



MHACA
Mental Health
Association of
Central Australia

Annual Report 2024-2025





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 and present.

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

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

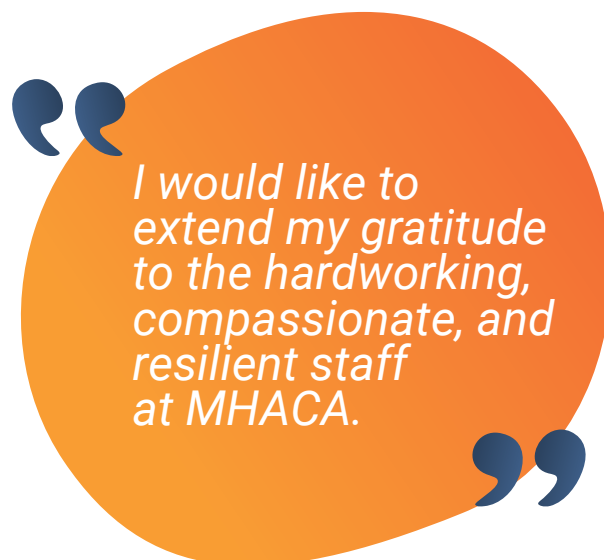
As an inclusive organisation we celebrate people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities, cultures, bodies and abilities.

Chairperson's Message

I am pleased to present MHACA's Annual Report for 2024–25.

This year brought a change in leadership at MHACA, as we farewelled CEO Dira Horne and welcomed Nicole Pietsch into the role. Dira was a passionate advocate for MHACA and its participants, and we thank her for the positive impact she made during her time with us. Nicole has hit the ground running and, in just under 12 months, has demonstrated an incredible work ethic and a strong commitment to strengthening MHACA's financial position. The Board looks forward to continuing to work closely with Nicole.

This year, MHACA was proud to launch two new programs: the NT Aftercare Service, providing support for non-Indigenous people following a suicidal crisis, and the Living Skills Pilot Program, a lived-experience-led initiative helping participants maintain their tenancies and develop essential independent living skills. These programs have been developed in close collaboration with our partners, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress and Community Housing Central Australia, and are a great example of working together to meet the needs of people in our community.



I would like to extend my gratitude to the hardworking, compassionate, and resilient staff at MHACA.

MHACA's ongoing commitment to quality management and compliance, saw the integration of the Folio platform to improve the coordination of incident management, risks, and compliance. MHACA remains certified against the National Mental Health Standards, QIC Health & Community Standards and the NDIS – an incredible achievement for an organisation the size of MHACA.

I would like to sincerely thank my fellow Board members for their support, expertise, and commitment over the past 12 months. Serving on the Board is a voluntary role, and I value the time each member contributes to strengthening our organisation. This year we were pleased to welcome new Board members, Tessa Snowden (Lived Experience member), Alice Campbell-Jones (Deputy Chair), and Adeyinka Hussain.

Finally, on behalf of the board, I would like to extend my gratitude to the hardworking, compassionate, and resilient staff at MHACA. As you turn the pages of this report, I hope you feel proud of the work you do and positive impact you make on the lives of our participants and the broader community.

Victoria Orpin
Chairperson

CEO Message

MHACA has a strong reputation as a service provider in Central Australia. We continue to provide essential non-clinical supports to people living with ongoing mental health challenges, as well as services that focus on increasing community wellbeing.

In this last year we farewelled Dira Horne as CEO in November, and I became CEO after 6 years of working for MHACA in the health promotion and quality teams. On behalf of MHACA I thank Dira for her strong leadership over the last 3 years, and we wish her well for the next part of her life journey.

In an increasingly complex world focusing on mental health is more important than ever. Alice Springs community members have faced some big challenges with the cost of living crisis and housing shortages, critical staffing shortages and the impacts of the sustained national negative media attention on our town.

We know that in the Northern Territory approximately one person a week still chooses to end their life by suicide, and we know that this impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities disproportionately.

Despite this there is so much resilience and strength here in Central Australia, and it continues to be a vibrant place with much art, culture and an outdoor lifestyle that attracts many people. It is important to remember this amongst the negativity and distressing global events that we have constant exposure to with online media.



Focusing on the good in our own lives and the things we can impact is an important strategy. This includes supporting others where we can and managing our own wellbeing.

I would like to thank our volunteer Board members who are essential to the governance of MHACA's services, and to all our community partners, MHACA staff and participants as we can never achieve anything unless we work together.

Nicole Pietsch
CEO



There is so much resilience and strength here in Central Australia.

Governance

MHACA is an incorporated association and is governed by a volunteer Board. We are very thankful that we have engaged members who give up their personal time to support the governance of MHACA.

It has been a busy year for the Board, with a CEO recruitment process and new funding proposals to consider. Chairperson, Victoria Orpin leads a skilled Board of nine people who meet eight times per year to review MHACA's finances, strategic risk and opportunities.

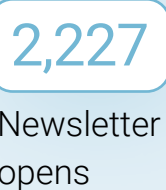
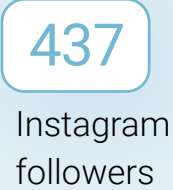
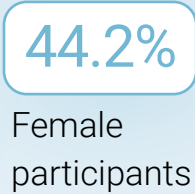
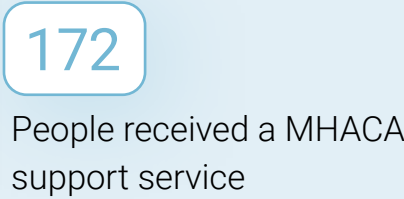
This year, we farewelled Neil Scholes-Robertson, Duncan Leggoe and Ali Thorn who departed at the November AGM, and welcomed Alice Campbell-Jones, Adeyinka Hussain, and Tessa Snowden.

We acknowledge and thank MHACA's Board members for their dedication to MHACA and supporting the wellbeing of Central Australian community members.

Board Members

- **Victoria Orpin** – Chair
 - **Lavenia Saville** – Treasurer
 - **Mary Menotti** – Ordinary Member
 - **Toby Churchill** – Ordinary Member
 - **Stephanie Van Son** – Ordinary Member
 - **Daniel Shane** – Ordinary Member
 - **Alice Campbell-Jones** – Deputy Chair (from November)
- **Adeyinka Hussain** – Ordinary Member (from November)
 - **Tessa Snowden** – Ordinary Member (from November)
 - **Neil Scholes-Robertson** – Ordinary Member (resigned November)
 - **Duncan Leggoe** – Ordinary Member (resigned November)
 - **Ali Thorn** – Ordinary Member (resigned November)

MHACA Board. From left to right – Adeyinka Hussain, Alice Campbell-Jones, Stephanie Van Son, Daniel Shane, Mary Menotti, Toby Churchill, Lavenia Saville, Victoria Orpin and Tessa Snowden.



The Year in Review

MHACA is a for purpose community managed organisation that provides non-clinical psychosocial supports, aftercare supports, NDIS services, suicide prevention training and health promotion programs in Central Australia.

A key strength of MHACA is the contribution made by people with a lived experience of mental health challenges and distressing life episodes.

