



MHACA gratefully acknowledges the support and funding from the Northern Territory Government, Australian Government Department of Health and the Northern Territory Primary Health Network

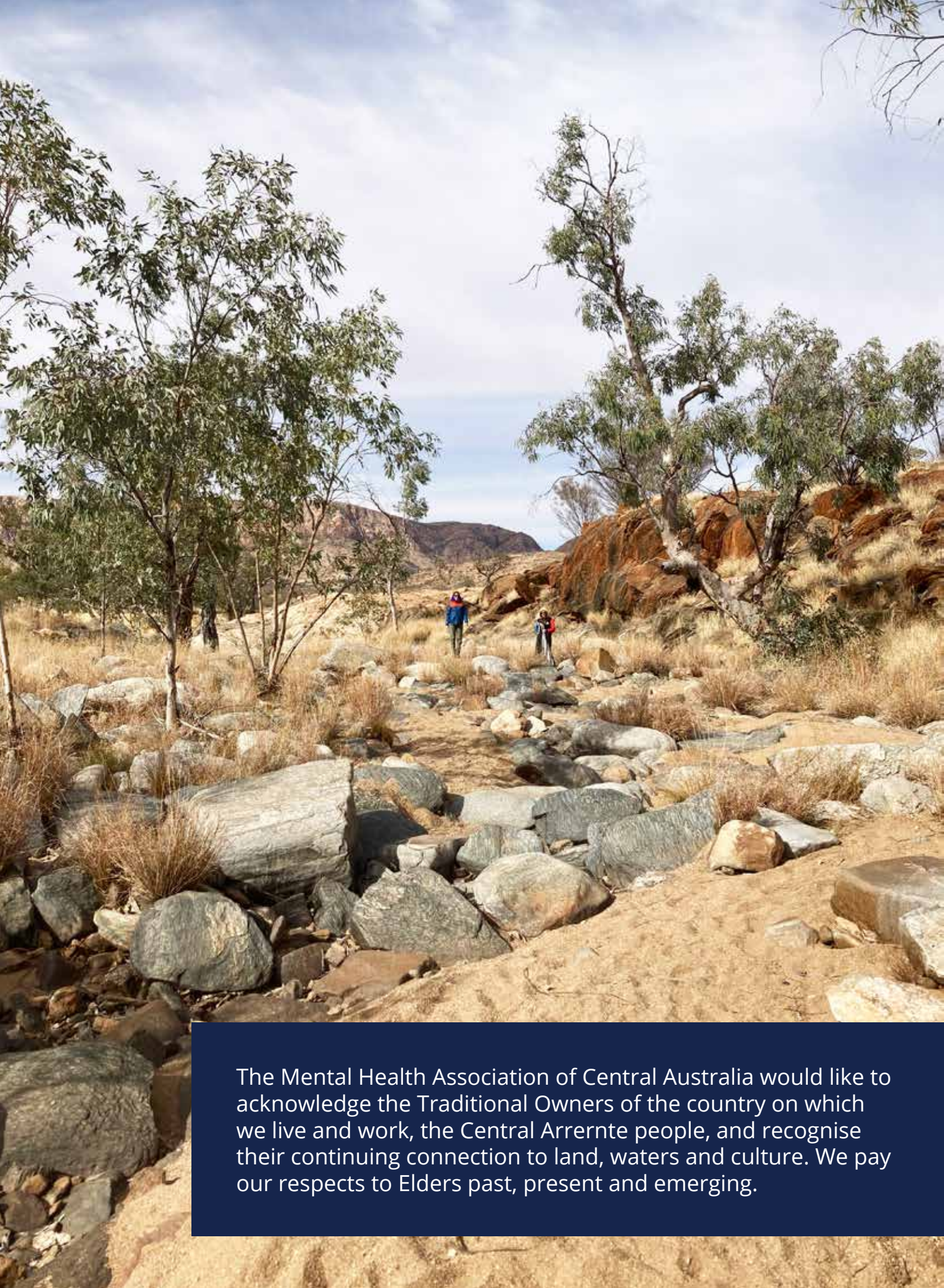


**MHACA**  
Mental Health  
Association of  
Central Australia

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2021 – 2022





The Mental Health Association of Central Australia would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the country on which we live and work, the Central Arrernte people, and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

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The Mental Health Association of Central Australia (MHACA) has offered psychosocial support services and health promotion programs aimed at enhancing the mental health and wellbeing of people living in Central Australia for 30 years.

We acknowledge people with a personal experience of mental illness and suicide, and the voices of lived experience informs the work that we do.

As an inclusive organisation we celebrate people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities, cultures, bodies and abilities.



# WELCOME FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

Thank you for your interest and support for the Mental Health Association of Central Australia (MHACA). I would like to acknowledge that we are privileged to be able to deliver our services from Mparntwe (Alice Springs) on Arrernte country.

I acknowledge the cultural richness and continuing connection to country of the Arrernte people as custodians and traditional owners of these amazing lands and pay my respects to their elders past and present, as well as acknowledging the contributions of their emerging leaders.

I am pleased to share MHACA's Annual Report. The report highlights the many achievements of the organisation throughout 2021/22, in an ever-evolving environment. We continue our work to lead and support a range of mental health initiatives across Central Australia.

Our primary focus is on supporting local communities through a range of quality services and facilities, which enhance peoples' quality of life and enable them to manage and potentially resolve the mental health issues that impact their lives.

A big change for MHACA in the last 12 months has been the departure of Merrilee Cox as CEO. Merrilee decided to move back east to be closer to family, and while we were sorry to see her leave, we were very supportive of her making the best decision for herself and her family.

On behalf of the Board, the staff, and the participants I would like to acknowledge and thank Merrilee for her contribution to MHACA as CEO for 4 years. We wish her all the best for the future.

On Merrilee's departure the Board undertook a recruitment process to find the right person to step into the role of CEO. We were fortunate to have a strong set of applicants and in the end were unanimous in our selection of Dira Horne as the new CEO. Dira has extensive experience in the community services space both on the east coast and locally here in Alice Springs, including as a previous MHACA Board member. Dira has quickly come up to speed on the operational and strategic elements of MHACA and is working closely with the Board, the staff, and the participants as well as with our funders.

Joining Dira on the MHACA Executive team I'd also like to welcome Chris Rumble as the new Executive Manager Corporate Services.

Once again, we have experienced a year overlaid by the impacts of COVID-19. While the closures and lockdowns have eased, there is no doubt COVID-19 continues to have a big impact on our participants, our team, and our services. I would like to acknowledge the work of the MHACA management team, staff, and participants in continuing to adapt to the challenges of COVID and ensuring the ongoing delivery of quality programs and services for our community.

There's no doubt it has been a challenging year for MHACA, as for many organisations in the current health and financial environment. MHACA continues to work through the challenges of delivering viable services under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), as well as a changing funding environment and increasing cost pressures. This means that as a Board we continue to look deeply at how things are working and the risks and opportunities for the future, so that we can make the best decisions in a timely manner to support MHACA as a strong and viable community services organisation.

