

Hunter New England Local Health District Allied Health Rural Reliever Program

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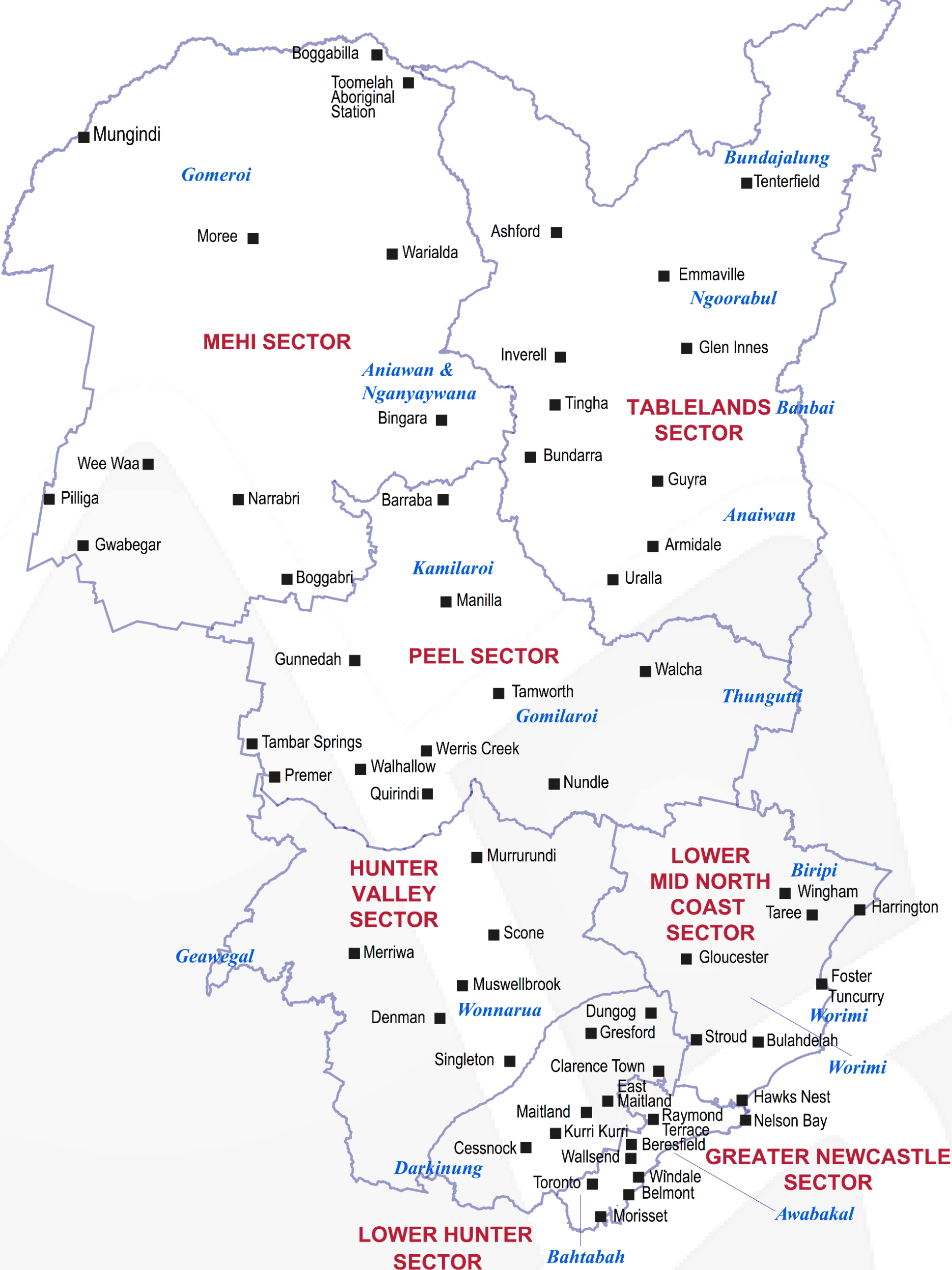
INTRODUCTION

What is it?

- A unique program established in 2007 in the Hunter New England Local Health District (HNELHD)
- Provides leave cover for Allied Health (AH) staff in rural areas, especially sites with sole clinicians
- Designed to ensure that people in rural communities receive continuity of high quality allied health services
- Has undergone 2 reviews, in 2009 and recently in 2019, to ensure program remains responsive to clinical needs

