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Author: Jonathon Howard

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By Jonathon Howard

THE FUTURE of healthcare in Murwillumbah is set to focus on improving access to services, expanding mental health support, and strengthening preventative health programs, following a key planning workshop held on September 24.

The workshop was part of the Collaborative Care Project, a NSW Health-supported initiative led locally by the Rural Doctors Network (RDN) in partnership with Healthy North Coast, the Murwillumbah Community Centre, Northern NSW Local Health District, NSW Ambulance, and Tweed Shire Council.

After extensive community consultation, including more than 460 survey responses and in-depth interviews with local health professionals, the project has identified three top health priorities for the region.

1. Improving community awareness of the full range of available health services and how to access them.

2. Expanding access to mental health and drug and alcohol support services.

3. Promoting preventative health programs and boosting social supports that underpin

community wellbeing.

Collaborative Care Program Lead, Justyn Walker, said these priorities reflect the lived experiences and ongoing concerns of both residents and health providers.

“The priorities that were identified are opportunities to work together to improve the health and well-being of the Murwillumbah community,” Mr Walker said.

“Our next step is to plan how we can make these improvements sustainable and ensure services meet community needs now and into the future.”

Each partner organisation will now begin developing locally-focused solutions to address these challenges – from clearer health information pathways and outreach to underserved groups, to improved access to mental health professionals and early intervention programs.

The Collaborative Care Project is part of a broader effort across rural NSW to ensure that smaller and regional communities have a say in shaping the health services they need most, especially at a time when regional health systems are under strain.