



## Update on the implementation of OHO recommendations: An outcome report on improvement actions taken in Doomadgee – November 2025

### Acknowledgement

*This document contains references to deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In accordance with cultural respect and sensitivity, we acknowledge that their names and identities are mentioned here with the utmost care. We recognise the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to their land, culture, and heritage. We extend our respect to their families, communities, and Elders, both past and present.*

### Implementation of OHO recommendations

- North West HHS and Gidgee Healing have undertaken substantial work to progress the implementation of the OHO's recommendations.
- Health service delivery improvements are considerable e.g. increased rates of monthly antibiotic (Bicillin) injections adherence to 78.6% in 2024 – 2025.
- Significantly improved working relationship between North West HHS and Gidgee Healing, delivering a more collaborative approach to care.
- Focus on recruitment of local staff resulting in better understanding of local cultural practices and community engagement in the health service.

### Background

Doomadgee is a remote town located in the far north-western corner of Queensland. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates the resident population at 1,461 (2023), comprised of 89.3% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.<sup>1</sup>

On 8 July 2021, the Office of the Health Ombudsman (OHO) received a complaint about the health services provided by Doomadgee Rural Hospital<sup>2</sup>, specifically in relation to the passing of Miss Sandy on 30 May 2020, as well as concerns about the broader impact on the Doomadgee community. Miss Sandy was an Aboriginal woman who resided in Doomadgee and was diagnosed with Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD) as a child.

Gidgee Healing is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service which provides primary health care services to the community of Doomadgee. Between September 2021 and March 2022, the OHO received several complaints regarding the provision of primary health services to the Doomadgee community by Gidgee Healing.

### Issues investigated

The OHO commenced investigations into both Gidgee Healing and Doomadgee Rural Hospital to identify possible systemic deficiencies in the systems and processes in place at the health services relating to the following themes:

<sup>1</sup> [Doomadgee | Region summary | Data by region | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> Doomadgee Rural Hospital has recently been renamed Yellagundgimarra Hospital Doomadgee.



- Governance, including policies and procedures and clinical incident management
- Staffing and training, including cultural awareness and cultural considerations
- Communication and engagement
- Provision of care

In July 2022, the Office of the Northern Coroner began an inquest into the passing of Miss Sandy, as well as two additional women from Doomadgee - Betty who passed away on 23 September 2023 and Kaya, who passed away on 30 May 2020, both due to RHD complications.

In May 2023, the OHO completed the investigations and published the findings for both health service providers with recommendations to implement to improve the safety and quality of healthcare services.<sup>3</sup>

The findings of the Coroner's inquest were delivered on 30 June 2023 and included recommendations for both North West HHS and Gidgee Healing.

## Key findings

The OHO investigations identified opportunities for improvement and made recommendations relating to:

- Increasing staff awareness and knowledge of chronic disease of particular relevance to the Doomadgee community, including Acute Rheumatic Fever (ARF) and RHD.
- Providing staff access to tools to assist in the detection of ARF/RHD.
- Improving ARF/RHD screening programs and ongoing management of patients through implementing a local coordinator

for screening events, community engagement, coordination of care, education for patients and families, and notification to the RHD registry.

- Developing staff capability to provide a culturally safe and responsive practice through the development and implementation of mandatory orientation packages that are informed by engaging with the local community and incorporate local values and beliefs, and highlight the needs of the community.
- Improving patient information systems and staff knowledge of how to access and use various record systems.
- Doomadgee Rural Hospital and Gidgee Healing working together to develop a partnership agreement to improve communication, collaborative care for patients, the sharing of information where consent is provided, and clearer determination of the responsibilities and expected outcomes for each service incorporating consultation from the community.
- Developing a sustainable workforce, prioritising recruitment and development of a local workforce where possible.
- Reviewing the accessibility of each service and strategies employed to ensure the community is informed of important information including service closures.
- Ensuring staff are aware of, through mandatory training, and adhere to, local practices relating to Sad News and Sorry Business.

The Health Ombudsman made 12 recommendations for improvement relating to

<sup>3</sup> Investigation reports into Doomadgee Rural Hospital and Gidgee Healing [Systemic investigation - Office of the Health Ombudsman \(oho.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.oho.qld.gov.au/systemic-investigation)



Doomadgee Rural Hospital and nine recommendations relating to Gidgee Healing.

## Implementation

After making recommendations the Health Ombudsman monitors the implementation of recommendations through ongoing engagement and the provision of reports and supporting evidence demonstrating progress made by the health service. Following receipt of a report and supporting evidence, the OHO conducts an assessment and reports the status of the recommendations to the health service. Where recommendations have not yet been satisfied, further reporting and evidence by the health service to the Health Ombudsman is required.

North West HHS and Gidgee Healing have shown significant commitment to the implementation of the recommendations. The OHO visited Doomadgee in August 2024 and noted the progress made. Since then, both health services have provided progress reports and documentary evidence in support of the work being undertaken.

Initiatives implemented and in progress include:

- A collaboration agreement between the services to support each other in the delivery of effective, efficient and equitable healthcare to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Improved community understanding of service delivery by Gidgee Healing and North West HHS.
- Open and collaborative communication between Gidgee Healing and North West HHS at operational and executive level.
- Focus on recruitment of local staff resulting in better understanding of local cultural practices and community engagement in the health service (Gidgee Healing).
- Case conferencing to address the needs of complex patients (North West HHS).
- Increased adherence rates of monthly antibiotic (Bicillin) injections from an average of 20% in 2022 – 2023 to 78.6% in 2024 – 2025 (North West HHS).

While not all of the recommendations have been fully implemented, both health services have demonstrated commitment to ongoing collaboration, with strategies underway to progress improvements to quality service delivery, such that the OHO will no longer formally monitor the recommendations.

The Health Ombudsman acknowledges the efforts made by North West HHS, Doomadgee Rural Hospital and Gidgee Healing to implement recommendations made in 2023, and commend the services on the improvements completed and in progress, to achieve improved health outcomes for the Doomadgee community, in particular those diagnosed with ARF and RHD.

### Further information

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