As Chairperson of MHACA I would like to extend my thanks to my fellow Board members for their ongoing support, engagement, and thoughtfulness around the work of the organisation. We are fortunate to have an active and committed Board who continue to work diligently on the current needs and future sustainability of our services and support for participants.

It is equally important to acknowledge the adaptability, patience and enthusiasm which has characterised the work of the MHACA team as we continue our journey in this new and still changing world.

In closing I would like to acknowledge the critical support of our funding bodies & partners, the MHACA staff & participants, my fellow Board members, and the Central Australian community. We are fortunate to have so much support and good will from many people and organisations, working together with us, as we deliver this vital work around mental health in the Central Australian community.

**Peter Riley**

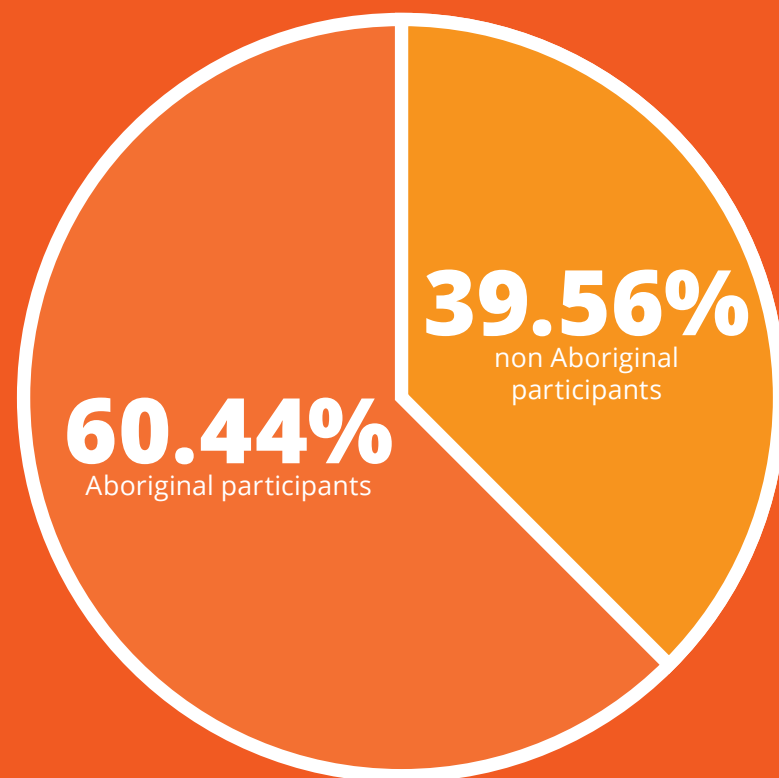
*Chairperson*





# 139

people received a MHACA service



## 50.36%

female participants



## 28

new participants

## 3050

hours of one-on-one support provided

## 49.64%

male participants



## 11500

hours accessed at the Drop-in Centre



## 4450

hours accessed of group activities



## 6

Alice Springs Mental Health Professionals Interagency Meetings



## 94

Support Coordination participants



## 35

health promotion events and presentations



## 5

Central Australia Life Promotion Network meetings



## 986

website visits per month



## 765

Facebook page likes



## 209

Instagram followers

# FOSTERING MENTAL HEALTH

## OUR VISION

Central Australia is a safe and inclusive community that actively fosters and supports good mental health.

## OUR MISSION

MHACA supports participant-driven recovery and promotes mental health and wellbeing in our community.

## OUR VALUES

### We value lived experience.

The knowledge and understanding of participants, communities, and others with a lived experience of mental illness and distressing life episodes underpins and continually improves our service delivery.

### We value respect.

We respect the experience and contributions of participants, colleagues, communities, and stakeholders. Staff demonstrate respectful behaviour in all aspects of their work.

### We value diversity.

We actively seek the voices of diverse peoples to enrich our approach and ensure our organisation responds to their needs. We value that MHACA participants and staff have a range of abilities and backgrounds. We acknowledge local Aboriginal cultures and embrace multiculturalism, gender equality and LGBTQIAP+ peoples.

### We value creativity and innovation.

We continuously review and improve our services and support each other to explore creative responses that will make our services and organisation stronger.

### We value safety.

We understand how critical it is that people feel safe. We will create an environment grounded in kindness and hope where people are supported to increase their skills and where recovery can occur.

### We value sustainability.

We are here for the long term and will equip ourselves to stay strong in the face of social, economic, and environmental changes, by making informed decisions to manage and optimise resources.

# OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

## GOAL 1

MHACA will provide quality, evidence informed services to our clients.

## GOAL 2

MHACA will work collaboratively in the development and delivery of high quality and effective mental health programs.

## GOAL 3

MHACA will work toward reducing the stigma associated with mental illness and promote mental health and wellbeing in our community.

## GOAL 4

MHACA will strengthen our organisation to effectively and efficiently navigate changes in the service delivery system and respond to emerging needs in the community.

MHACA participants at a Healthy Bodies Support Healthy Minds picnic.





# RECOVERY-ORIENTED PRACTICE

SELF-DIRECTION | HOPE | STRATEGIES | PEER SUPPORT | LIFE SKILLS



SELF-CARE | SETTING GOALS | RESPECT | ADVOCACY | SUPPORT

**MHACA UNDERSTANDS THAT PEOPLE'S LIVES DO NOT HAVE TO BE DEFINED BY THEIR MENTAL ILLNESS.**

Recovery is a fundamental principle underpinning all of our programs and services. We work with participants to identify their strengths, set their own goals and say what recovery means to them.



**Recovery oriented practice supports people to recognise and take responsibility for their own mental health and wellbeing.**

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

It has been an extraordinary year, in every sense of the word. At the beginning of this year, we experienced for the first time the impact of COVID-19 in our community. Social isolation, upheaval, and the disruption to the lives of people who access our services, our community, staff, and their families cannot be underestimated in terms of the impact on mental health and wellbeing.

Yet while this has certainly been one of the most challenging times, we have emerged stronger and ready to move towards COVID normal. This is a testament to every person connected to MHACA and I extend my thanks to the extraordinary staff who rose to this challenge, day in and day out, making sure MHACA is always here for support.

### NDIS Mid Term Review

I am pleased to report that MHACA was assessed against the NDIS Practise Standards and received conformity on all standards in the NDIS Mid Term Review in June 2022.

The purpose of this assessment is to determine MHACA's functioning as it relates to the NDIS Practice Standards. The assessment included a review of the relevant requirements of the standard. The assessment evaluates the implementation, including effectiveness, of MHACA's service delivery according to the scope of the identified standards and assessment type.

### Central Australia Suicide Prevention Training Program

MHACA was awarded a five-year contract to deliver the Central Australia Suicide Prevention Training Program for the Central Australia and Barkly region commencing July 2022. We will build on our existing partnerships and networks to ensure that the training and capacity development activities are responsive to the identified needs of the local communities that make up this region.

MHACA understands the role of suicide prevention training as one component of an overall suicide prevention strategy. We welcome the opportunity to complement our existing work with training which aims to support communities to gain the knowledge and tools that can equip them to respond effectively to the needs of their own communities.



**MHACA**  
Mental Health  
Association of  
Central Australia



Minister Warren Snowden, Merrilee Cox (MHACA CEO), and Minister Marion Scrymgour standing in front of MHACA's new door to improve access for people of all abilities.