Recovery is a fundamental principle underlying all our programs and services. MHACA works with participants to identify their strengths, set their own goals, and define what recovery means to them.



Participants and staff meeting at MHACA's Drop-in Centre.

NT Aftercare Service

Since March 2025, MHACA has been funded to develop and deliver the NT Aftercare Service which provides non-clinical supports for all non-Aboriginal adults (18+) living in Alice Springs, who have recently experienced suicidal thoughts or a suicide attempt.

The three-month long program is designed to meet people where they are at, with a flexible approach that honours each person's recovery journey. Our team will work alongside participants, focusing on their individual strengths and what recovery looks like for them. A specialised aftercare program for First Nations people is available through Central Australian Aboriginal Congress. We will work closely with Congress to ensure individuals are connected to the support that best meets their needs and cultural context.

The program will initially receive referrals from the Community Mental Health teams but will look to open referrals more broadly in the next financial year.

There is a strong link between housing instability and poor mental health, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) indicates that 31.2% of specialist housing clients have a current mental health issue (AIHW 2024). MHACA sees every day the impact that housing instability has on people's lives.

Community Housing Central Australia (CHCA) and MHACA have a strong existing working relationship and shared participants. CHCA and MHACA proposed a pilot program to understand the real support needs of participants with lived experience of homelessness and unstable tenancies and to develop a culturally appropriate strengths-based tenancy and living skills program.

This 2-year program was funded in March to conduct research, develop educational resources including culturally appropriate animations, and to deliver the lived-experience led program to residents of social housing in Mparntwe-Alice Springs for a year before an evaluation process.

Living Skills Pilot Program



MHACA farewelled peer worker Padma.

Central Australia Suicide Prevention Forum

The Central Australia Suicide Prevention Forum was again a key event for MHACA, drawing stakeholders from across the Territory and interstate together to connect around the issue of suicide prevention and postvention.

More than 80 people attended and representatives from the following organisations delivered presentations; Justice Reform Initiative, SabrinReach4Life, Standby Support, Thirrili, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, NT Health, headspace, and 13 Yarn.

An independent psychodramatist ran an interactive workshop exploring drama as a tool for healing, and workshops were delivered by Pengangk Cultural Consultants and Trainspire.



Group discussions at the Suicide Prevention Forum 2025 at Desert Park Alice Springs.

Collaboration

Collaboration is a key value of MHACA's and where possible we look to partner with other organisations to seek the best outcomes for participants and the broader community.

Some key partnerships in the last year have been with:

- The Northern Territory Department of Health
- The Northern Territory Department of Children and Families
- Northern Territory Primary Health Network
- Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs - Central Australian Region
- Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
- headspace Alice Springs
- Community Housing Central Australia
- Lutheran Care
- Human Services Australia
- Suicide Prevention Australia
- SANE Australia

MHACA was represented on the following networks and committees:

- NT Mental Health Coalition Board
- NTCOSS Interagency
- Suicide Prevention Australia NT Committee
- NT Specialist Housing Reform Group
- Alice Springs Homelessness Reference Group
- Alice Springs Accommodation Action Group
- Alice Springs Mental Health Professionals Interagency
- Central Australia Life Promotion Network
- International Women's Day Event Committee
- NAIDOC Committee
- 16 Days of Activism Against Gendered Based Violence
- Alice Springs Town Council All Abilities Network

SANE Australia at MHACA – Josefina Olmedo (MHACA), Nathan Deaves (SANE Australia), Suzy Canady (SANE Australia) and Nicole Pietsch (MHACA).



NT AFTERCARE SERVICE

Support after a suicidal crisis

Referral Information

Community Services and Individuals

The NT Aftercare Service is a free, non-clinical and voluntary program for all non-Indigenous adults (18+) living in Alice Springs who have recently experienced a suicidal crisis.

You might have clients who have disclosed suicidal thoughts or experienced a recent suicide attempt and would like to receive some gentle support. Or you may be experiencing a suicidal crisis yourself and be open to receiving help to recover.

The NT Aftercare Service provides inclusive, person-centred support and we welcome people from all backgrounds including culturally and linguistically diverse community members as well as people from the LGBTQIA+ community.

The 3-month program is delivered by the Mental Health Association of Central Australia (MHACA) and requires consent from the person to engage in the service.

A dedicated Aftercare Program for First Nations people is available through Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, and we work closely with Congress to ensure appropriate, culturally safe referrals.

What can Aftercare offer?

Our team offers support that meets people where they are at focusing on safety, connection, and recovery. Grounded in lived experience, our approach is built on respect, compassion, and genuine care. We offer support that includes:

- Safety planning
- Help to make and attend appointments
- Referrals to clinical and community services
- A Wellness Recovery Plan
- Regular check-ins
- Support via phone, text, or in-person sessions

Before referring, please call MHACA first to ensure the person meets the program criteria. This is not a crisis service. If someone is in immediate danger or distress, please guide them to medical or emergency support.

This program is designed for the period after a suicidal crisis or attempt, when the person is no longer in immediate risk but still needs support to recover and reconnect.

Contact the NT Aftercare Service at MHACA:

- 📞 0447 884 324
- ✉️ recovery@mhaca.org.au
- 📍 14 Lindsay Avenue, Alice Springs
- 🌐 www.mhaca.org.au



Peter's Story

I first got involved with MHACA after being referred from the mental health sub-acute facility in Alice Springs. That's how I made a connection with MHACA, which runs a lot of great programs. The biggest benefit for me has been connection.

When your life feels like it's hit the concrete floor — when you've lost direction and focus and you're probably at your lowest — having a place to go where people give you love, care, support, and guidance with no conditions attached makes such a huge difference. It really helps you start to move forward.

I attend the day program at MHACA and come here every day. I often think of it like this: when you're out in the ocean, you need a life jacket to keep you safe and help you get back to shore. That's what MHACA has been for me. The people here are understanding, helpful, and they really know what's going on in this space — they know what needs to be put in place to help you take the next steps.

If you're reading this and you need support, check in with MHACA at East Side. Have a look at the programs they offer — they might not all be for you, but there's probably a few that could really help you connect with people and move forward. I especially recommend the *Pathways to Recovery* program — it's helped me get to a place where I can finally see the light.



Corey's Story

I'm from out bush in Nyirripi, but I've been living in Alice Springs for about 25 years now. I first heard about MHACA when I was living rough. Someone told me that MHACA could help me out, so I decided to check it out.

Since then, MHACA has helped me get a transitional home, and I've been coming to the Drop-in Centre pretty much every day. It's a good place for me — I can meet up with family and friends, have a yarn and a laugh, and get a good feed. When you're going through hard times, just having a place where people know you and say hello makes a big difference. Now I'm also on top of the list for public housing to get a permanent home.

I've helped MHACA with some art projects too. I painted a wall in the Drop-in Centre and created a big tree for the Health Promotion team's *What Keeps You Strong?* activity.

What I like about MHACA is that everyone is welcome. You can sit down, have a coffee, talk with others, play footy or basketball, play some music, or do a bit of art — it helps keep your mind good. Coming here has helped me stay connected and keep moving forward.

