



Chief Minister Michael Gunner opens the Arnhem Allied Health Centre. PICTURE: Supplied

Business

Arnhem Allied Health Centre official opens to serve remote patients

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VISITING medical professionals are being urged to consider a new one-stop health hub built in Nhulunbuy to service clients living in the township and the region's remote community residents.

The Arnhem Allied Health Centre comprises eight fully-furnished consulting rooms, complete with modern information technology resources, targeted at allied health practitioners.

The centre was developed by Arnhem Physiotherapy director Sarah Fincham-Thomson to operate her own business from while targeting visiting specialists in fields including paediatrics, occupational therapy, diet and speech therapists and child psychology.

Arnhem Physiotherapy employs four physios and Ms Fincham-Thomson said: "The reality for a lot of people in regional parts of the Territory is that they need to travel to larger centres such as Darwin for medical and allied services that most people in larger communities take for granted.

“In creating the new health hub, we want to attract health professionals who can use the specialist consulting rooms and our administrative support without signing longer-term leases.

“Previously, many of these service providers found it difficult to operate in the region, with some treating clients out of their hotel rooms.”

Ms Fincham-Thomson said the roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme in East Arnhem from January next year was an opportunity to connect clients from Nhulunbuy and the regional population base of more than 10,000, with treatment options. “Therapy takes time and most often requires steady progression,” she said.

“This is very tough if you or a loved one needs to fly out of town for regular appointments every two weeks to see an orthodontist, child psychologist or a hand therapist for example.

“As parents, if your child couldn’t swallow properly or couldn’t make friends because they couldn’t understand or communicate with them, or couldn’t read or write, we would do anything to get them help.

“Now with this health hub, local help arrives with a paediatric occupational therapist next week and a regular visit by a speech therapist on a fortnightly basis.”

In addition to Ms Fincham-Thomson’s investment in the health hub located at Franklin Street next to the town’s main shopping centre, the project received a \$195,000 grant from Developing East Arnhem Limited (DEAL) — a not-for-profit regional economic incubator.

DEAL chief executive officer Carley Scott said the project was selected for support because of its contribution to both economic and social development of the region.

She said: “We were attracted to the innovation in the proposal to develop capacity in the town, and ultimately the hub also supports a more productive, healthy workforce in the town.”

Ms Scott said the DEAL strategic plan aimed to encourage self-sustaining and resilient business enterprises, with health and education services high on its support agenda.

Of 10 key projects supported by DEAL since inception two years ago, 33 direct local jobs have been created.

Chief Minister Michael Gunner, who officially opened the health hub on Sunday, said the development was another chapter in the town’s growth story post the closure of the Rio Tinto alumina refinery three years ago.

“The Arnhem Allied Health Centre goes beyond the provision of essential services for the region, but is at the heart of our sense of community,” he said.

“It’s a perfect story for the region with enterprising people taking the right steps to build capacity for the region.”