. “Western Cape women have been waiting for 25 years for this, and it is fantastic news that from next month they will no longer have to travel to Cairns to give birth!



“Staff were very disappointed at the delay last year, when the newly refurbished facility was scheduled to start receiving patients, as at that time despite having a full complement of midwives there were not enough doctors to meet the required minimum numbers to staff the roster.

“Over the past year the Torres and Cape Health Service has been working to recruit the necessary staff that will enable safe operation of this low-risk birthing service. There is now a great team in place, and they are preparing for births to start from 22 May 2024.



“This is a real credit to the whole team at Weipa, doctors, nurses, midwives and administrators, who have worked relentlessly over several years to finally be able to offer this much-needed birthing service in their community and for the families in the Western Cape.

“The importance of rural birthing services was validated in Weipa just last month, as the team successfully managed a life-threatening presentation by an emergency caesarean delivery. Births do not always happen in the timeframe or manner everybody might like, and rural birthing centres really do save lives.”

RDAA and the Rural Doctors Association of Queensland (RDAQ) have been tireless advocates for rural birthing and say that the reopening of more birthing units should be on the agenda for Governments right across Australia.

“Birthing services are essential for rural hospitals, and for the communities they service,” RDAQ President Dr Alex Dunn said.



“Women should be able to give birth close to home, and as many on Country as possible, no matter where they live but over the past 20 years, more than 150 rural maternity units across Australia, including many in Queensland, have been closed with too many others downgraded or bypassed,” he said.

“Aside from the obvious impacts of travel on birthing mums and their families, maternity also underpins many other services that are offered through the hospital by enabling the skill sets of doctors and nurses to be used to their full scope.

“This, in turn, helps attract and retain staff with essential skills in anaesthetics and emergency medicine, and keeps operating theatres open which results in more services remaining viable through the rural hospital.”

RDAA and RDAQ have advocated for rural birthing over many years, and will continue to do so.

Last year RDAA coordinated a National Rural Maternity Forum in partnership with the Australian College of Midwives and the Commissioner for Rural Health. This forum developed action items to be progressed that will ensure that we not only save rural maternity services from closure and downgrading, and reopen closed services, but also expand their role in communities, ensuring their sustainability into the future.

In Queensland, the focus on reopening birthing services was an outcome of the Queensland Rural Maternity Taskforce with the final report, delivered by Premier Stephen Miles (then Minister for Health), targeting Weipa as one of the priority sites.

Births will resume at Weipa Integrated Health Service on 22 May 2024.

“This is wonderful news for Weipa and the Western Cape community and, it’s an example of what can and should be achieved in many other sites across Queensland and Australia,” Dr Dunn said.

Photos:

[Dr RT Lewandowski](#)

[Weipa Birthing Team](#)

[Dr Alex Dunn](#)

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