

Winnunga News

ISSN 2206-3080

APRIL 2023

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CEO Update

I wish, firstly, to extend sincere condolences on my own behalf and the Directors of the Winnunga Board, staff and all our clients to the family and friends of Russell Taylor following his recent death.

Russell Taylor's contribution, throughout his life, to the Aboriginal community of Canberra and indeed across Australia was simply outstanding. Russell was a friend of mine and his counsel, advice and unrelenting support of me personally and of Winnunga generally was of great importance and significance to me.

While Russell had so much to be proud of in terms of his work and advocacy over much of his life, I have no doubt that among the proudest moments he experienced was the appointment of his daughter, Louise, as an ACT Magistrate. We will miss you, Russell. Thank you for all you have done for us. Rest in peace.

I also acknowledge the recent death of Chris Lane also known as Tallamardi Jabanunga, a long time resident of Canberra and client of Winnunga. Tallamardi's sudden death at the age of just 56 years has come as a shock to us all. I extend my heartfelt condolences on behalf of all of us here at Winnunga to Tallamardi's family and friends. Tallamardi was regarded by all that knew him with genuine affection, and he will be sorely missed. May he rest in peace.

I have included in this edition of the Winnunga News an opinion piece published by the Canberra City News in which I respond to the recent decision of the ACT Supreme Court where it sanctioned a policy of the ACT Government which effectively denies Aboriginal detainees in the AMC access to an Aboriginal Health Assessment. As you will see from the article, I am utterly non-plussed by not just the decision of the Supreme Court but by the determination of the ACT Government to justify its policy of denying Aboriginal detainees in the AMC access to such a fundamentally important health service. I have, in light of the decision, called on the Government to amend the Human Rights and Corrections Management Acts in order to negate the Courts unfortunate interpretation of these Acts.

On the subject of the law and the law courts, despite my current disappointment with the Supreme Courts latest decision I was very pleased to welcome a group of ACT Magistrates to Winnunga to exhibit our wonderful health service. More importantly, however, we also discussed the complex and seemingly intractable factors contributing



Julie Tongs OAM, CEO



If you are not part of the solution you are part of the problem

'...as a result of a surge in demand for our services, that we were left with no option but to change the criteria for access to our clinic by non-Aboriginal clients. This is, as I said, a matter of enormous regret to me and I do wish that it was not the case.'

to the levels of contact which Aboriginal peoples in Canberra have with the justice system and Canberra's status as the jurisdiction with both the highest Indigenous incarceration rate in Australia and the highest rate of recidivism. I am grateful to the Magistrates for taking the time to visit Winnunga and I thank them for their interest in seeking to better understand the range of issues relevant to Aboriginal offending and subsequent contact with the criminal justice system.

Speaking of the law I wish to also thank AMC Commissioner Ray Johnson for agreeing to allocate additional space in the AMC to the Winnunga AMC health and wellbeing service. The additional space is most welcome and will have a major impact on our capacity to better meet the needs of our clients.

On the question of the needs of our clients I reported in the March edition of the Winnunga News that regretfully, as a result of a surge in demand for our services, that we were left with no option but to change the criteria for access to our clinic by non-Aboriginal clients. This is, as I said, a matter of enormous regret to me and I do wish that it was not the case. We highlighted that the major factor in the increase in demand was almost certainly the difficulty many people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, were having in finding or accessing a bulk billing health service.

My concern about the increasing difficulty which lower income Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal households are currently having in accessing health care that they can afford, has been increased by recent media commentary that the ACT Government is proposing to enforce payment by GP practices of payroll tax. In an environment in which poorer households across Canberra are already finding it virtually impossible to afford even basic health care I fear that any such move by the Government will have a devastating impact on not just the Aboriginal community but all for whom life is a struggle.

As some of you may recall I have from time to time, over the last year or two, called on the ACT Government to be more pro-active and to show leadership in seeking to heal or at least ameliorate the rifts that have developed within the local Aboriginal community.

It was, therefore, with a genuine sense of relief that many of us greeted the decision taken by the ACT Government to abandon its decision to seek to defend itself against the legal action initiated by members of the local Aboriginal community who identify as Ngambri and who assert a traditional connection to this country.