Pathways To Recovery

The Pathways to Recovery program provides psychosocial and recovery-focused support to people living with mental health challenges in Central Australia. The program helps participants access the services and resources they need to live safely, independently, and confidently within their community.

Pathways to Recovery staff work together with participants to create and carry out individual recovery plans based on each person's goals and priorities. Recovery is different for everyone, and support workers take the time to build trust, understand each participant's strengths and challenges and provide practical assistance that helps improve their overall quality of life.

Support is tailored to each participant and may include:

- Advocating on their behalf
- Developing daily living skills
- Home visits
- Support with shopping and appointments
- Encouraging participation in MHACA and community activities
- Connecting participants with other service providers

We have started using the AIMhi (Aboriginal and Islander Mental Health Initiative) Stay Strong app developed by the Menzies School of Health Research in partnership with the Queensland University of Technology. The app is a motivational care planning tool that helps health providers promote wellbeing by exploring a person's social supports, strengths, worries, and goals. Feedback from participants has been very positive — many say the pictures included in the app make it easier for them to tell their story.

Pathways to Recovery supports people with and without NDIS plans. Funding from the Northern Territory Government and the Primary Health Network (PHN) allows us to assist participants who do not have an NDIS plan, ensuring that more people in our community can access the support they need.

The program is currently providing one-on-one support to 55 participants, with an additional 29 participants attending MHACA's Drop-in Centre and group activities.

MHACA's Craft and Music groups were recognised at the Alice Springs Town Council Mayoral Awards.



MHACA staff and participants at the Christmas lunch.



One MHACA participant had a strong desire to find work but was struggling with anxiety and low self-confidence. With the encouragement and weekly one-on-one support of her Pathways to Recovery Support Worker, she built up her confidence, developed her resume, and began applying for jobs.

Not long after, she was invited to an interview — something that felt both exciting and nerve-wracking. With support and preparation, she attended the interview and was offered the position. She has now been working in her new role for six months and continues to enjoy her job and the sense of independence it brings.

Another MHACA participant had been finding it hard to leave home because of an irregular sleep pattern. With gentle encouragement and support from his Pathways to Recovery Support Worker, he completed a sleep apnea test and was diagnosed with the condition.

Since starting to use a CPAP machine at night, his sleep quality has improved greatly. He's now waking up earlier, spending more time out in the community, and even going out on his own — a big step forward in his recovery journey.

Christine Boocock
Programs Manager

MHACA participants Juan and Kennedy at Standley Chasm.



Good news stories

Participants at NAIDOC Week March with a banner they painted at MHACA.



Activities at the Centre

The MHACA Drop-in Centre offers a welcoming, safe, and supportive environment where participants can relax, feel at home, and be part of a community. Participants complete an intake interview to access the centre. The Centre operates on weekdays and provides a comfortable lounge area, kitchen facilities, tea and coffee, food, and computers with internet access.

An assortment of activities are available, including board games, a library, movies, music, arts and crafts, physical activities, as well as laundry and bathroom facilities with hot showers. This space is regularly used by some participants who may not have access to these amenities in their daily lives.

The Program also offers various activities and events at MHACA and within the community, which are part of MHACA's monthly Group Activities Calendar. This calendar is developed in consultation with participants to ensure our programs meet their needs. It provides participants with a snapshot of upcoming community events and group activities.

MHACA activities have a therapeutic focus and are facilitated by individuals with lived experience, as well as qualified facilitators. The activities focus on educational pursuits, personal development, living skills, and recreational outings to facilitate community engagement.

Maurice jamming at the Friday Music Connection Group.



Over the year, these activities include:

- Visits from other support services in town: Congress Foot Doctor, Centrelink, Lutheran Care, CAWLS legal sessions, Community Nurses Clinic, Dental Care Clinic, Hepatitis C finger prick checkups by the Northern Territory Government Department of Health.
- Activities at MHACA's Drop-in Centre: exercise, arts and crafts, healthy cooking, music connection, quiz activities, movie and games days, and the Recovery Wellbeing group.
- Community activities: Footy 4 Life, swimming, pickleball, Men's Yarning Circle, basketball, sports at the Y, Christmas Night Market, and Stress Less in the Plaza community event.
- Weekend social activities: picnics/BBQs at Telegraph Station, visits to the Araluen Art Centre and Yaye's Cafe, movie days at Alice Springs Cinema, ten-pin bowling competitions, swimming at the Alice Springs Town Pool, and outings to places like Standley Chasm and the Transport Hall of Fame Museum.



MHACA participants and staff at the Alice Springs Desert Park.

MHACA at the Imparja Cup

Australia's largest Indigenous cricket competition, the Imparja Cup, took place in mid-February.

A team comprised of MHACA participants who attend the MHACA Drop-in Centre and staff competed in the Men's Community Division. The team registered one of MHACA's best performances in the competition, winning three out of five games and making the grand final as the top ranked team.

Two participants were selected in the competition's team of the tournament and one participant won the umpire's choice Spirit of Cricket Award at the gala event following the grand final matches.

The first match, against the Blue Healers, was a particularly gripping contest. Needing 36 runs to win with only 12 balls remaining, two players each hit multiple sixes to win the match against the odds with only two balls to spare.

The confidence, sense of accomplishment and enjoyment participants gained from this experience permeated the atmosphere in the Drop-in Centre for weeks afterwards.

Linda Carpenter
Senior Services Manager



MHACA participants getting haircuts at the Participant Wellbeing Day in February.



Halloween at MHACA.



MHACA participants joined the Imparja Cup 2025.

Housing and Homelessness Support

MHACA housing and Homelessness programs support participants experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness due to a mental health condition to find suitable housing or to maintain their tenancies in Alice Springs. Housing support is delivered through two programs: **Tenancy Sustainability Program (TSP)** and **Housing and Psychosocial Support Program (HPSP)**. Participants are referred for support by other community service organisations in Alice Springs and some participants join the program as self-referrals.

Services provided include:

- Conducting assessments to identify individual needs and goals.
- Referring participants to other services such as financial, legal, and advocacy support.
- Providing case management tailored to each participant's circumstances.
- Working alongside participants to strengthen practical skills for maintaining a long-term, stable tenancy — including home care, pest management, timely bill payments, and understanding tenancy agreements.
- Developing support networks around participants to reduce homelessness and promote stable housing.
- Assisting participants to access crisis, transitional, and long-term accommodation across public, community, or private housing sectors.
- Supporting participants in their mental health recovery journey.

We support people with mental health conditions to find appropriate housing.

Tenancy Sustainability Program (TSP)

The Tenancy Support Program (TSP) supports people with mental health challenges experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in the Alice Springs area. For those people without a home, we offer support to find appropriate housing. For those who are already accommodated but are at risk of homelessness due to life challenges, the TSP workers support them to learn skills to maintain long-term stable tenancies.

The TSP continues to collaborate with other services in Alice Springs to support participants in achieving their recovery plan goals. Participants are supported to access:

- Alcohol and other drugs services
- Emergency relief
- Financial counselling
- Domestic and family violence support
- Emergency accommodation
- Transitional housing
- Public housing
- Mental health services
- Community connection
- Occupational therapist assessments

Housing and Psychosocial Support Program (HPSP)

MHACA Housing and Psychosocial Program (HPSP) support participants residing in public housing, community or private rental whose tenancies are at risk due to mental health and other life challenges. Participants are referred from Central Australia Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Department of Territory Families Housing and Community (DTFHC), primary health care or self-referred. MHACA HPSP works collaboratively with other services in Alice Springs to help participants to maintain safe and secure homes and overcome other life challenges.