# MHACA Strategic Plan 2020-2022

This plan is due to expire at the end of 2022, and I am pleased to report the following key achievements for the goals set in our current plan.

**Goal 1: MHACA will provide quality, evidence informed services to our clients.**

- Housing Strategy provides sustainable housing for MHACA participants
- Developed Diversity Report and Strategy
- YES (Your Experience of Service) survey informed by lived experience
- Alive National Centre Mental Health Research Translation.

**Goal 2: MHACA will work collaboratively in the development and delivery of high quality and effective mental health programs.**

- Housing and Psychosocial Support Program partners
- Learning and Development Framework for staff
- Strong partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations & other service providers in the region
- MOU and working together with Central Australia Mental Health Service.

**Goal 3: MHACA will work towards reducing the stigma associated with mental illness and promote mental health and wellbeing in our community.**

- Developed a suite of animations increasing mental health literacy
- Delivered Mental Health in the Workplace and Observe Respond Support presentations to community service sector staff
- Developed mental health resources
- Strong collaborative community events
- Implemented Healthy Bodies Support Healthy Minds Program for MHACA participants.

**Goal 4: MHACA will strengthen our organisation to navigate changes effectively and efficiently in the service delivery system and respond to emerging needs in the community.**

- Invested in systems to support NDIS processes
- Appointed a Business Development Manager to oversee the introduction and ongoing support for the new Client Management System
- Investment in new website with greater accessibility
- Streamlined the financial reporting to Board.

## CEO'S MESSAGE

In preparing this report I reflect on my time here with pride and amazement on what MHACA has achieved. The many success stories shared throughout this report reflects the leadership of our previous CEO Merrilee who finished her time at MHACA in September 2021. I wish to thank Merrilee for her dedication and the wealth of experience she brought to MHACA, we are in a strong and respected position because of you. I also extend my gratitude to the MHACA Board who have supported my transition into the role of CEO, I am fortunate to work with highly skilled and committed members who strive for excellence in service and governance.

**Dira Horne**  
CEO



## Collaborations

So much of our work is delivered in partnerships with people and organisations, which bring a wealth of expertise and knowledge. Through our partnerships and collective work this year we have worked with:

- Central Australia Aboriginal Congress to co-design a suicide prevention resource.
- Housing and Psychosocial Support Program with Territory Families Housing and Community, Anglicare NT, Community Housing Central Australia, Central Australia Mental Health Service, Salvation Army.
- Homelessness Reference Group with NT Shelter, Community Housing Central Australia, Salvation Army, Anglicare NT, Alice Springs Youth Accommodation Support Service, Mission Australia, Central Australia Women's Legal Service, Lutheran Care, Central Australia Aboriginal Congress, Disability Advocacy Service, and CatholicCare NT.
- Central Australia Family Violence and Sexual Assault Network with Women's Safety Services of Central Australia, Central Australian Women's Legal service, CatholicCare NT, Tangentyere Council, Northern Territory Council of Social Services, Northern Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, Central Australia Aboriginal Congress, Police Fire and Emergency Services, Domestic Family Violence Legal Service, NPY Women's Council, Central Australia Aboriginal Family Legal Unit, and World Vision.

## Representation on Boards and Networks

- NT Mental Health Coalition Board – Dira Horne
- Alive National Centre Mental Health Research Translation – Dira Horne
- Alice Springs Accommodation Action Group – Ruby Shoko
- Alice Springs Homelessness Reference Group – Ruby Shoko
- Central Australia Suicide Prevention Advisory Group – Helen Lambert
- NTCOSS Interagency Meetings – Nicole Pietsch
- NT Mental Health Week Committee – Nicole Pietsch
- Suicide Prevention Australia - membership and representation on NT/QLD State Committee

Tristram Watkins (NT PHN), Donna Ah Chee (CAAC), Robyn Liddle (headspace Alice Springs), Sabella Kngwaraye Turner (CAAC), Helen Lambert (MHACA), Nicole Pietsch (MHACA) at the 'No Shame in Getting Help' animation launch.





# GOVERNANCE

Members of the MHACA Board: Peter Riley, Duncan Leggoe, Greg Bull, Mary Menotti, Lavenia Saville, Ali Thorn



MHACA is supported by a skilled and committed Board, and we thank them for their guidance and generous contribution of time and expertise. The Board meets every six weeks and this year the Board finalised the review of the MHACA Constitution with all changes adopted at the AGM in October 2021. Induction and Financial Literacy Training was also conducted for new Board members.

## Board Members

- Peter Riley – Chair
- Lavenia Saville - Treasurer
- Mary Menotti – Ordinary member
- Greg Bull – Ordinary member
- Susan Brookes – Ordinary member
- Ali Thorn – Ordinary member
- Duncan Leggoe – Ordinary member
- Marcus Tabart – Ordinary member (resigned July 2022)

# VALUING LIVED EXPERIENCE & PEER WORK

At MHACA we believe that the contribution of people with a lived experience plays a vital role in the delivery of our supports and services, and a key component of our work. We know that current research indicates that by providing peer workers at MHACA this contributes to an improved sense of hope and social inclusion for those accessing our services.

We are committed to building our Peer workforce and this is demonstrated by the increased numbers of people with a lived experience working at MHACA. Peer support workers draw upon their own learnings of their recovery to support others, and are employed in direct service roles, group facilitation and activities.

Work is progressing on the Lived Experience and Consumer Participation Framework; it is critical that the role and principles of Peer Work and values are understood by all in our organisation. We view this as a living document as we continue to embed Lived Experience here at MHACA and seek to amplify their voices.

### MHACA offers many ways participants can contribute to our organisation:

- working groups including MHACA's Little Environment Group
- collaborative projects such as the annual Your Experience of Service (YES) Survey
- group program planning days
- training and employment opportunities for participants
- regular staff and participant meetings
- input to policy positions and submissions.

Participants put down their ideas for activities at a planning day in January.





# RUDY'S STORY

Having a house has made a big difference to my life. Its good having your own place. You get to look after yourself better and there's somewhere to have a rest. You can have peace of mind for yourself.

MHACA's Housing and Homelessness Team helped me get the place. They help make sure I am ready for house inspections and provide support for me to go shopping every week. They provided advice on plates and cups and things, and I only have 3 lots of everything, so the dishes don't stack up.

It's so good having a place for yourself. I am feeling a lot more relaxed. Before I was sleeping at mates' houses and camping out. It was stressing me out not having a quiet place for myself.

I've also been doing the Healthy Bodies Healthy Minds Program and been exercising each week. Lately I've been doing the Footy 4 Life. It's brought back a lot of good memories as I used to play rugby when I grew up here.

I'm glad I have MHACA's support. - Rudy



# BRIAN'S STORIES

"Stories are not just stories: They are lessons".

Congratulations to Brian Clyne on the launch of two new kid's books in Yankunytjatjara/Martutjarra and English, "How the perentie and the goanna got patterns on their back" and "How the echidna came to be", at the Alice Springs Public Library at the end of April.

