

Enquiries to: Office of the Chief Executive
Telephone: 4226 6000



**Cairns and Hinterland
Hospital and Health Service**

Kara Thomas
President
Nurses Professional Association of Australia

Email: kara.thomas@npaaservices.org.au

Dear Ms Thomas,

Thank you for your correspondence dated 11 August 2026 regarding concerns raised by members at Atherton Hospital relating to parking access, occupational violence, and staffing and resourcing. We appreciate the feedback provided and acknowledge the importance of maintaining a safe environment for patients, visitors, and staff. Our response can be found below.

Parking

We acknowledge the challenges experienced during the recent Atherton Show period and recognise that road closures associated with the event created additional pressure on available parking for staff and patients

Following several complaints regarding road closures during the show period, the Atherton Director of Nursing and Midwifery (DONM) met with representatives of the Atherton Show Society Executive on 8 July 2026. During this meeting, the Show Society Executive advised that planning for the event included consultation with Traffic Control and the Queensland Police Service. The Executive acknowledged that consultation with Atherton Hospital should also have occurred and agreed to ensure the hospital is included in future planning discussions. The Show Society apologised for any inconvenience caused to patients, visitors, and staff.

I understand the challenges and frustrations faced with limited car parking options near the Atherton Hospital. All street parking in the vicinity of the Atherton Hospital falls under the remit of Tablelands Regional Council (TRC) which will be better placed to address your concerns directly related to specific parking.

Staff safety continues to be a key priority for CHHHS. Atherton Hospital is scheduled to undergo a Facility Security and Occupational Violence Risk Assessment next month, and we will consider and implement recommendations arising from that review where appropriate. In addition, works completed last year at the Community Health Centre included the creation of a dedicated patient drop-off area with accessible kerbing to better support patients using wheelchairs and walking aids.

Atherton Hospital also has access to two Fire Safety and Security Officers on a 24-hour basis who are available to assist staff, including providing escorts to vehicles after hours when required. Education and training programs are also available to staff to support their personal safety and awareness.

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Occupational Violence

CHHHS is deeply committed to supporting and protecting our healthcare workers. CHHHS remains focussed on managing occupational violence risks through established policies, clinical governance frameworks, and patient-centred care approaches designed to reduce the risk of harm to patients, visitors, and staff.

Patients are assessed using recognised screening and risk assessment tools, including the 4AT assessment where clinically indicated. Interventions may include environmental strategies, enhanced clinical care, patient-centred support measures, and appropriate investigation and treatment of underlying causes contributing to behavioural concerns.

With respect to the patient referred to in your correspondence, appropriate clinical and behavioural risk assessments were undertaken, and the patient continues to be closely monitored and managed. The patient is currently awaiting placement in a residential aged care facility. The Cairns Hospital General Medicine Team, together with the Dementia and Delirium Service, remains actively engaged in supporting Atherton Hospital and local staff in the ongoing management of this patient's care needs.

CHHHS has established and well used escalation processes and these are used where staff can report concerns regarding patient and/or staff safety. This includes a case review through the Complex Care Panel, with the aim of bringing together a range of professional expertise to contribute to the development of an appropriate care plan. Where all available strategies have been exhausted, the matter is escalated to an Executive Sponsor for further review and consideration.

CHHHS acknowledges the challenges presented by increasing numbers of high-acuity and behaviourally complex patients in rural facilities. CHHHS continues to monitor these pressures and advocate for service improvements through appropriate planning and governance processes. Discussions regarding patient flow, rural healthcare delivery, workforce sustainability, and service capacity will continue through ongoing engagement with government and health system stakeholders.

CHHHS also continues to invest in infrastructure improvements across the region. At Atherton Hospital, this includes the refurbishment of the 25-bed ground-floor ward, which will modernise patient rooms with ensembles, improve patient privacy and comfort, and provide more contemporary facilities for both patients and staff.

Staffing and Resourcing

CHHHS complies with nursing workforce planning requirements and staffing frameworks in accordance with applicable legislation, industrial agreements, and workload management principles designed to support safe, effective, and sustainable patient care.

Nursing Hours Per Patient Day is one of the recognised workload methodologies used to determine nursing resource requirements based on patient acuity, activity levels, complexity of care, and service demand. This approach aligns with Queensland Health's Business Planning Framework, which requires staffing decisions to be informed by patient need and service requirements.

Atherton Hospital reports against these requirements monthly and has oversight of the Queensland Nursing and Midwifery Union and continues to meet the relevant legislative obligations. Where unforeseen circumstances arise, such as emergent leave or unexpected increases in service demand, every effort is made to address staffing impacts through escalation processes, resource allocation, and roster adjustments to maintain safe service delivery.

Staff are also encouraged to raise workload concerns through established reporting mechanisms and directly with their line managers so that concerns can be reviewed and addressed appropriately. Thank you for bringing these matters to my attention. Your feedback is valued and assists us in our ongoing efforts to improve staff safety, workplace wellbeing, and the delivery of healthcare services across our communities.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued advocacy and support of healthcare workers across Queensland in your role as President of the Nurses Professional Association of Queensland. Should you wish to discuss these matters further, I have arranged for Selda Coombs, Director Rural and Remote Services, on 4226 3202 to be available to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leena Singh', with a stylized circular flourish at the end.

Leena Singh

Chief Executive

Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service

02 / 09 / 2026