MHACA HPSP supports 8 participants at a time.

Edson Chigaba
Housing and Homelessness Manager

Good outcomes

- **17** Participants accessed the program. Out of these, **4** participants exited the program successfully as they achieved their goals.
- **5** participants have improved their property maintenance standards.
- **2** participants were supported to move into long-term public housing.

Cathryn's story

I never thought my life would change for the better. My unit where I was living was not good. There were cockroaches everywhere, many damages, and the yard was full of rubbish. Because I am on dialysis, I could not climb the stairs to go to the bathroom to have a shower or use the toilet. Life was very hard for me, and I did not know what to do.

My worker from Tangentyere Aged Care sent me to MHACA Tenancy Support Program for help. They helped me clean the unit and move to another place. MHACA, TSP, TACS and CHCA (Community Housing Central Australia) all worked together to support me. I was lucky to move into a two-bedroom unit in a senior's complex. I also got white goods from TACS and a television from Foodbank.

Now I live in a clean unit in a safe place. I spend some time watching TV – how good is that?

Sometimes MHACA tenancy support workers visit me to see how I am going.

This is how I came to be where I am today. Happy!



MHACA staff members Cheryl and Edson hand over a television donated by Foodbank to Cathryn.

Kennedy at the front door of his house.



Kennedy's story

Back in 2022, my life was not going well. It was hard for me to look after myself and connect with friends and family. I moved into a one-bedroom unit at Community Housing Central Australia (CHCA) transitional housing program. I struggled to keep my unit clean and was afraid of losing my unit and ending up sleeping in the creek.

After failing my unit inspection, CHCA staff were very helpful and referred me to MHACA.

MHACA Tenancy Support Program worker visited me, sat down with me and listened to my story. We agreed on a plan to look after my unit better, improve my social life and manage my mental health. MHACA and CHCA worked together and supported me to get a cleaning kit and to get my unit deep cleaned.

I now receive the supports I need to feel better and attend MHACA group activities and Drop-in Centre.

I am happy I got help from people who listened to my story and gave me hope in life.

Health Promotion and Improving Wellbeing

Health promotion is about supporting individuals and communities to improve their overall health and wellbeing by giving them the tools and knowledge to make healthier choices.

In the context of mental health, health promotion aims to create environments that nurture emotional wellbeing, encourage healthy lifestyles that can prevent mental illness, and reduce the stigma often associated with mental health challenges.

In the 2022-2027 period MHACA's Health Promotion work has four targeted goals:

- Reduce stigma of mental ill health and suicide and encourage help seeking in the Central Australian community.
- Build capacity in the community services sector to respond to people experiencing mental health difficulties.
- Support sector communication on suicide and promote suicide prevention resources.
- Promote lifestyle interventions to support mental health and wellbeing.

MHACA continues to have a strong impact across Central Australia. We connect with the community through an active online presence on social media, as well as through mental health awareness campaigns on television, radio, and in local newspapers.

In addition, all existing MHACA animations have been translated into Walpiri so messages supporting mental health and wellbeing can reach more people.

In the last year MHACA developed and printed 2 new resources:

- Neurodiversity Flyer
- Healthy Eating Guide for MHACA Participants

Anna from Divergent Futures delivered the Neurodiversity Training in April.



Healthy Eating Guide for MHACA participants.



Alice Springs Mental Health Interagency Network meeting in February 2025.

Social Media Can Make You Feel No Good Animation

MHACA also developed a new animation for First Nations community members – ***Social Media Can Make You Think No Good***. It addresses how spending time on mobile phones doom-scrolling can impact our mental wellbeing. The animation has been translated into Arrernte, Pintubi-Luritja, Pitjantjara and Walpiri languages and can be found on the MHACA website.

Social Media Can Make You Think No Good animation.



Collaboration

Working together is at the heart of MHACA's approach to health promotion. By connecting with other organisations, we share knowledge, build relationships, and create stronger support for our community.

This year, MHACA hosted 11 meetings through the ***Alice Springs Mental Health Professionals Interagency*** and the ***Central Australia Life Promotion Network***, helping local services stay connected and collaborate on community wellbeing.

Community engagement events

MHACA continues to work alongside other organisations to promote help-seeking and raise awareness about mental health. This year, we took part in 43 local events, connecting with around 3,310 people across the community. Event highlights include:

Heads Up Youth Wellbeing event

MHACA organised the second edition of the Heads-Up Youth Wellbeing event, in collaboration with headspace Alice Springs, aimed at empowering young people to express themselves and access information to support their mental health & wellbeing. More than 300 young people between 12-25 years old attended the event at the Alice Springs Town Council Lawns which featured workshops, local young artists, live music, mental health speakers, lived experience speakers, activities, food, a chill-out space, chat zone, a dancing workshop and relevant information stalls.

Mental Health Week

MHACA hosted a series of free workshops and activities at the Stress Less Hub in the Alice Plaza, creating a welcoming space for community members to explore wellbeing and connect with others. Over four days, 65 people visited the Hub to take part in activities which included: Mindful Movement, Exercise, Clay Making and Yoga.

Neurodiversity Training

MHACA organised a Neurodiversity Sector Training and hosted Divergent Futures, neurodiversity training specialists, to run a full day training in neurodiversity affirming practise and trauma informed care for neurodivergent individuals. 45 people attended the training.

IT WAS EXCELLENT!
We need more training like this to remind people of the importance of neurodivergent affirming practice - sometimes it can be overlooked."

Training participant

Congratulations to all involved in the 2024 Heads Up Youth Wellbeing Event. What a day it was! We were thrilled to be a part of the day. Thank you all for contributing to the Health & Wellbeing of our young people and in turn, their teachers and families

Lucinda Moody,
Reclink Australia (NT)

One individual expressed that they had been feeling socially anxious and fearful about meeting new people in town as she was new but found the workshop to be a very relaxing experience, and it helped her feel more confident in starting conversations around town.

Jack Martin
Somatic Relationship Counsellor
at The Healing Studio



Craft activity at Heads Up youth wellbeing event.



MHACA delivering a wellbeing session for young Aboriginal men participating in the Alcohol and Other Drugs Program at DASA.

Mariah Torres (NTPHN), Ebony Abbott-McCormack (NTPHN), Josefina Olmedo (MHACA), Christie Russell (MHACA) and Andy Harrison (8CCC) at Stress Less in the Plaza.



