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BOOST FOR MATERNITY CARE IN NEW ENGLAND

Hunter New England Local Health District has welcomed eight newly registered midwives to maternity units across the District, as part of the 2022 Rural Midwifery Program.

These eight rural midwives are amongst 34 new midwives commencing their midwifery careers in Hunter New England this year.

Delivered through Charles Sturt University in partnership with seven participating hospitals across HNELHD, the Rural Midwifery Program offers registered nurses a postgraduate diploma of midwifery with a specific rural focus.

Elizabeth Grist, Executive Director of Nursing and Midwifery at HNELHD joined the District's eight new midwives at their graduation ceremony held recently in Inverell.

Ms Grist said it is wonderful to see local registered nurses diversifying their skills to support our local communities.

"The Rural Midwifery Program has been offered across Hunter New England Local Health District since 1993, and is present in Armidale, Inverell, Moree, Narrabri, Gunnedah, Tamworth and Glen Innes hospitals. To date, more than 180 midwives have graduated from the program within the District."

"This program is an opportunity to support our local community to continue to access safe and appropriate maternity care in rural and regional locations. Midwives work collaboratively with the wider multidisciplinary team in supporting women to receive the right care, in the right place at the right time.," Ms Grist said.

"It's great to see these nurses, who are so passionate about their local community already, have the opportunity to become midwives so that they can support women during pregnancy, birth and into parenthood."

"The presence and support of our midwives leaves an everlasting impression for families during the most exciting and challenging moments of their lives," Ms Grist said.

"These eight midwives who have spent the year working and studying in Tamworth, Armidale, Inverell and Narrabri, become part of a network of 13 dedicated maternity services across the District, as well as 11 Aboriginal Maternal Infant Health Services who provide a culturally respectful and supporting environment to our First Nations Australians.

Roughly 75 per cent of all graduates stay working in rural and regional facilities, with many transitioning to education or leadership positions. The retention of these midwives is testament to the rural focus of this program.

Sarah Whyte, Northern Area Clinical Nurse Consultant, Hunter New England Women's Health and Maternity Network graduated from the program almost 20 years ago and was also present at the graduation.

"We like to call it '**growing your own midwife**' as we're taking our existing registered nurses who have a passion for maternity services, and providing them support and guidance to become a registered midwife."