Brian is a participant of MHACA and regularly accesses MHACA's group activities and Drop-in Centre. MHACA staff have been encouraging Brian to share his stories and have provided support in helping Brian to type the stories on the computers. Brian has then received further support from Tangentyere Council to have the stories developed into books and audio books.

You can find digital versions of the books on Brian's YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsPSwM755kVeZkP8vYA5X8A>

With the support of MHACA, Total Recreation and 8CCC, Brian Clyne now has a weekly radio show 'First Nations Music and Stories' on 8CCC Tuesdays 1-2pm.



# SUPPORTING RECOVERY



The Women's Recovery Group and their 'heart work'.

Pathways to Recovery is a psychosocial and recovery-focused program which provides support to participants living with mental health challenges in Central Australia.

The Pathways Team provides one-on-one person-centred support, working alongside participants to develop and implement their recovery plans which support their goals. Supports are provided to people with and without NDIS plans.

To assist participants to build a recovery plan we use the Camberwell Assessment of Needs (CANSAS) and

the Recovery Assessment Scale (RAS-DS) to provide an evidence-based approach to identify what the participant needs to support their recovery.

Recovery-oriented practice is a key principle underpinning the services participants receive from MHACA which supports people to recognise and take responsibility for their own mental health and wellbeing, and to define their own goals.

The support offered includes advocating on behalf of participants when needed and assisting with living skills





development. This can include:

- home visits
- shopping
- budgeting
- cleaning
- attending appointments
- assisting participants with forms
- linking participants up with other service providers.

The Pathways Team also facilitate therapeutic group activities like Hearing Voices, Men's Yarning Group, Women's Recovery Group, and weekend activities.

Weekend activities are enjoyed by participants and are generally based out in the community. They provide social connection and support inclusion. Activities can include:

- ten pin bowling
- movies at the Alice Springs Cinema
- art gallery visits
- picnic's out bush

Pathways funding has been extended for another 5 years, which allows us to continue providing support to participants that do not have a NDIS Package.

As well as the NDIS we have two other funded programs that enable MHACA to provides services to participants:

The Psychosocial Program (PSP) - The PSP Program provides psychosocial support services to assist people who are not more appropriately supported through the NDIS, Continuity of Support or Transition funding arrangements but are significantly affected by severe mental illness, which has an impact on their psychosocial functional capacity.

COS Program (COS) - The Continuity of Support Program provides psychosocial support services to clients who previously accessed service through PIR, PHaMS and D2DL, and who are ineligible to receive services under the NDIS.

### Christine Boocock

*Programs Manager*

## GOOD NEWS STORY

It's rewarding to observe a participant set a goal and then achieve it with support. A participant wanted to be able to take his dogs on regular walks. After a few months of encouragement and support from his support worker he is now able to do this with ease and confidence. He has stated that if it wasn't for his support worker being persistent, encouraging, and providing strategies he would still be avoiding taking his dogs for walks.

# CULTIVATING CONNECTION

MHACA's Day Program provides therapeutic activities that build living skills and foster social connection.

A key strength of MHACA is the contribution made by participants and others with lived experience of mental illness and distressing life episodes. Presently we are employing staff as Activity Officers and Day Program Manager who bring their lived experience to the work we do. MHACA values lived experience and is committed to a peer-lead team.

The Day Program offers a Drop-in Centre which is a welcoming and safe space for MHACA participants and

is open Monday from 8.30am-1.30pm and Tuesday-Friday from 8.30am-3pm. An average of 20 participants accesses the Drop-in Centre every day.

Participants can utilise a comfy lounge area where they can watch movies and chat with other participants. They can make themselves a cuppa and use the kitchen. We also have showers, a washing machine and dryer which are available for participants to use. We receive donations of clothes which we can provided to participants if needed. We also have computers with internet access so participants can check their emails and do personal administration when needed.

MHACA's weekly craft group runs on Thursdays.





# REDUCING STIGMA AND IMPROVING WELLBEING

MHACA is committed to reducing the stigma that exists around mental health challenges as this shame and embarrassment prevents people from seeking help and isolates people living with mental illness.

By improving mental health literacy in Central Australia, community members understand that it's important to seek help for mental health challenges and know what support services are available for them.

MHACA's Health Promotion Unit:

- shares mental health information
- organises community engagement events
- develops health promotion resources
- facilitates sector networking
- collaborates with community stakeholders
- delivers workshops and presentations.

The Health Promotion Team facilitated 35 health promotion events and presentations throughout the year. Some of the highlights included:

- **Equal Futures.** The International Women's Day Fair was held in March at the Women's Museum of Australia. MHACA facilitated the organising committee which included representatives from Desert Knowledge Australia, Women's Safety Services of Central Australia, Central Australian Women's Legal Service, Relationships Australia, Multicultural Services of Central Australia, Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit, 8CCC Community Radio and hosts Women's Museum of Australia. More than 400 people attended the event. There were great speakers and performers, stalls and a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony. A demonstration by the Arrernte Community Boxing Academy Kungka's Klass was a highlight. MHACA held a health promotion stall which had over 100 community engagements.
- **Arlparra Community Health Promotion Workshop.** In October MHACA's Health Promotion Team visited the Arlparra Community in



MHACA runs a weekly Healthy Cooking Class.

We have developed a monthly calendar of structured activities which include therapeutic groups like Women's Recovery Group, Hearing Voices, and Men's Yarning Group. Our therapeutic groups are facilitated by people with lived experience, they run weekly and are well attended. The Men's Yarning Group is a popular group where the men like to go out bush, cook kangaroo tails, sit around the fire to connect and yarn.

There is a Craft Group every Thursday and some of the activities they have done this year include:

- working with clay
- mask making
- weaving baskets
- creating prints.

We encourage men and woman to join Craft Group and show their creative side.

On Friday we have a regular Music Jam with Darcy which has become popular with both participants and staff. What a way to bring in the weekend with a sing along and we do it loud and proud!

**Sarah Irwin**

*Day Program Manager*

Participants enjoy music with Darcy every Friday.



Fun at the Pool as part of Mental Health Week.





Participants received haircuts at the Wellbeing Day.

the Utopia Homelands. MHACA showed mental health promotion animations to the women and children at the Community Centre and held a discussion on mental health whilst the women participated in a craft activity. The women also took part in an activity to identify what made them feel good and what supports they have in their community.

- **Healthfest.** MHACA joined NT Public Health, Disability Advocacy Service, Trachoma Program, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, Create Foundation, Captain Starlight, Carer's NT and NT Oral Health at the event and held a health promotion stall for students of Acacia Hill and Sadadeen Primary School.
- **Burnouts and Mullets – NT Titles.** MHACA provided a wellbeing hamper and mental health resources to the Burnouts and Mullets competition at the Alice Springs Inland Dragway. The event promoted MHACA services and fundraised through a raffle. Approximately 250 people attended and MHACA would like to thank the Alice Springs Inland Dragway for their generous donation.