Reaching to Remote Communities

Many remote communities across Central Australia have limited access to mental health education, so MHACA made it a priority to share wellbeing information wherever possible. When invited by local services, the team travelled to communities to connect, listen, and provide practical tools to support mental health. These engagements included:

- MacDonnell Regional Council Community Safety staff session held at Ross River Resort in August 2024, MHACA delivered three interactive workshops — Taking Care of Worries, Self-Care, and Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds — to 40 youth workers from western remote communities. Reclink Australia NT joined the sessions, leading the exercise component and promoting the importance of keeping active.
- MHACA joined the Central Land Council's 50th Anniversary celebrations, where 77 people stopped by the MHACA stall to take part in a creative activity inspired by the question "What keeps your fire burning?" — sparking thoughtful conversations about what keeps people strong and connected.
- Visited Ampilatwatja Community in June to deliver the Taking Care of Worries presentation and share wellbeing bags and mental health resources with community members.

Presentations and Workshops

Throughout the year, MHACA responded to requests from local organisations to deliver a range of mental health and wellbeing workshops. These sessions aimed to build understanding, encourage help-seeking, and strengthen the capacity of workplaces and community groups to support mental health.

- **Mental Health in the Workplace** was delivered both to Purple House staff and to the Rangers from the Mutitjulu Community Aboriginal Corporation.
- **Observe Respond Support** delivered to the Rangers from the Mutitjulu Community Aboriginal Corporation.
- Tailored presentation at the Tangentyere Council Community Centre Coordinators meeting on mental health and suicide prevention activities that can be provided to town camp community members.
- Mental health and wellbeing presentation, in collaboration with Reclink Australia, to young Aboriginal men participating in the Alcohol and Other Drugs Program at Drug & Alcohol Services Australia (DASA).
- Lived Experience presentation at the Suicide Prevention Australia National Conference.
- **Engaging Lived Experience and Healthy Bodies Support Healthy Minds – Lifestyle Interventions to Support Wellbeing** presentations at the NTPHN Compass Conference in Darwin.

Josefina Olmedo
Marketing Officer

Keeping Everyone Safe

MHACA continues to take a leading role in Central Australia around connecting organisations and community members on the issue of suicide prevention and postvention.

Central Australia Life Promotion Network

MHACA has been leading conversations on suicide prevention in the Central Australian community since 1999 through the Life Promotion Network. Facilitating the network provides opportunities to share important information with stakeholders, engage on critical issues, and build essential collaborations.

In the last year, there were 5 meetings with 64 attendees.

- July 2024. Guest Presentation - NPY Women's Council – Suicide Prevention Activities Update (Bronwyn Hall): The Uti Kulintjaku Project delivers preventative work that positions suicide prevention in culturally meaningful ways, guided by Ngangkari and senior Anangu women.
- October 2024. Guest speakers included Sam Snell, Regional Coordinator (Top End) – Standby Support After Suicide, Daniel Mulholland, NT State Coordinator, Thirrili and Alice Campbell-Jones, Suicide Prevention Manager, Culture Care Connect Program, CAAC.
- November 2024. The Network discussed upcoming initiatives and emerging roles in Suicide Prevention across Central Australia and format and content ideas for the Suicide Prevention Forum 2025. Some areas for focus in 2025 to strengthen the suicide prevention response in the region.
- February 2025. Guest speaker Isabella Kotlar from BeYou NT shared their approach to suicide prevention and planning in schools across the Territory.
- April 2025. Guest speaker Alice Campbell-Jones talked about the communications protocol that Congress is developing.

Attendees at network meetings reflected diverse organisations from across the Northern Territory, such as Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet, NT Department of Health, NT Primary Health Network, Suicide Prevention Australia, MacDonnell Regional Council, AMSANT, Aboriginal Liaison Unit Alice Springs Hospital, Royal Flying Doctor Service, NPY Women's Council, NT Mental Health Coalition, Mission Australia, Mental Health Services Central Australia, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, headspace Alice Springs, NT Health Advisory Group, Standby, MATES Construction, Wesley Mission, Lifeline Central Australia, Disability Advocacy Service, Sexual Assault Referral Centre, National Wellbeing Alliance, Sabrina's Reach for Life and Marigold Therapy.

Raymond Walters Penangke (Penangke Cultural Consultants) and Nicole Pietsch (MHACA) at the Central Australian Suicide Prevention Forum in June.



Central Australia Suicide Prevention Forum

MHACA hosted the annual Central Australia Suicide Prevention Forum on 17 and 18 June 2025. 82 people attended over the two days, including community members and service providers.

Presenters included:

- Justice Reform Initiative
- SabrinReach4Life
- Standby Support
- Thirrili
- Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
- NT Health
- headspace
- 13 Yarn

An independent psychodramatist ran an interactive workshop exploring struggles, hopes and human connection. Pengangke Cultural Consultants ran a workshop on Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Trainspire delivered two sessions on de-escalation in practice and navigating tough emotions.

See the short social media video from the forum at www.facebook.com/share/v/1Adg8JvNdw/

World Suicide Prevention Day

MHACA hosted the World Suicide Prevention Day – “Keeping Everyone Safe” community event at the Council Chamber Lawns, which brought together around 100 people to raise awareness and strengthen community connections. Local service providers including headspace Alice Springs, MIFANT, the Central Australian Women's Legal Service (CAWLS), Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Central Australia (ADSCA), and NPY Women's Council shared information and resources with attendees.

The Rotary Club of Alice Springs cooked a healthy BBQ for everyone to enjoy, while local performers Sally Westaway, Dan the Underdog, and Stuart Nugget provided live music. Guest speakers from the Tangentyere Men's Behavioural Support Program, the Culture Care Connect Team at the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, and MHACA spoke about the importance of connection, safety, and community support in suicide prevention.

Nicole Pietsch
Chief Executive Officer

Nicole Pietsch, MHACA's Chief Executive Officer, presenting at the National Suicide Prevention Conference



The presentations and workshops were excellent, it's always valuable to have such a diverse range of presenters and to hear more about the programs currently being funded. Nicole's presentation on lived experience was particularly powerful and impactful. The sessions were also very well facilitated, with a good balance of interactive activities and listening, as well as well-timed breaks to keep everyone engaged.

Forum participant

NEURODIVERSITY AND NEURODIVERGENCE



'Neurodiversity' is a term that describes the natural differences in how people think, learn, and process information. These differences are part of being human – just like having different personalities or learning styles. We use the word **'neurodivergent'** to describe people whose brains work in ways that are less typical. People who are **'neurotypical'** process information in a way that's more common or expected by society. Neither way is better – they're just different.

Recognising neurodivergence helps us create more inclusive schools, workplaces, and communities where everyone can thrive.

Neurodivergence includes a range of conditions, including:

- **Autism:** Affects how people communicate, interact, and experience the world.
- **Dyslexia:** Affects reading, writing, and spelling.
- **Dyspraxia:** Affects coordination and physical movement.
- **Tourette syndrome:** Involves involuntary movements or sounds (tics).
- **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** Impacts attention, focus, and impulse control.
- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD):** Involves repetitive thoughts and behaviours that can cause distress.

Each person's experience is unique. These are not "disorders" to fix, but ways of being that deserve understanding and support.

More information at

www.australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au
www.divergentfutures.com

Contact MHACA

📍 14 Lindsay Avenue, East Side 0870
 ☎ (08) 8950 4600

✉ info@mhaca.org.au
 🌐 <https://www.mhaca.org.au/>

Neurodivergence is more common than many people realise. Research suggests that around 15–20% of the global population is neurodivergent¹. In Australia, approximately 11% of employees identify as neurodivergent². Around 6-8% of children and 3-5% of adults in Australia have ADHD³, while around 1.1% of the population is Autistic⁴. These numbers may be even higher, as many people are undiagnosed or diagnosed later in life.