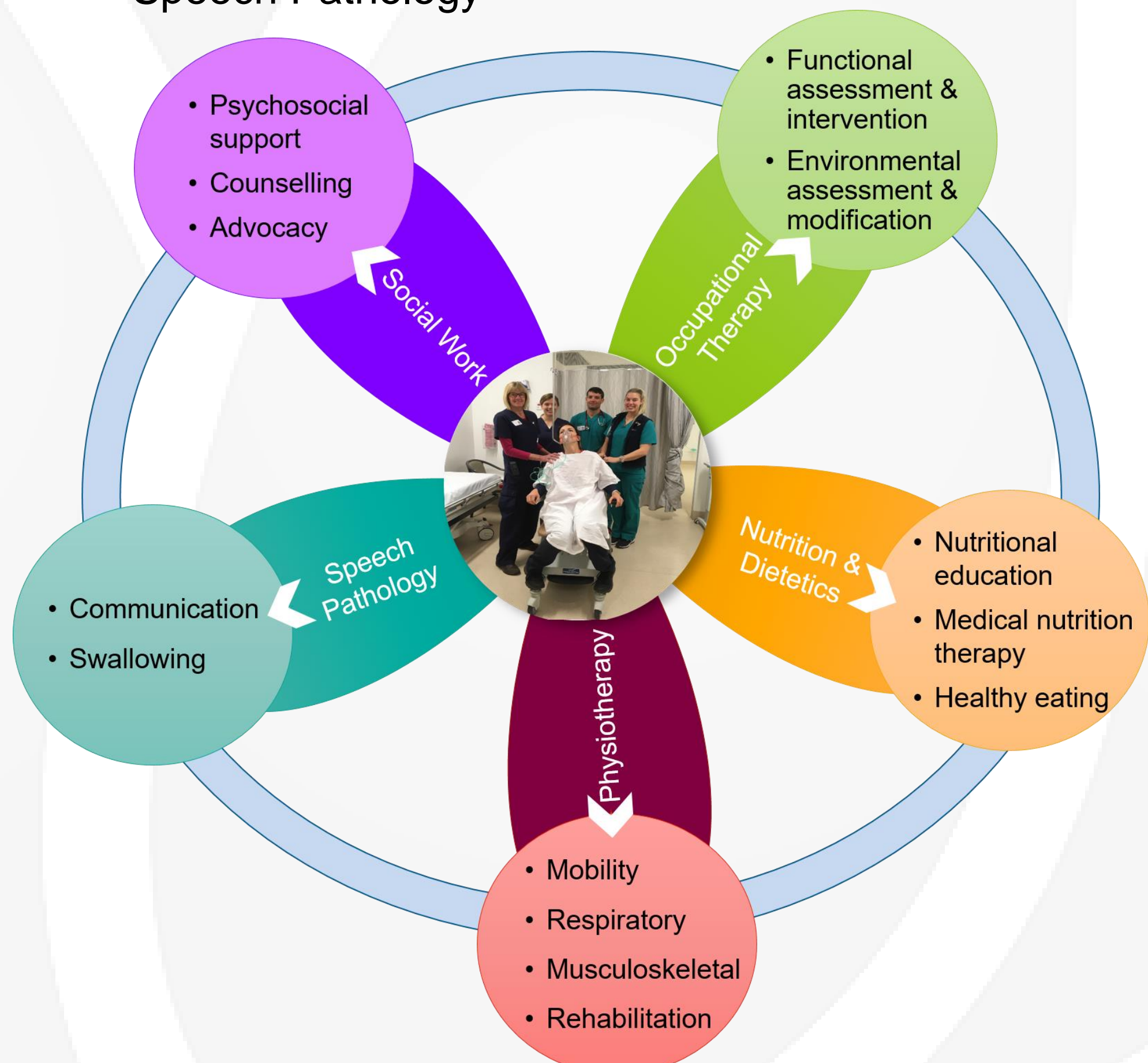
Areas covered?

- HNELHD (excluding Greater Newcastle Sector) comprising
 - Mehi, Tablelands, Peel, Hunter Valley, Lower Hunter and Lower Mid North Coast Sectors



Professions included in program

- Dietetics
- Occupational Therapy
- Physiotherapy
- Social Work
- Speech Pathology



TELL ME MORE!

Clinical areas covered?

- Across paediatric and adult populations
 - inpatient (acute / subacute / rehab)
 - outpatient
 - community

Types of leave covered?

- Primarily annual leave and professional development leave **but** depending on capacity of the Rural Reliever (RR) and if funded by the requesting site, the following are also considered
 - long service leave
 - maternity relief
 - extended sick leave
 - leave without pay
 - position vacancies during secondments etc.

What works well?

- For the health service:
 - supports rural clinicians to prevent burnout
 - reduces gaps in service
- For the patients / clients:
 - reduced travel times
 - continued access to service
- For the rural reliever:
 - variety of clinical caseload
 - explore and see country areas

What's challenging for the reliever?