MHACA also facilitated a local program of events for Mental Health Week in October that included:

- **Connect to Wellbeing – Parents and Carers.** Organised in partnership with the Alice Springs Town Council Healthy Communities Program, local women learnt more about post-natal depression and looking after your mental health when caring for children. Participants also undertook a gentle exercise class and enjoyed a social catch up over morning tea.
- **Connect to Wellbeing – Fun at the Pool.** Participants took a gentle aqua class, or just had a swim and then shared a healthy lunch afterwards. This event was organised in partnership with the Alice Springs Town Council Healthy Communities Program.
- **The Girl on the Bridge.** This film screening at the Alice Springs Cinema explored the issue of youth suicidal ideation through the story of Jazz, a mental health and lived experience youth advocate.
- **Stress Less in the Park.** More than 400 people attended the feature event for Mental Health Week at the Civic Centre Lawns. 20 local service providers hosted informative and interactive stalls, and attendees also enjoyed music and kids' activities. The event was organised with the support of a local committee and was supported by the Alice Springs Town Council and Northern Territory Primary Health Network.

The Health Promotion Team shared learnings at several events and conferences including:

- **Reducing Stigma and Promoting Wellbeing.** Presentation at the Desert Knowledge Australia Knowledge Intersections Symposium.
- **Mental Health in the Workplace.** Presentation at Business at Sunset.
- **MHACA Services and Referral Pathways.** Presentation at the AADANT Conference.
- **Reducing Mental Health Stigma and Promoting Wellbeing.** Presentation at the National Rural and Remote Mental Health Symposium (hosted by the Australian New Zealand Mental Health Association).
- **Supporting Mental Health in the NT.** Presentation to the Australian Association of Social Workers.
- **Taking Care of Worries – Mental Health Resources Addressing Stigma and Shame.** Presentation at the Indigenous Wellbeing Conference, Cairns.
- **Feeling Sad or Worried.** Presentation on MHACA's animated resources at the Waltja Director's Meeting.
- **Healthy Bodies Support Healthy Minds – Equally Well in a Remote Context.** Presentation at the Equally Well Symposium at the Griffith University, Gold Coast.

# STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

"I Just wanted to share some of the great work coming out of Central Australia and the mental health messaging that MHACA created through these powerful animations. It was done in English, Arrernte, Walpiri, Pitjantjara ... these animations have also been broadcasted on Imparja television and other social platforms. I would like to thank MHACA and Congress for their excellent work."

"Thanks so much for your time and effort presenting this morning for our MHCC Collaborative Bites session. The feedback so far has been overwhelmingly positive."

"It was so enriching to have MHACA come and share a presentation about mental health with our Kunga Stopping Violence Program participants in the Alice Springs Correctional Centre. The presentation led to some conversations about mental health that are normally quite difficult to have but was presented in such a way that de-stigmatised mental health which made a safe space for everyone to learn and reflect."



Stress Less in the Park.



Throughout the year MHACA also developed several mental health resources that were distributed to community members and online audiences including:

- **No Shame in Getting Help.** This animation reminds us that we all have sad thinking sometimes but if we're sad for too long we need to get help. It was co-designed with Central Australian Aboriginal Congress and funded by the Northern Territory PHN.
- **Taking Care of Worries.** A poster, flyer and social media resource developed in collaboration with Women's Safety Services of Central Australia providing self-care tips for Aboriginal women.
- **Mental Health in the Workplace.** This resource was developed to provide tips and support options for people attending MHACA's presentations.
- **What is Recovery Oriented Practise.** This resource explains what recovery-oriented practice is and how MHACA services are informed by this principle.

## Improving Wellbeing

MHACA has made a whole of organisation commitment to increasing the physical health of our participants and to promote lifestyle interventions to the broader community.

Key lifestyle interventions include:

- healthy eating
- exercising
- good sleep hygiene
- reducing stress.

MHACA has a Healthy Bodies Support Healthy Minds Strategy that supports the wellbeing of our participants, and in the last year received funding for a program that provides a focus on nutrition, exercise and increasing water consumption. MHACA has also organised several wellbeing events including:

- **Smart Eating Week.** In March MHACA provided a focus on healthy eating through having healthy snacks available each day and distributing easy healthy recipe books to participants. Participants helped to cook a vegetarian curry and chicken stew for a shared lunch. Educational videos were shown.
- **Participant Wellbeing Day.** This event provided a focus on physical health and self-care for MHACA participants. 21 participants attended and received haircuts, massages, nail care and shared a healthy lunch. Oral health information was also provided.

**Helen Lambert**

*Health Promotion Manager*

## 'BUSINESS AT SUNSET'

MHACA hosted a successful Chamber of Commerce Business at Sunset event as part of Mental Health Month and October Business Month. 50 attendees learnt more about the work of MHACA and received a mental health in the workplace presentation. Participants also took a mental health survey.

Special guests included member for Lingiari, Warren Snowden and Member for Braitling, Josh Burgoyne. Prize sponsors for the evening included Lhere Artepe Supermarkets, Club Eastside, Bunnings Alice Springs, Geoff Miers Garden Solutions and Crown Plaza Lasseters.



# TAKING CARE OF WORRIES

MAKE  
ART AND  
MUSIC

LOOK  
AFTER MY  
BODY

THINK  
ABOUT MY  
STRENGTHS

TAKE  
DEEP  
BREATHS

TIME  
WITH  
FAMILY  
AND  
FRIENDS

ASK FOR  
HELP



**Sometimes I feel sad and have too many worries on my mind. When I feel like this, I try to remember that I am a strong woman and that there are things I can do to feel better.**



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# MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

Our mental health is important. It refers to our social and emotional wellbeing, which is something that can change as we move through life. On one end of the spectrum we can feel well and happy, on the other we can experience mental illness or crisis and need support.

Workplaces can have both a positive and negative impact on our mental health. Work can give us a sense of purpose, connection with others and income. However, workplaces can also be a source of stress and conflict. Too much stress can lead to mental health challenges.

**It is important workplaces are proactive in providing a supportive environment and fostering a positive workplace culture. There are also several things employees can do to support mental health whilst at work.**



## KEEP A HEALTHY WORK APPROACH

Limit out of hours work, take regular breaks from technology, include stretch breaks, take time for lunch, and set realistic deadlines which can be met.



## LOOK AFTER YOUR HEALTH

Eating healthy food, regularly exercising, having a good sleep routine, and prioritising the rest you need supports overall wellbeing. This helps you to feel better whilst at work.



## ACKNOWLEDGE AND REDUCE STRESS

Understand what the stressors are at work and develop strategies on how to address any issues. Practice relaxation techniques.



## SEEK SUPPORT FROM YOUR MANAGER

Communicate clearly about work pressures and ask what supports management can provide. You are not required to talk about personal issues or mental health conditions (unless there is potential danger to fellow employees or the workplace). However, if they are affecting your work, it is often best to discuss them with your manager. Some additional supports like flexible working arrangements may be possible.



## UNDERSTAND YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Work Health Safety legislation provides protection for workers to have a safe workplace, both physically and mentally. However, employees also have responsibilities to look after themselves and contribute to a safe working environment. It is important to understand what constitutes bullying, and what conflict resolution policies your workplace has.



## SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP IF YOU NEED IT

If you have been feeling down for more than a few weeks, it's important to get help. Reach out to friends and family. See if your workplace has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), talk to your GP or health clinic, and access phone and online supports.