Neurodivergent people are part of every community and bring valuable perspectives, ideas and skills. But they can also face barriers, especially when environments or expectations don't meet their needs.

Understanding and supporting neurodivergence benefits everyone. It helps create kinder, more flexible and more productive communities.

How to support neurodivergent individuals?

- 👂 **Listen and learn.** Respect people's experiences and preferences.
- 🧠 **Be flexible.** Offer different ways to learn, work or communicate.
- ⌚ **Be patient.** It might take someone longer to process information or respond.
- ❓ **Ask what helps.** Don't assume – everyone is different.

Small changes can make a big difference. A quiet space, clear instructions, or extra time can help someone feel safe and supported.

Supports specific to Autism

- **Autism Social Group at headspace.** Regular get-together for Autistic young people in Mpartnwe/Alice Springs. Call 8958 4544 or email headspace.reception@caac.org.au for more info.
- **Autism Connect.** Free national autism helpline Monday to Friday 8am-7pm (AEST). Call 1300 308 699 or go to www.amaze.org.au/autismconnect

If you're not sure where to start, see your local GP. If you are experiencing distress, you can call Lifeline anytime for free suicide prevention and crisis support on 13 11 14.

[1] Global ND – <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7732033/>

[2] ND Aus employees – <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release>

[3] ADHD in Australia – <https://adhdguideline.aadpa.com.au/adhd-factsheet-for-gps/>

[4] Autism in Australia – <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/autism-australia-2022>

NDIS Support Coordination

NDIS Support Coordination at the Mental Health Association of Central Australia (MHACA) helps people get the best out of their NDIS plans, while navigating the unique challenges of living with psychosocial disability. It is a service centred on listening, understanding, and tailoring supports to each individual's needs and goals.

At MHACA we provide two levels of support: Level 2 Support Coordination and Level 3 Specialist Support Coordination (SSC). Level 2 builds participants' skills to manage their own supports—support coordinators explain plans, link people with providers, and coach them to make decisions confidently. The aim is to grow independence and self-advocacy over time.

SSC is for people with more complex needs, such as co-occurring mental and physical health conditions, unstable housing, or contact with the justice system. SSCs take a more intensive, hands-on approach—bringing together multiple services, managing risk, and making sure the most vulnerable participants don't fall through the gaps.

This year MHACA has worked with an increasing number of participants leaving prison and re-entering the community. Coordinators helped them secure accommodation, reconnect with services, and establish routines that promote stability and reduce risks of relapse or re-offending. These positive outcomes have shown the value of strong planning and collaboration across justice, housing, and health services.

We are also preparing for the NDIS system reforms that will introduce Navigator roles. Our coordinators are already practicing many Navigator principles—such as early engagement, outreach, and stronger handovers—ensuring MHACA is ready for the future while continuing to deliver quality support today.

Our purpose remains the same: to help people access the right supports, at the right time, in the right way, so they can recover, build capacity and live meaningful lives.

Our purpose remains the same: to help people access the right supports, at the right time, in the right way, so they can recover, build capacity and live meaningful lives.

Supporting over 100 participants and their families and new applicants

MHACA's Support Coordination team worked with more than 100 people this year, helping them not only to understand and implement their NDIS plans but also to apply for the scheme in the first place. Dozens of participants were supported through the application process, with many securing strong plans that gave them access to services and supports tailored to their mental health and recovery goals. This work also extended to family members where needed, ensuring holistic support across households.

Additional Complex-Needs Impact (Justice Transitions)

This year we supported several participants to transition from prison back to community. Coordinators worked from custody-based planning through to day-one supports in the community, prioritising housing, daily structure, and clinical follow-up. Outcomes included stable accommodation (including transitions to 24/7 SIL where required), re-establishment of primary care and mental health supports, reinstatement of income and identification, and reconnection with family and culture.

We facilitated Return-to-Country journeys so participants could attend important cultural ceremonies in their home communities. Each trip was carefully prepared with risk assessments and personalised supports, making sure people could travel safely and with dignity. These experiences strengthened cultural connection, identity, and wellbeing—key elements for recovery and resilience.

Return-to-Country trips

Rudra Jakhar
Support Coordination Manager

Good news stories

In late May, a participant undertook a Short-Term Accommodation trip to Melbourne to reconnect with her son—a long-held goal she had previously felt anxious to attempt. With planning and coaching before departure and practical support during travel, the participant managed large parts of the journey independently, including navigating new environments and attending to personal care with minimal assistance. The trip was a confidence boost that has sparked interest in future travel with even greater independence.

With improved health and mobility, a participant resumed Return-to-Country visits, including a meaningful trip to Areyonga to spend time with family. He also re-engaged with Riding for the Disabled Australia (RDA), an activity he loved but had previously paused. These steps have supported cultural reconnection, physical wellbeing, and routine—key enablers of his ongoing recovery and social participation.

A participant is a Central Australian artist whose work has been recognised in major exhibitions. When the participant connected with MHACA, his goals included building daily living skills—especially cooking—and finding ways to balance creative work with healthy routines. Through Support Coordination, the participant was linked with providers who could scaffold skills at home and in the community while maintaining flexibility around his art practice.

Over the year, the participant has taken a lead role in preparing evening meals and planning a weekly menu. These seemingly small routines have had big ripple effects: improved nutrition and energy, greater confidence, and more predictable days that support time in the studio. The participant says the best part is sharing food with family and friends and feeling proud of what he has created—on the plate and on the canvas.

These steps have supported cultural reconnection, physical wellbeing, and routine



A participant making mashed potatoes with the help of his support worker.

Central Australia Suicide Prevention Training Program

The Central Australia Suicide Prevention Training (CASPT) program delivers a range of accredited training workshops which aim to strengthen community connection by equipping people with the skills and confidence to intervene when someone may be at risk of suicide.

CASPT offers the following workshops:

- safeTALK
- safeYARN
- ASIST – Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training
- I-ASIST – Indigenous Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training
- Standard Mental Health First Aid
- Adult Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid
- Youth Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid
- Other targeted workshops

Over the last year, MHACA began delivering safeYARN and I-ASIST, ensuring suicide prevention training was culturally secure and responsive to First Nations communities. These programs, aligned with the NT Health Aboriginal Cultural Security Framework, attracted strong demand.

In addition, MHACA supported two local Aboriginal trainers to get fully accredited in I-ASIST, not only enhance program sustainability, but also to ensure training reflects lived cultural realities, embedding trust and authority while reducing reliance on fly-in/fly-out facilitators.

The program also increased social media promotion for upcoming training dates and developed a promotional video aired on Imparja TV and ICTV significantly raising awareness of training opportunities across Central Australia.

Attendees after completing the 2-day I-ASIST training.