It has genuinely saddened me that we have been focused on or distracted by that which divides us rather than working together to improve the lives of all of us. If we, the Aboriginal members of this community, cannot achieve reconciliation among ourselves it is surely asking too much to expect we will achieve it more broadly. Voice or no Voice.



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'I am grateful to the Magistrates for taking the time to visit Winnunga and I thank them for their interest in seeking to better understand the range of issues relevant to Aboriginal offending and subsequent contact with the criminal justice system.'

Raise the Rate

Winnunga CEO Julie Tongs spoke at a press conference with Senator David Pocock and other NGOs on Wednesday 26 April at Parliament House regarding raising the rate of JobSeeker and related income support payments in the May Budget.



Magistrates Visit Winnunga

On Tuesday 18 April a number of Magistrates visited Winnunga to learn more about and discuss issues impacting on Aboriginal people residing in the ACT and surrounding region.



Chief Magistrate Walker, Magistrate Stewart, Magistrate Campbell, Magistrate Archer, Special Magistrate Urbas and Magistrate Temby, together with Julie Tongs and Winnunga Staff Member Ambrose House.

Fact: To find out more about the Raise the Rate Campaign please go to www.raisetherate.org.au

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Human Rights Law Centre Slams Strip Search Culture at AMC

'There was a total of 1,196 strip searches conducted (roughly 170 per month). Of those 372 (31.1%) were conducted on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.'

The Human Rights Law Centre recently released updated strip search data it had received from ACT Justice and Community Safety, covering the period from October 2021 to April 2022.

The data reveals for the seven months between 1 October 2021 and 30 April 2022:

- * There was a total of 1,196 strip searches conducted (roughly 170 per month). Of those 372 (31.1%) were conducted on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. During this time Aboriginal people comprised 25% of all people detained at AMC.

- * 90.1% of searches were conducted on men and 9.9% were conducted on women. During this time women comprised 5.5% of all people detained at AMC. Of the 118 strip searches conducted on women 45 (38%) were conducted on Aboriginal women.

- * There were 32 items of contraband found in 23 searches, ie contraband was detected in a total of 1.9% of all strip searches.

- * The most common reasons recorded for searches were court attendance (564 searches - 47.2%), new admissions (341 searches - 28.5%) and intelligence searches (9.9%). No reason was recorded for 50 searches.

The Human Rights Law Centre advises that the failure to record a reason for a strip search, which as noted above occurred on no less than 50 occasions in the seven-month period under review, is a direct and blatant breach of the Corrections Management Act.

It would seem reasonable, therefore, that the ACT Government initiate contact with each of the detainees whose legal rights have been so blatantly ignored with a view to negotiating an appropriate settlement in respect of the wrong they have suffered. To not do so risks the very real possibility of yet further court action against ACT Corrective Services.

While it is acknowledged that the AMC has changed its policy of searching detainees on every transfer to and from Court and has, albeit following an inordinate and unexplained delay, dusted off a body scanner that has been sitting idle in an AMC storeroom for a number of years, there are two aspects of this latest strip search data that are particularly alarming, namely that Aboriginal detainees were strip searched at a higher rate than non-Aboriginal detainees and that women detainees were strip searched at a higher rate than male detainees. Now what possible explanation could there possibly be for that?



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'When I arrived, Winnunga's reception area was absolutely full of people, and Julie told me that demand for their services has been outstripping the capacity of her dedicated staff to meet those demands.'

Alicia Payne MP Speaks Up For Canberra Aboriginal Community

Julie Tongs was recently very pleased to meet with Ms Alicia Payne MP, the federal member for Canberra, to discuss a range of issues of particular importance to the local Aboriginal community.

Julie was also pleased that Alicia took the time when the Parliament next met to raise the issues which they had discussed in a detailed speech to the House of Representatives.