# CONNECTING COMMUNITIES IN RESPONSE TO SUICIDE

MHACA continues to connect communities around the issue of suicide prevention in Central Australia by providing network facilitation, community engagement events, workshops, and resources.

## Central Australia Life Promotion Network (LPN)

The Life Promotion Network supports a coordinated approach to suicide prevention in our region. MHACA has a leadership role in the facilitation of the LPN. The network has a local focus but is inclusive of membership across the NT.

5 LPN meetings were held throughout the year, and MHACA also facilitated a working group of LPN members for the organisation of World Suicide Prevention Day.

Guest speakers at LPN meetings included:

- Marjorie Anderson, National Program Manager, 13YARN
- Tegan Scheffe, Training Manager Indigenous Suicide Prevention, LivingWorks Australia
- Matt Davis, NT Community Development Coordinator, Wesley LifeForce
- Laurel Duffel, Training Manager Lifeline Alice Springs

## World Suicide Prevention Day

Creating Hope Through Action was the theme of World Suicide Prevention Day in September 2021. MHACA and the LPN worked together to acknowledge this important annual event.

There was significant collaboration and engagement with the community and considerable support with donations of money, time, and infrastructure. Over 300 people attended the event which included a Welcome to Country, Smoking Ceremony and Flower Ceremony.



Photobooth message from World Suicide Prevention Day.



Speakers at the event included:

- an attendee with lived experience
- a First Nations custodian
- Children’s Ground representative
- an advocate and poet who spoke powerfully about support and recited a poem.
- Gap Youth Centre who spoke about the support available for young people in the community
- a strong grandmother, advocate and community member shared the impacts of suicide on families.

Paul Ah Chee, a local singer-songwriter, provided live entertainment and shared insights into his experience with suicide and its impacts.

# Suicide Prevention Forum 1-2 June

MHACA organised a successful Suicide Prevention Forum at the Alice Springs Desert Park 1-2 June.

The aim of the forum was to connect people, share the learnings from local programs that are working on addressing suicide, and have collective discussions that support reducing suicides in our community.

67 people attended on the first day, and 76 attended on the second. Attendees heard from a wide range of organisations and programs including:

- Akeyulerre Healing Centre
- Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
- headspace Alice Springs
- NPY Women’s Council Uti Kulintjaku Program
- Arrernte Community Boxing Academy
- Thirrili - Indigenous Suicide Postvention Service
- MacYouth
- Royal Flying Doctor Service SA/NT
- Tangentyere Men’s Family Safety Group
- Lifeline Central Australia
- 13YARN
- Northern Territory PHN
- NT Health Suicide Prevention Coordinator
- R U OK?

13 YARN presented at the Central Australian Suicide Prevention Forum in June.

# FEEDBACK FROM THE SUICIDE PREVENTION FORUM

*“Fantastic, informative, needs to happen more regularly.”*

*“So good to hear what’s happening, have the men talk, having SA/APY mob included.”*

*“Overall, the Forum was wonderful. Attending the Forum, I have learned about how to be more competent while supporting children and young people thrive and grow.”*

*“We witnessed the delivering of knowledge and information from expert presenters. Staff were able to listen and see what supports and tools are available to help deal with suicide in our communities. During the forum we discussed challenges, what works well when dealing with suicide, and brainstormed/work shopped ideas to assist us back in our communities. Our staff have gained valuable tools and knowledge from the forum, and overall it was beneficial to staff in Central Desert Regional Council communities.”*



Workshop participants at the Suicide Prevention Forum.

- Central Desert Regional Council Community Safety Program.

Participants discussed what is working well in suicide prevention and what the challenges are, and workshopped ideas on how we can work better together. The Suicide Prevention Forum was organised by MHACA and supported by Wesley LifeForce and the Northern Territory Government Department of Health.

# Observe Respond Support Presentation

MHACA developed a presentation called ‘Are They Ok’ which was designed to equip attendees to support others who may be thinking about suicide or are in crisis. After community feedback the workshop title changed to ‘Observe Respond Support’. The workshop was amended to be more culturally appropriate for local community members and was delivered in 4 local Town Camps.

# National Communications Charter

MHACA is a signatory to the National Communications Charter and has incorporated the language guidelines into our workshops and presentations. MHACA’s presentations incorporate a participatory activity to demonstrate what is acceptable and what is not acceptable language use and why. MHACA also shares the guidelines with guest speakers and at suicide prevention events.

**Helen Lambert**  
*Health Promotion Manager*



# HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT

## Housing and Homelessness Support

MHACA has a long history of advocating for safe, secure, and affordable housing, and the need for adequate support for tenants with mental health challenges.

One of the TSP participants moved into the Salvation Army independent living units last October. He struggles with AOD issues. He had an incident where he was under the influence of drugs, felt paranoid and angry and proceeded to damage the property.

Instead of getting evicted, TSP and Salvation Army worked together to encourage the participant to accept help for the AOD issues as they were impeding on his ability to have a successful tenancy. The participant was receptive of the support, he agreed to go into detox for 7 days and the Salvation Army facilitated a referral and flights to a rehabilitation facility in Darwin where he will stay for 3 months. This story highlights the strength of working in partnership with other organisations to achieve good outcomes for participants.

## Tenancy Support Program

The Tenancy Support Program (TSP) is a person centred, strengths-based program that supports people who are homeless or those with tenancies at risk to find housing and to have successful tenancies.

When a person is referred to TSP, they go through a comprehensive intake and assessment process that screens for other areas of need in their lives that might impact on them securing or maintaining a successful tenancy. If necessary, referrals to other services such as financial management, clinical mental health, AOD and emergency relief services are made.

Participants are encouraged and supported to set goals around their housing needs. A Support Worker is then allocated to walk alongside the participant as they work on their goals.

While the program does not provide housing, what we can do is:

- Support people to put in applications for housing and making sure that they provide all the required details, and the applications are complete before submission.
- Advocate on behalf of participants who have tenancies at risk. We help them set up payment plans for arrears or in some cases access emergency relief funding to pay off arrears. We act as a mediator between the housing provider and tenant when issues arise.
- We are not a crisis service however we do support people to access short-term emergency accommodation if needed.

This year we have received 22 new referrals and have supported 42 participants in total. 4 people have been housed.



Rudy standing in front of his new house.

## Housing and Psychosocial Support Program

The Housing and Psychosocial Support Program (HPSP) is an intensive housing and support program that works in partnership with the clinical community mental health team and housing providers to provide up to 15 hours a week of housing and psychosocial support. This program was previously called Coordinated Living on Arrernte Country (CLOAC).

The HPSP started off as a pilot program in September 2020. Since that time, 45 referrals for the program have been received. It is funded to support 8 participants and is currently at capacity. HPSP has received funding for an additional 5 years.

A participant that has recently been accepted into HPSP has been chronically homeless for most of his life due to ongoing Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) issues. He has tried to address the AOD issues many times in the past however he always struggled to stay clean due to being homeless. The AOD issues have also previously been a barrier to him getting housed however a unique feature of HPSP is that people can be housed despite their difficulties and then wrap-around supports are put in place while the person has safe and stable housing.