Organisations that attended MHACA's training include:

- Akeyulerre Aboriginal Corporation
 - Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC)
 - Children's Ground
 - Tangentyere Council
 - NPY Women's Council
 - AMSANT (Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT)
 - CAYLUS (Central Australian Youth Link Up Service)
 - Penangke Cultural Consultants
 - Alice Springs Anglican Church
 - Anglicare NT
 - ASYASS (Alice Springs Youth Accommodation and Support Services)
 - Batchelor Institute
 - CAWLS (Central Australia Women's Legal Service)
 - Carers NT
 - Catholic Care NT
- Central Australia Mental Health Service (CAMHS)
 - Department of Education Northern Territory Government
 - Department of Tourism and Hospitality
 - Eunoia Lane (NDIS)
 - Katherine West Health Board
 - Mindful Living NDIS
 - Money Mob
 - North Australia Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA)
 - NT Health
 - NT Legal Aid
 - Purple House
 - Saltbush
 - Salvation Army
 - Trainspire
 - Women's Safety Services of Central Australia
 - Yirara College

In 2024–2025, CASPT delivered workshops across Central Australia, including urban, regional, and remote settings and 297 participants completed accredited training:

TRAINING TYPE	WORKSHOPS/SESSIONS	LOCATION
ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training)	14	Alice Springs
I-ASIST (Indigenous-adapted ASIST)	2	Alice Springs
safeTALK	18	Alice Springs
safeYARN	1	Alice Springs
Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)	13	Alice Springs & Tennant Creek
Tailored Trainings	2	Alparra & Ampilatwatja



The last year has been difficult for the Central Australian community due to recent deaths. In respond to this and in order to keep training participants safe, a self-assessment tool was developed as a pre-training wellbeing check. This tool will be implemented in the next financial year to ensure that participants feel safe and supported before undertaking training.

Jane Ndove
Senior Manager Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention



The training gave me the courage to ask hard questions and know what to do if someone is at risk. Having local Aboriginal trainers made it more meaningful and connected to our community.

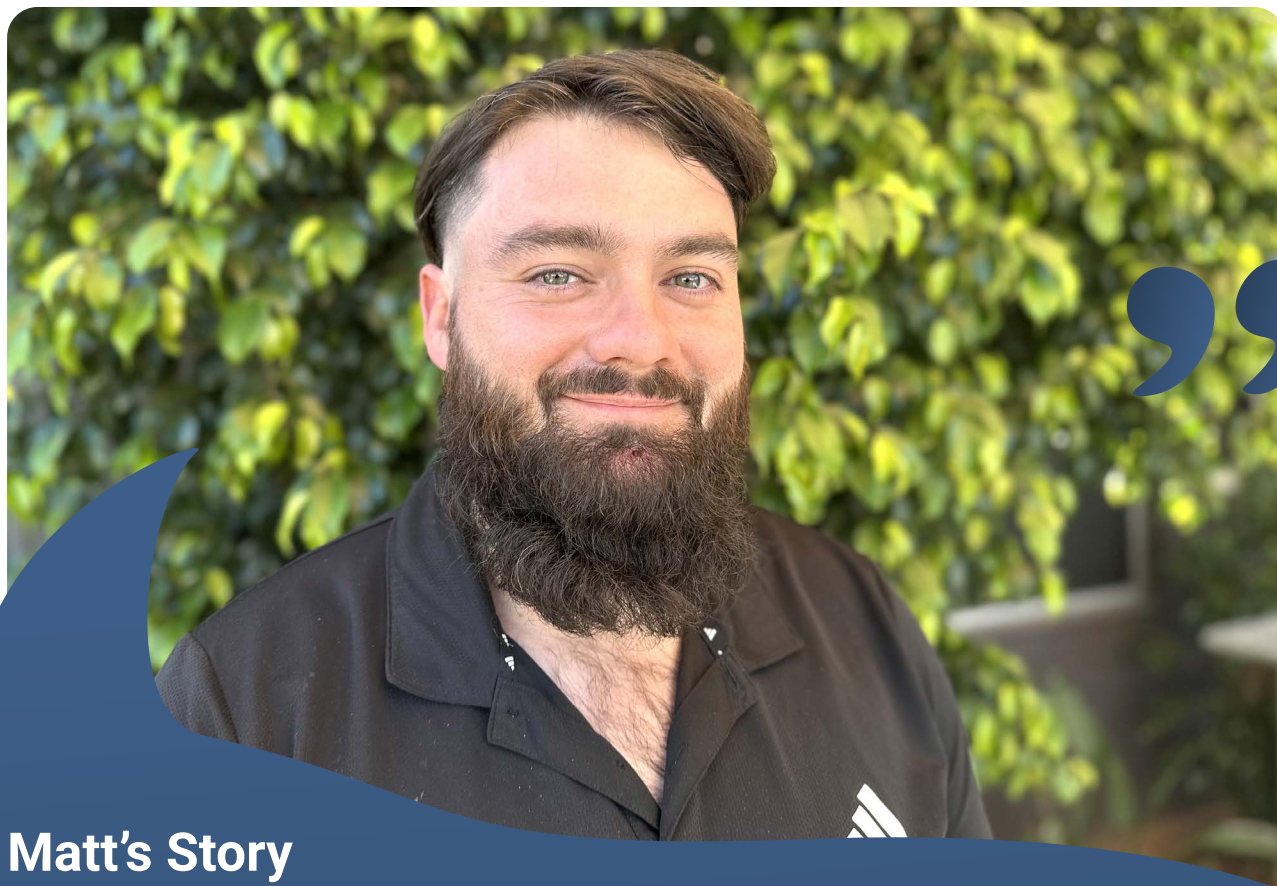
Participant feedback



MHACA participants and staff at Standley Chasm



Mental Health Workforce



Matt's Story

Working within mental health and overall health and wellbeing has always been a passion of mine. I enjoy helping and assisting MHACA participants achieve goals and take part in new activities.

Before joining MHACA, most of my working life was in fitness and health. I've been a personal trainer and coach, gym manager and owner, and I also competed in strength sports such as powerlifting and strongman. Alongside this, I worked in several mental health, seniors and disability facilities in New South Wales.

In 2022 I moved from the Hunter Valley to Uluru to manage the staff gymnasium facility. By the end of 2024, my partner and I decided it would be best to have the birth of our first child closer to more facilities, so we made the move to Alice Springs. When I saw that MHACA had positions available, I quickly applied, as I knew the role and responsibilities in the Day Program aligned perfectly with my skills and experience.

My role at MHACA involves monitoring the Day Program facilities and assisting in activities and programs, including weekend activities. Since starting, I've learned to be more patient and understanding, especially when it comes to building connections with participants.

One of the highlights for me was being part of the Imparja Cup cricket competition earlier this year. Seeing everyone supporting and encouraging each other and having fun together was amazing, and I can't wait for next year's event.

What I enjoy most about working at MHACA is developing connections and relationships with coworkers and participants. These connections are the best part of the job. I have never experienced such an amazing workplace before moving to Alice Springs. To witness and be a part of all the activities and events brings me joy and a real sense of fulfilment.

Aline's Story

I've always been drawn to supporting people. Even before studying psychology, I had a natural interest in listening and encouraging others. Mental health felt like the right path for me because it combines that personal passion with professional skills.