The following extract from Hansard incorporates Alicia's speech:

Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services Ms PAYNE (Canberra) (09:42): 'Recently, I visited the Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services here in the ACT and met with CEO Julie Tongs to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing Aboriginal health and community services in the ACT. Julie has run Winnunga for 25 years and is a pillar of our community. Winnunga is a vital service based in Narrabundah, a short distance from this place, that supports First Nations people not just from the ACT but from surrounding New South Wales. Established in 1988 by local Aboriginal people, Winnunga offers a range of health services, including medical, dental, counselling, outreach and preventative health programs. It brings together doctors, dentists, midwives and counsellors with art teachers, boxing instructors and mechanics. Julie believes there is no point treating a person for a single ailment without looking at other aspects of their life. So, in addition to the health programs provided by Aboriginal health workers, Julie has established and expanded life-skills options, such as a youth diversion program, a boxing club and a home maintenance program.

When I arrived, Winnunga's reception area was absolutely full of people, and Julie told me that demand for their services has been outstripping the capacity of her dedicated staff to meet those demands. As a result, patient outcomes are suffering. For example, there is a need for a paediatrician on staff, but Commonwealth funding doesn't currently stretch to this. Winnunga also runs a health clinic inside Canberra's prison, the Alexander Maconochie Centre, where their services are in high demand. Julie believes Winnunga is critical in helping to prevent Indigenous people going to jail, by treating alcohol and drug dependencies.

In our chat Julie outlined the challenges and opportunities facing Winnunga. A number of recent reports, including from the Productivity Commission and the ABS, showed that First Nations Canberrans experience some of the worst outcomes of any Aboriginal community anywhere in Australia. For example, Indigenous people make up less than two per cent of the national capital's population but make up more than one quarter of



Ms Alicia Payne MP

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'I will be working with the federal government to ensure that Winnunga receive the support they need to support those that they support.'

Alicia Payne MP Speaks Up For Canberra Aboriginal Community (cont'd)

the prison population at the Alexander Maconochie Centre. In fact, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 20 times more likely than non-Indigenous people to be in prison in the ACT. This is the worst rate in the country. Sadly, other areas tell a similar story, including homelessness and Aboriginal children in contact with the care and protection system and in out-of-home care.

Julie and the Winnunga team are doing an incredible job, but they are absolutely stretched. They desperately need the fair proportion of Commonwealth funding and assistance to be directed to ACT Aboriginal community controlled health services. As Julie explained to me, Winnunga serves not only the ACT community but a huge proportion of New South Wales, as Canberra is a meeting place not just for politicians but for people from all around the country as well. I will be working with the federal government to ensure that Winnunga receive the support they need to support those that they support.'

Julie said that she was particularly pleased that Alicia highlighted the fact that the outcomes being achieved by Aboriginal peoples resident in Canberra are in many instances the worst in Australia and in fact far worse than those experienced by some Aboriginal communities in remote and regional localities throughout Australia.

About Alicia Payne

I'm Alicia Payne, the Federal Member for Canberra.

I grew up in Canberra and I've seen it grow and diversify. I love our unique and progressive city and couldn't think of a better place to raise my children.

Through my work and community involvement, I have seen the real difference Labor Governments and progressive policy can make in people's lives. I will be Canberra's voice for our community, and for fairness, in our Parliament.

I'd love to hear from you about the issues that are important to you.

To contact Alicia please go to: www.aliciapayne.com.au



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The Poisonous Culture at The AMC

Insights from an inmate in the AMC

'We keep hearing about the shambles that the AMC is in but no one seems comfortable calling it for what it is. It's not a series of buildings that are contributing to the poor outcomes, neither is it some politicians far removed from the reality of the AMC. We're failing here because staff culture is poisonous, with punishment being viewed as the primary objective of most. Rehabilitation and protective factors are deemed privileges, and policy and legal compliance are laughed off, only considered relevant when it suits the punitive needs of staff.

As time goes on it becomes clearer and clearer that without significant change to the staffing make-up, nothing can improve. The astonishing levels of misconduct at almost all levels have worn me down to the point where I feel that advocating for anything has become a pointless endeavour, merely resulting in my becoming a target for the petty and spiteful staff that the AMC seems to excel at producing.

I'm going to stop posting on here, at least for now. I've told others that they are welcome to but for me, I need to step back and stop caring so much.