Since getting housed, this participant is now able to manage his medication regime that supports him to stay well, enjoys weekly shopping and challenges himself to cook something new. He regularly attends the cooking group at MHACA. He also enjoys the exercise group and is keen to pursue further study in Arts.

Referrals are only accepted through the clinical mental health team. People who come into the HPSP are guaranteed housing along with the support. The target group for this program are people with severe and persistent mental health difficulties who have a history of institutionalisation and over utilisation of emergency services.

Through this program Support Workers work with the participant to build their capacity to allow them to develop the skills needed to live as independently as possible within their capacity. Participants undergo a comprehensive intake and assessment process and set goals through an Individual Support Plan. Case coordination meetings are held every 3 months with the participant and their other supports to evaluate progress towards the desired outcomes.

### Ruby Shoko

*Housing and Homelessness Manager*



# SUPPORT COORDINATION

MHACA is a specialist NDIS mental health provider with a focus on recovery and making positive changes to support participant health and wellbeing.

Support coordination at MHACA is to have someone walk beside a participant through their NDIS journey. We respect that each participant's journey is different, and that one size will not fit all.

MHACA provides Level 2 and Level 3 Support Coordination (Level 3 – higher complexity of supports).

When the participant is ready, a support coordinator will walk a participant through their NDIS Plan, interpreting how the funding will support them to meet their goals, and work towards building a participant's capacity to understand their plan, and identify any gaps in support needs.

We can step through how to use the NDIA portal and sit with participants to break down their budgets so they can understand how their funding will can be used to support their goals. MHACA support coordinators encourage participants to participate in the choosing of providers and provide encouragement to speak up if they are not satisfied with the supports.

Support coordinators are responsible for implementing the funded supports, tracking the supports, and reporting to the NDIS on behalf of the participant.

Currently there are 97 participants receiving Level 2 and Level 3 support coordination from MHACA.

## Choice and Control

One of the greatest parts of having a NDIS plan is that the participant has the right to decide who provides supports to them. If they are not happy with that service, including support coordination, a support coordinator will help them negotiate with that service or help find a new service.

A support coordinator also assists participants to connect with services that are not NDIS funded known as mainstream supports such as health and employment services. We also make sure that the participants family is involved if they wish.

It is important for the support coordinators to know they are empowering participants to understand their plans and their rights.

We have been able to assist participants in connecting with supports and services they may not have been able to before. Participants have been supported to access employment opportunities, access new providers and supports to engage in community activities that they have wanted to do like:

- boxing
- art therapy
- Aikido
- cooking classes

Even something like having someone to have a coffee with can be organised.

Participants have wanted to move from the houses they have been living in and by having a NDIS plan and a support coordinator, they have been able to realise this and move somewhere where they feel happy and safe.

The NDIS landscape can be difficult for support coordinators and participants to navigate; price guide changes every year, uncertainty of funding, new terminology, and decisions being made by the NDIA.

But through it all the support coordinators at MHACA always have the participant at the centre of what they do.

**Lyla Dash**  
*Support Coordination Manager*

“MHACA support coordination has helped me achieve some of my goals like getting my learners permit for first time in my life! And returning to the workforce after being unemployed for 3 years!”

- **Support Coordination participant.**

MHACA staff at the Ready Set Connect NDIS networking event.



Dougie's Support Coordinator assisted him to take a trip to Adelaide and see some of the sights including the art gallery.



# MENTAL HEALTH WORKFORCE

## Syed

My name is Syed Hassan, and I am the Business Development Manager at MHACA.

I was born and raised in Karachi, the largest city in Pakistan, situated on the Arabian Sea's southern shore. After completing my bachelor's degree in Computer Engineering from Karachi in 2012 and working as a Business Analyst for over a year, I opted to seek further education in the same industry.

After extensive research, Swinburne University in Melbourne stood out, so I relocated to Melbourne in August 2013 and began my two-year postgraduate degree.

Swinburne University taught me a great deal about Australian history, culture, and language and assisted me in integrating into the local society. It also instilled in me a profound sense of appreciation toward the community and a need to give back in return. Therefore, I began volunteering at "Lentil as Anything," a restaurant where less fortunate people of the community may have a nutritious meal on a "pay what you can" basis.

After completing my master's degree in 2015, I began working full-time as an IT Implementation Analyst at Coles Headquarters while continuing to volunteer in the evenings. After completing four big IT projects during my six years at Coles, I chose to explore more of Australia by moving to Alice Springs at the beginning of 2021.

My relocation to Alice Springs drew me closer to the indigenous culture and history of Australia. During my time at the community hostel, I developed meaningful and enriching relationships with many local people.

Later that year, MHACA advertised for a project manager to oversee the implementation of a cloud-based CRM (Customer Relationship Management) for handling participant data, billing, and service delivery. The position was a good fit for my skill set, and MHACA's status as a non-profit mental health care provider allowed me to give back to the community while utilising my education and expertise.

It has been a great journey since I joined MHACA. The project I was hired for went live in September 2021 with no major issues. I made many friends in the process.

I now interact with MHACA participants daily. I enjoy spending time with Mr. Wilson, the renowned support cockatoo at MHACA, and I get to babysit him when his owner has an appointment or must go someplace alone.

I like working at MHACA and feel that the organisation contributes significantly to the Central Australia community.

## Syed Hassan



## Josefina

My name is Josefina, and I am the Health Promotion Officer at MHACA.

I came to Central Australia looking to work in the social services sector and learn about the local culture. I came across MHACA and heard about the work MHACA does by supporting people living with mental health illness.

I started working at MHACA in 2020 as an Activities Officer in the Day Program which consisted of supporting participants that come to our Drop-in Centre. Tasks could include helping with the use of computers, supporting them in challenging and difficult situations or just dancing and singing along together at a jam session.

MHACA's Drop-in Centre is such a unique and safe space for anyone that chooses to spend their days here. The care for each other is real and contagious and made me feel that I could also be who I am with no judgment at all.

Early this year, a position in the Health Promotion team became available. I have a background in marketing, so I saw this as a great opportunity to grow in the organisation. I was successful in getting the job.

As part of my new role, I coordinate MHACA's Healthy Bodies Support Healthy Minds Program which promotes a healthier lifestyle for our participants. It allows me to still be involved in fun activities such as cooking and a weekly exercise session.

I also work alongside other services in town organising community events to raise awareness around mental health. It is very important to have good relationships and collaborate with other organisations to get better outcomes for the community.

Working at MHACA has been great. It is inspiring to see the work every team does, with participants always at the centre of focus. I felt very lucky to be part of the participants' lives and recovery journeys.

## Josefina Olmedo





# DELIVERING QUALITY SERVICES

This year has been one of changes and challenges for Corporate Services at MHACA.

This year we implemented a new operating system for NDIS administration. The implementation of this system is an ongoing process as MHACA adapts to changes to our processes and the efficiencies gained are proving beneficial.

At the very end of the financial year the Corporate Services staff assisted with the relocation of our Leichardt Terrace offices into Lindsay Avenue. We thank everyone for their massive effort in making this a smooth transition. We have now all settled in to the one location and this is already paying dividends for the whole organisation.

Nola writes her message on the participant blackboard.