After completing my psychology degree in Brazil, I worked in the prison system in São Paulo, supporting people with light sentences and alternative measures. That experience gave me real insight into how much the right support can change someone's life. When I moved to Australia, I knew I wanted to continue in this area, and joining MHACA felt like a natural step to keep growing in the mental health field.

As a Recovery Support Worker, I spend time with participants in their daily lives—whether that's helping with shopping, supporting them to get to appointments, or just being there to listen. Sometimes the biggest impact comes from those small everyday moments.

One of the most important things I've learned is the value of going at the participant's pace. Recovery is different for everyone, and being patient, flexible, and present makes all the difference.

Some of the most rewarding experiences are when participants achieve something they've been working towards, like creating a routine, reconnecting with family, or showing up to an activity for the first time. Those small wins are really huge steps forward.

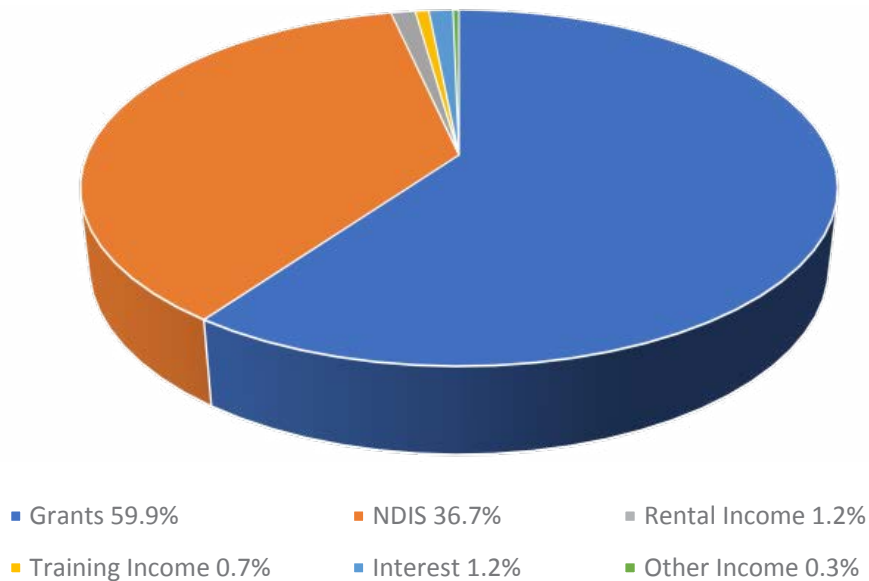
What I like best about working at MHACA is the sense of community. The participants bring so much resilience and strength, and the team is supportive and approachable. It feels like a place where everyone is learning and growing together.



Treasurer's Message

I am pleased to present the 2024/2025 Treasurer Report. Mental Health Association of Central Australia (MHACA) ended the 2025 financial year with a trading surplus of \$510,609. The total annual revenue for MHACA during the 2025 fiscal year was \$5.09 million which represents an increase of 17.4% when compared to 2024 financial year. The increase is due to the association gaining additional funding in 2025 financial year as well as an increase in generating NDIS income.

Total Revenue – \$5.09 Million

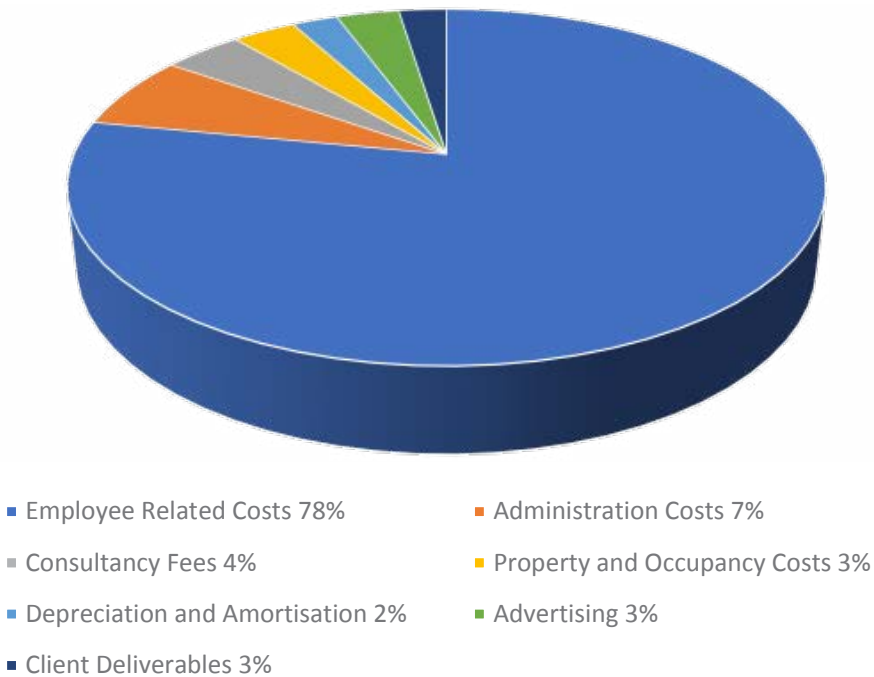


The NDIS arm of the business continues to improve. The new systems that were implemented in the 2024 year have continued to show the benefits in the 2025 year. MHACA management is also focused on achieving the optimal outcomes for this important area of the business.

MHACA will continue to monitor the changes in funding policies to assess potential implications on the operations, reporting and governance requirements. There has also been a focus on identifying new funding opportunities and this has been reflected in the increase of revenue in the 2025 year.

Our changing funding landscape provides us with the opportunity to nurture and strengthen our relationship with Government and other stakeholders with a renewed focus on maintaining current programs and developing new business partnership.

How We Spent Our Money – \$4.58 Million



In the 2025 financial year, we see an increase in MHACA's total expenses by 11% which is in line with the increase in revenue and additional service delivery. Labour costs comprise over 78% of the total expenses. MHACA's management team are focused on their 2026 budgets to ensure that costs remain under control.

Our overall cash position remains strong and MHACA continues to have sufficient funds to meet all its current liabilities as and when they fall due. In a climate of continuing uncertainty, it provides MHACA with the opportunity to nurture and strengthen its relationships with stakeholders with a renewed focus on exploring new revenue sources.

Overall MHACA is in a strong financial position. Our Current Ratio (Current Assets divided by Current Liabilities) as at 30 June 2025 was 1.82%. Late in the 2025 year the board approved the purchase of 13 Lindsay St (next door) to allow MHACA to expand and improve service delivery. The deposit and the renovations for this property were funded from the 2025 surplus.

To access MHACA's audited financials please go to the MHACA website www.mhaca.org.au

Overall MHACA is in a strong financial position.



Lavenia Saville
Treasurer



Contacts

Mental Health Association of Central Australia

-  14 Lindsay Ave, East Side NT 0870
-  PO Box 2326 Alice Springs NT 0871
-  +61 8 8950 4600
-  info@mhaca.org.au
-  www.mhaca.org.au

-  [MentalHealthAssociationCentralAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/MentalHealthAssociationCentralAustralia)
-  [@mhaca0870](https://www.instagram.com/mhaca0870)
-  [company/mental-health-association-central-australia](https://www.linkedin.com/company/mental-health-association-central-australia)

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MHACA
Mental Health
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