For those staff who consider this a win; it might seem like it now but I'm confident that in the decades to come, your legacy of misconduct and the negative outcomes this has resulted in will become a source of shame for you. Your staunch opposition to the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners is disgusting and you bring shame to the notion of a Correctional Officer. You might feel like you're winning but every day you pull on that uniform and behave in a manner that perpetuates the cycle of recidivism, making your community a less safe place to live, you've lost, even if you don't see it.'

How to recognize and treat an emerging toxic culture

(source: <https://www.customerexperience.com.au/>)



'We're failing here because staff culture is poisonous, with punishment being viewed as the primary objective of most.'

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Frankly, How Are We Ever Going to Close the Gap?

City News, 25 April 2023, Opinion

The Alexander Maconochie Centre... not all Aboriginal detainees are able to access the Winnunga clinic in the prison.

“The court’s decision is disappointing to those of us who have fought for so long and so hard for recognition of the needs of our community and how best to meet them,” writes a frustrated JULIE TONGS.

THE Supreme Court of the ACT delivered its decision in the case of *Brown v Director-General of the Justice and Community Safety Directorate* on April 11. The case is one of many recently brought by Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) detainees and ex-detainees against the ACT government for breaches of the Human Rights and/or the Corrections Management Acts.

The issue in contention in this case was the failure by ACT Corrective Services to ensure that the applicant, Ms Keira Brown, who is an Aboriginal woman, was availed of the opportunity to undergo an Aboriginal Health Assessment (AHA) while detained in the AMC. Central to the case brought by Keira was the obligation imposed on ACT Corrective Services to ensure, consistent with the Human Rights Act and the Corrections Management Act, that detainees in the AMC have access to health services equivalent to those available to people not incarcerated in the ACT.

It is a matter of fact that ACT Justice Health, which is the ACT government health service operating within the AMC, does not make available to Aboriginal detainees an AHA. An AHA is a diagnostic tool specifically designed to assist in assessing the health status of Aboriginal peoples and is recognised throughout Australia as a fundamentally important tool for assessing and responding to the health-care needs of Aboriginal peoples. It is reflected in a specific Medicare Benefits Schedule item and is often referred to as the “715”.

It involves taking a detailed patient history, performing particular examinations and may involve a range of screening tests. It was devised as a direct and urgent response to the appalling health status of Aboriginal peoples when compared to other Australians.

Winnunga strives for best practice in providing health care and, as such, undertakes an AHA for all its Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients, including in the AMC. Although Medicare cannot be claimed for services provided to clients in the AMC, Winnunga strongly believes in the value of this assessment and ensures it’s available to all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients of the service. However, not all Aboriginal detainees are able to access the Winnunga clinic in the AMC.

In light of the non-provision by Justice Health of AHAs to Aboriginal detainees in the AMC and the fact that AHAs are routinely undertaken in the ACT community, I had thought that this was an open and shut case of a breach by the ACT government of the law and its obligations to Aboriginal detainees.

Regrettably, that is not how the Supreme Court saw the matter. I have read the judgements delivered by the three judges who heard the case but, unfortunately, the language, legalese and reasoning have left me, a non-lawyer, confused as to how or why the court decided that in this case “equivalent” doesn’t mean “the same as”.



The Alexander Maconochie Centre... not all Aboriginal detainees are able to access the Winnunga clinic in the prison.

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Frankly, How Are We Ever Going to Close the Gap? (cont'd)

'Regardless of that, I'm certain Senator Dodson would not be satisfied with the provision of the Clayton's variety of health assessment that ACT Corrective Services, on behalf of the government, has successfully argued for.'

Of particular concern is that the judgement doesn't appear to me to fully appreciate the nature of and rationale for an AHA or that it has been specifically designed to identify health-related issues pertinent to Aboriginal peoples and how best or most appropriately to respond to them.

In this regard it's relevant to reflect on remarks by Senator Patrick Dodson, recently reported in "The Sydney Morning Herald" in which he again highlighted that, since 1991, more than 525 Aboriginal Australians have died in police or prison custody.

He urged the federal government to establish an Indigenous justice committee to oversee state and territory coronial inquests and ensure that there be Aboriginal-specific and tailored health services in every prison in Australia.

