Aligning a $1.5 billion infrastructure program to meet expectations and consistently deliver critical outcomes across country Western Australia

Rob Pulsford

WA Country Health Service

WA Country Health Service (WACHS) delivers health services across all of rural WA, an area of 2.55 million square kilometres with a total population of over 470 000 people. Health services are delivered from a variety of settings ranging from 70 hospitals to remote area nursing posts and community health centres.

WACHS is currently delivering a $1.5 billion infrastructure program across country WA. This level of government investment in health infrastructure is unprecedented and has resulted directly from WA’s fortunate financial circumstances arising from the mining resource boom, as well as the State Government’s Royalty for Regions Initiative where 25% of mining royalties is directed into rural and regional WA.

Not only is the scale of the overall health infrastructure investment impressive, so too is the breathtaking diversity and complexity of the many infrastructure projects being planned and delivered at the one time.

For instance in the southern part of the state the Southern Inland Health Initiative, which at its core comprises $325 million in infrastructure upgrades, includes $147 million to redeveloping six major district hospitals with another tranche of investment focusing on redeveloping 31 small hospital/nursing posts with an investment of $108 million. Also located in the south of the state is the $170 million Albany Health Campus project, which will result in the inclusion of state-of-the-art ICT infrastructure, which will act as a pilot and forerunner to the $2 billion Fiona Stanley Hospital, to drive the delivery of service reform and significant change in how health services are delivered.

In the north of the state there is the $207 million Karratha Health Campus, which represents the biggest single hospital construction investment ever in country WA. There is also the $50 million East Kimberley Project, which includes a $20 million Integrated Primary Health Care Centre, adjoining the Kunnunurra hospital, as well as eight other individual projects ranging from the construction of new remote health clinics to the delivery of dedicated staff housing.

The sheer scale and breadth of WACHS’s capital works program brings many opportunities and many challenges. The opportunities are provided to staff who have the once-in-career opportunity to be part of major capital projects—many seeing projects through from the very beginning of planning and business case development until practical completion.

Opportunities also exist in terms of reform, improved patient safety, and increased functionality to support contemporary and more effective models of care. The provision of new ICT infrastructure leads to quantum changes to the way patient care is delivered and recorded, i.e. electronic medical records.
At the heart of these opportunities is the joy and satisfaction experienced by health care staff, and members of rural and regional communities, who are part of projects which are often regarded as most important and integral to the health and wellbeing of rural communities.

However with the opportunism there are challenges. Across WACHS the need for well-documented, articulated and understood governance structures is paramount in ensuring that projects are managed in line with the available budget, scope and program. The expectations on WACHS to deliver effectively on the $1.5 billion capital program is immense.

To achieve this, strong project leadership, both project and program level accountability, and clear well-articulated and well-documented project process have been developed and are continually evolved to ensure that this significant government investment maximises outcomes in terms of the design and construction of contemporary health care facilities, as well as supporting service reform and the delivery of new models of care.

A strong focus is also made on stakeholder and community engagement to ensure that communication regarding ongoing project development is clear and transparent, and that stakeholder expectations are effectively managed.