## Quality

MHACA has a commitment to providing quality services for our participants, family, friends and the general community and a safe and consistent working environment for our staff.

Our Quality Committee leads the quality system of MHACA to ensure we meet and exceed industry accreditation standards and provide a high-quality service. This year MHACA successfully undertook a mid-term review of its National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) accreditation against the NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators and associated legislation. This included new requirements such as Emergency and Disaster Management Planning that were introduced since the COVID-19 pandemic. MHACA had no corrective actions. Thanks to the participants and staff who participated in the interviews with the auditors.

The Quality Committee is to be congratulated on its leadership during the pandemic, where it monitored the implementation of MHACA's COVID Action Plan, ensuring MHACA's compliance with NT Health orders and advice within a dynamic environment.



The Central Australian Women's Legal Service (CAWLS) provided domestic violence training to MHACA staff.

## Participant satisfaction

MHACA uses the Your Experience of Service (YES) survey to hear participants' views of the services that we provide and to identify areas for improvement. During the year we focused on improvements to services to respond to feedback we received in the 2020 YES Survey. Following feedback from participants, we made it easier to use our complaints process and to have family and carers involved in participant support.

While the 2020 survey responses had been overwhelmingly positive (97% of respondents stated that their overall experience of service had been

positive), MHACA is committed to continuous quality improvement and valued this opportunity to improve.

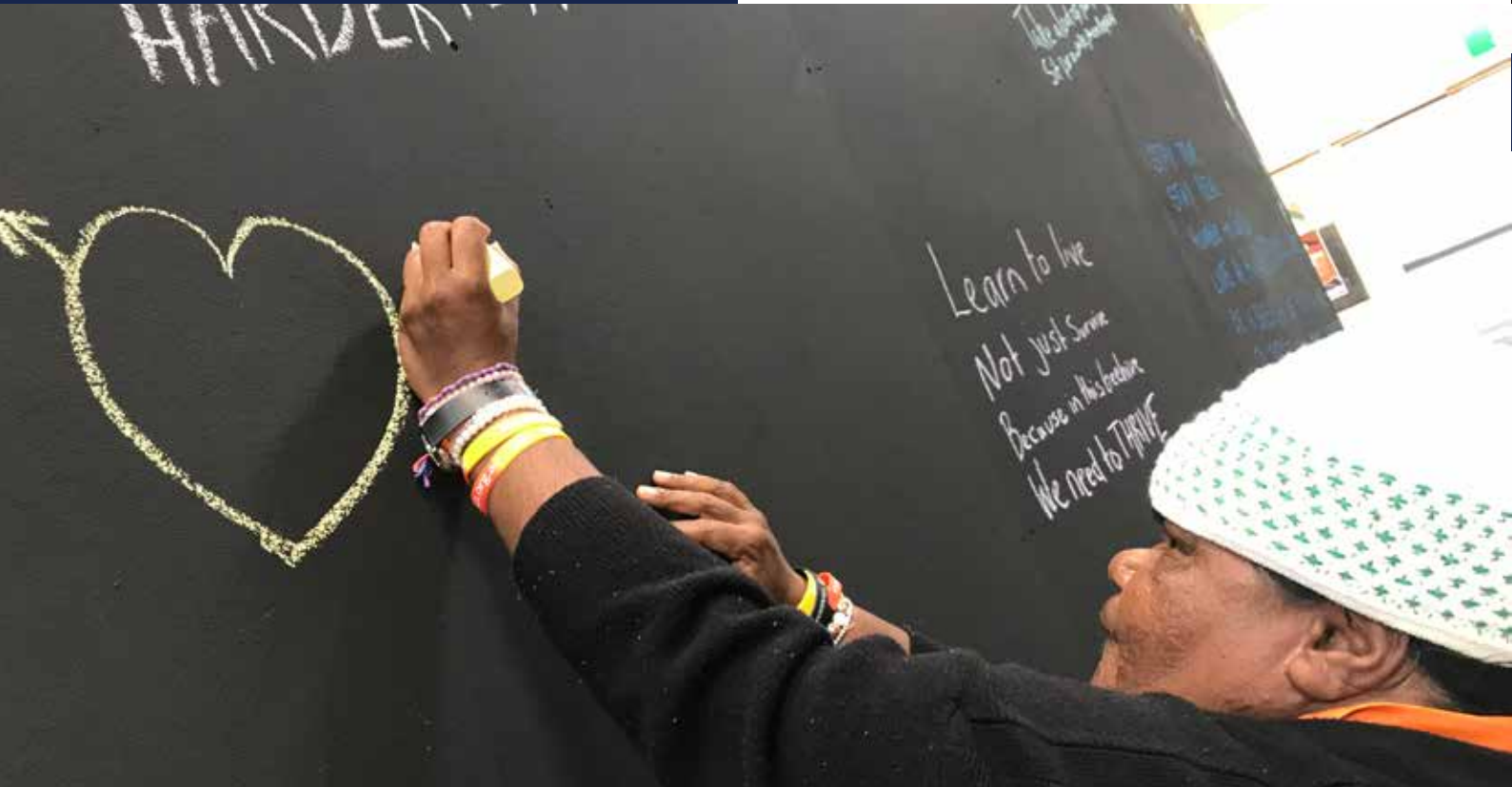
## Staff Survey

MHACA undertook its annual staff survey in September 2021, with a 79% response rate, which indicates an engaged workforce.

The CEO followed up with a staff workshop where staff engaged in discussions about their feedback and some proposed improvements.

**Chris Rumble**

*Executive Corporate Services Manager*





# TREASURER'S MESSAGE

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continued to dominate the landscape and challenge the mental health sector, including MHACA in 2021-22.

Responding to the increased outbreaks, providing community services, and maintaining workforce capacity and readiness and appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) stock has been ongoing.

The economic uncertainty caused by COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions has had an impact on service delivery and a decrease in revenue this financial year when compared to 2020-21 financial year. This and other operating factors have resulted in MHACA achieving a small surplus of \$4,153. The Board have been working closely with the CEO and Corporate Services Manager to develop strategies to ensure MHACA will remain viable as an ongoing concern.

In 2021-22, we have made great progress on improving capturing NDIS data, with the implementation of the Lumary Client Management System which we expect to bring substantial efficiencies and benefits in the longer term.

This past year, we have strengthened our partnership with the Northern Territory Government who has provided funding for our mental health services on

a five-year funding model. This gives us a degree of stability and certainty in this complex and evolving environment.

During the year, we have taken steps to reduce our cost base that has led to consolidating all operations at our Lindsay Avenue site. This will save MHACA around \$40,000 per year with the value-added benefit of all staff being on one location. This will result in improving communication and increasing our cohesion as participants do not have to visit different sites to receive different services.

Despite these challenges, we are optimistic about opportunities that the new NDIS Minister will enact to improve both the quality of services and the long-term viability of NDIS providers such as MHACA, who continue to face the economic challenges ahead.

MHACA remains in a strong financial position and has significant reserves to help it weather the current economic storms. We continue to focus on why we are here – to make a positive impact on those in our community who live with a mental illness.

**Lavenia Saville**  
*Treasurer*



Please go to the MHACA website for a copy of the audited financial statements.

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