While he did not say so, I am certain Senator Dodson would also insist that each of those Aboriginal-specific and tailored health services undertake a regular Aboriginal Health Assessment of all Aboriginal detainees. It would be revealing to confirm how many of the 525 dead Aboriginal detainees referred to by Senator Dodson had undertaken an AHA. I understand the answer is none.

Regardless of that, I'm certain Senator Dodson would not be satisfied with the provision of the Clayton's variety of health assessment that ACT Corrective Services, on behalf of the government, has successfully argued for.

Suffice to say, I am surprised and disappointed with the decision handed down by the ACT Supreme Court.

It is disappointing to those of us who have fought for so long and so hard for recognition of the needs of our community and how best to meet them. Frankly, how are we ever going to close the gap?

I also do not believe that the court's interpretation reflects the intent of the author of those two acts, namely then chief minister Jon Stanhope (in fact, he has told me that is the case) and I believe it behooves the ACT government to introduce, as a priority, amendments to both these acts to ensure, as a minimum, that Aboriginal Health Assessments are available, on a regular basis, to all Aboriginal detainees in the ACT.



Julie Tongs is the CEO of Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services.

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Nothing about us without us

ACT Ambulance Service Yarning Circle

ACT AMBULANCE SERVICE YARNING CIRCLE

🕒 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM

📅 Tuesday, 9 May 2023

📍 Yarramundi Cultural Centre



SCAN HERE



The ACT Ambulance Service has commenced a First Nations Inclusion project, to embed First Nations culture and awareness into healthcare practices.

First Nations community members are invited to a Yarning Circle, to share stories and lived experiences, and provide ideas and direction for the future.



<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/606894235997>

Fact: 'In providing emergency ambulance services, our emergency ambulances are staffed with paramedics and intensive care paramedics. Non-emergency ambulance services are provided by Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPT) officers. Our NEPT crews undertake routine ambulance transport of patients to, from and between hospitals and other medical facilities' (<https://esa.act.gov.au/about-esa-emergency-services/ambulance/who-we-are>)

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COVID-19 and Influenza Update

The 2023 Flu Vaccine is now available at Winnunga for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples aged 6 months or older

Influenza

- It is time to get your flu vaccine again!
- Influenza is a very contagious infection and affects people of all ages. It can be mild, but it can also cause very serious illness in otherwise healthy people. It can require hospitalisation and cause death.
- Vaccination is a safe and effective way to protect you from serious disease caused by influenza.
- Every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person aged 6 months or older is eligible for the flu vaccine.
- Children under the age of 5 should be vaccinated as they are at increased risk of serious illness if they catch influenza.

Please come in to Winnunga for your flu vaccination or call reception on (02) 6284 6222 to book in.

You can get your flu vaccine and a COVID booster at the same time.

2023 COVID-19 boosters are now recommended for all adults if it's been 6 months or longer since your last COVID-19 vaccination OR last COVID-19 infection. We have both Moderna and Pfizer bivalent vaccines available.

The Winnunga Respiratory Clinic has moved to Reception 2 in the main building. Please go to Reception 2 if you have symptoms or need a COVID-19 test.

COVID-19 Vaccinations

Everyone aged 5 years and older is eligible for COVID-19 vaccination. Two doses are required to start with (3 for people with severe immunocompromise), followed by boosters.

You are due for a booster if you are:

- Aged 18 years and over, and you completed the primary course 6 months or more ago

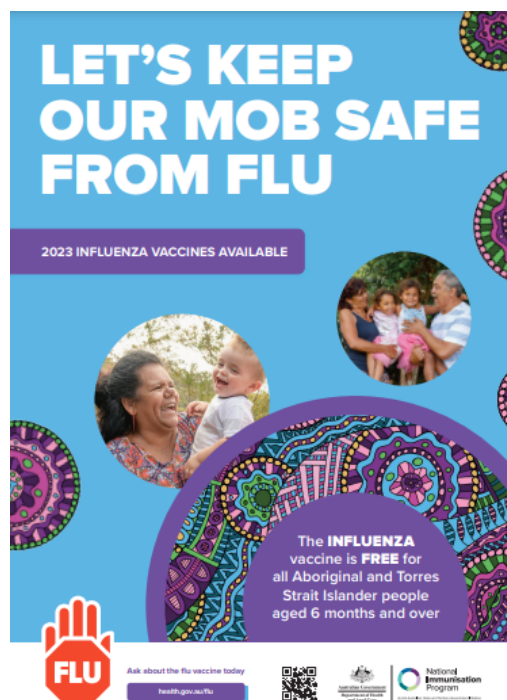
OR

- Aged 5-17 years, you completed the primary course 6 months or more ago AND you are severely immunocompromised or have a disability or complex health condition that increases the risk of severe COVID-19

If you have been infected with COVID-19 OR had a COVID-19 vaccination you should wait 6 months (whichever was later) before getting your next COVID vaccination.

