

UPDATE FROM STIRLING HOSPITAL

MARCH 2025

We are pleased to welcome you to our latest community information update, providing the latest developments at Stirling Hospital. As a proud local healthcare provider, we remain committed to delivering high-quality patient care and strengthening our engagement with the Adelaide Hills community.

PRIVATE HEALTH LANDSCAPE

The private healthcare sector plays a critical role in the Australian health system, performing approximately two-thirds of the nation's elective surgeries. Unfortunately, private health insurance is not covering the true cost of care, leaving hospitals like ours to absorb these increasing expenses.

Rising costs related to staffing, medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, and day-to-day operations continue to place immense financial strain on private hospitals, yet health insurers have not adjusted their reimbursements to reflect these escalating expenses. This growing disparity threatens the sustainability of high-quality patient care and places additional pressure on already stretched resources.

Stirling Hospital, along with the broader private healthcare sector, has been actively advocating for federal support. Our ongoing discussions with the Australian Private Hospitals Association (APHA) and local MPs aim to increase awareness and drive support for our sector. We continue to push for a more equitable funding model that ensures private hospitals are adequately reimbursed for the care they provide, safeguarding the future of private healthcare and ensuring patients continue to receive timely, high-quality treatment.

Despite these challenges, we have continued to provide essential medical care to the community. Between July and December 2024, we treated 2,387 patients, including 1,988 day surgery cases and 399 overnight patients—which represents a 10% increase from the same period in 2023.

GOVERNANCE AND COMPLIANCE

As a private, not-for-profit hospital governed by a volunteer board, we are fortunate that having 50% of our directors currently residing in the Adelaide Hills means there is strong local representation. We extend our sincere gratitude to retiring board members Hugh Steele and Astrid Kuivasaari for their dedicated service. We also warmly welcome new board members Tony Hurren and Steven McGregor.

It was pleasing to see our Catering Department and Café recently achieved accreditation. In addition, our new online patient admission portal has streamlined hospital processes, enhancing efficiency and patient experience. Positive feedback from patients continues to reinforce the value of our services.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

The 2023-24 financial year resulted in a total comprehensive loss of \$1.1 million, primarily due to loss of some operating theatre lists, rising costs of services and consumables, business restructuring to improve long-term sustainability and a revenue shortfall of \$1 million compared to the previous financial year.

However, we have worked hard to significantly reduce operating costs by over \$800,000. Admission numbers have exceeded budget expectations, growing nearly 10% compared to the same period in 2023. This is attributed to increased patient numbers per specialist list, staff flexibility, contract negotiations and the introduction of new services like the Sleep Study Laboratory.

Our request for a \$25,000 annual rate rebate from Adelaide Hills Council was unfortunately denied, despite strong support from the Member for Heysen and the Save Stirling Hospital group. Following this decision, we raised awareness through media engagements, including an ABC interview and coverage in The Advertiser and the Mount Barker Courier. An important upcoming project is the Perioperative Theatre Ventilation System upgrade. Stage 1 will focus on upgrading the ventilation system in the procedure room area at an estimated cost of approximately \$200K. While some operational downtime will be required to complete the work, this upgrade is essential for maintaining patient safety, meeting regulatory requirements and ensuring the continued delivery of high-quality care.

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NEW SPECIALISTS AND SERVICES

Stirling Hospital now employs 80 staff members and has expanded its medical team to include 37 Operating Specialists and 16 Medical Specialists. Engagement with GPs remains a priority, with recent education sessions, GP practice visits and active participation in the Stirling Business Association.

Since launching in August 2024, our Sleep Study Laboratory has operated at full capacity, providing vital diagnostic services. We are also pleased to welcome a number of new specialists, including ENT Specialist Dr Ian Wong, Gynaecologist Dr Anna Nicholson (commencing March 2025) and General Surgeon Dr Chris Lauder.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Our November 2024 Quiz Night was a resounding success, raising \$16.5K. Stirling Hospital would like to acknowledge the Stirling Community Shop for their donation of \$24K, and the Witty Knitters Craft Group for their donation of \$5K, after the event towards items on the wish list, resulting in a total of \$45K being raised to purchase new medical equipment and instruments.

We also continue to engage with GPs through educational sessions and lunches.

Upcoming fundraising initiatives include:

- A community walk around Stirling, concluding with a sausage sizzle, involving local businesses,
- Participation in Stirling Markets and the Christmas Pageant,
- Our ever-popular raffles, generously supported by local businesses, and
- Stirling Hospital merchandise, including socks and umbrellas, now available for purchase.

We are expanding our volunteer program, with three volunteers already on board and plans to recruit more. We also continue to support community representation through our Consumer Representatives on Safety & Quality and Infection Control Committees. In 2025, we plan to launch our inaugural Community Reference Group to further strengthen community engagement.

To keep you informed, we will publish quarterly newsletters and maintain regular updates on our social media channels.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Your support is invaluable in ensuring the sustainability of Stirling Hospital.

Here's how you can help:

- Ask your GP to refer you to a specialist who consults or operates at Stirling Hospital,
- Support our onsite tenants: Radiology SA (now with upgraded CT scanning, ultrasound, x-ray, and mammography services), Clinpath (blood tests, ECGs, blood pressure monitoring), and Flex Physio (physiotherapy and Pilates classes),
- Make a donation, whether through bequests or targeted equipment purchases.

We thank you for your continued support and look forward to working together to strengthen healthcare services in the Adelaide Hills community.