- Living and working away from home
- Constantly changing work environments and teams
- Limited face to face supervision
- Lack of continuity of caseload management

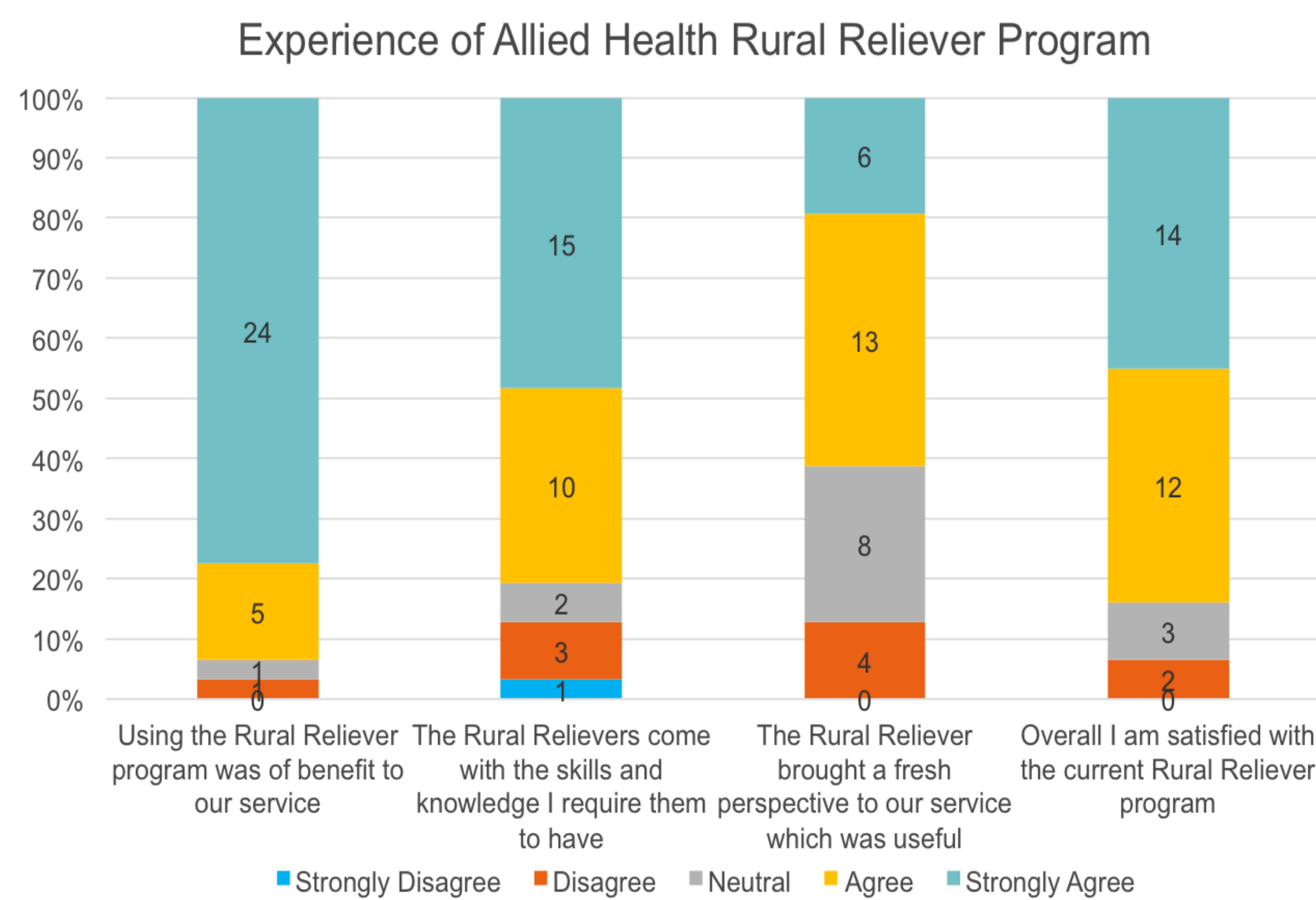
Skills required?

- resilience | flexibility | time management
- independence | broad clinical skills | adaptability
- advanced interpersonal skills
- willingness to drive long distances



What do sites say?

- “Rural Relievers have been adaptable, flexible and have worked well in our Dept. They have communicated well, are reliable and share their knowledge with us”
- “All participants have been committed to quality of care; good communication and benefit of previous experiences shared.”
- “It is wonderful to have the reliever to cover when you’re away to allow urgent patients to be seen”
- “Great service for rural services to get some coverage or ability to catch up after taking leave.”



CONCLUSION

- Without the rural reliever program, many of our rural communities would be without a service during staff absences, as these communities and facilities survive with sole practitioners in the AH disciplines unlike large metropolitan regions.
- The most recent review of the program in May 2019 found the program had a **positive effect** on the professions' profile in HNELHD, main benefits being
 - ability to provide continuity of services for patients
 - support for the Allied Health workforce
 - decrease workforce stress for rural clinicians knowing they will have someone to cover the leave period

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