Please come in to Winnunga for your vaccination or call reception on (02) 6284 6222 to book in.

If you are unsure about getting vaccinated, we encourage you to discuss this with one of our healthcare workers.



COVID-19 and Influenza Update (cont'd)

For the latest advice and updates from the Department of Health, visit: <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines>

Winnunga Respiratory Clinic

The Respiratory Clinic has recently moved and is now located in the main Winnunga building at Reception 2.

Anyone who has a fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath or loss of taste or smell should go directly to this entrance.

If you require testing for COVID-19 please also go directly to the Respiratory Clinic.

Temperature, symptom and exposure screening is in place for all clients presenting to the main Winnunga entrance and you will be redirected to the Respiratory Clinic if you have symptoms or have been exposed to COVID.



Reception 2 entrance

Rapid Antigen Tests

Winnunga can provide Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients and families with rapid antigen tests if you are having difficulty accessing them.

If you have a positive RAT test at home please notify Winnunga nurses by calling 6284 6222. You may be eligible for antiviral treatments, which must be given in the first 5 days. This is particularly important for people who are immunocompromised, have chronic conditions or are not fully vaccinated.

Although it is no longer mandatory to report positive RATs to ACT Health, we encourage you to still report positive RAT results by completing the online reporting form: <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/stay-safe-and-healthy/rapid-antigen-test-rat-positive-result-registration-form>



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COVID-19 Update (cont'd)

Please stay at home if you are sick or test positive to COVID-19

While isolation for people with COVID-19 is no longer mandatory, if you catch COVID you should stay at home and minimise your contact with others until your symptoms have gone and you are feeling much better.

If you test positive for COVID:

- Speak to your health care provider about your symptoms and check if you are eligible for antiviral medications
- Maintain separation from other people in your household
- If you need to leave your house wear a mask
- Avoid attending large gatherings or crowded indoor places
- Don't visit high risk settings (like hospitals, aged or disability care) or visit people who are at high risk for at least 7 days
- Follow ACT Health advice for people who test positive: <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/stay-safe-and-healthy/information-for-people-who-test-positive-for-covid-19>

What to do if you are exposed to someone with COVID-19

- Closely monitor for COVID-19 symptoms
- If you become unwell, get tested and stay home
- Wear a mask indoors if you are not at home and on public transport
- Consider testing regularly for COVID-19 using a RAT
- Avoid visiting people at high risk of severe illness, anyone in hospital, or an aged or disability care facility
- Follow ACT Health advice for people exposed to COVID-19: <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/stay-safe-and-healthy/exposed-to-covid19>

Attending Winnunga and telephone consultations

Please maintain social distancing while attending Winnunga. Please do not gather in groups while waiting for services. Please use the hand sanitiser provided before entering the clinic, while waiting in the clinic and on your way out. You will also be required to wear a surgical mask while visiting Winnunga.

If you cannot attend Winnunga in person our doctors can do telephone consultations. To organise a telephone consultation call Winnunga on 6284 6222.



Staff Profile



Name: Debby Gill

Position: Facilities Manager

Where are you from?

God's country – Brisbane Queensland.

Who is your favourite singer/band?

It depends on my mood.



What is your favourite song?

Que Sera (Justice Crew Version).

What do you do on the weekends?

Camping.

What is your favourite food?

Seafood.

What do you like most about working at Winnunga?

The people and the fact that no 2 days are ever the same.

My Favourite pet?

My dog, she's a Chipoo called Molly.

What is your pet hate?

People that label/judge things by what they see before they know/understand the situation or person.

