



PALM Workers Wellness Event

Mareeba, Queensland

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AUTHORSHIP

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AE	Approved employer
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
HIML	Health In My Language
NIB	NIB Health Fund (health insurer)
PALM	Pacific Australia Labour Mobility
PICQ	Pacific Islands Council Queensland
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
True	True Relationships and Reproductive Health
TSAS	Tablelands Sexual Assault Service

INTRODUCTION

The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme is a program that enables workers from Pacific Islands and Timor-Leste to engage in seasonal employment in Australia, primarily in sectors such as agriculture and hospitality. The scheme provides economic opportunities for workers and supports Australian industries. However, PALM participants often face significant challenges beyond the workplace.¹

Issues arise around access to healthcare due to limited English proficiency, difficulty navigating complex and unfamiliar healthcare and insurance systems in Australia, and geographic isolation in rural or regional work settings. These barriers lead to missed opportunities for preventive care such as sexual health screenings and general health checks. Additionally, gaps in knowledge and understanding of Australian values regarding respectful relationships, consent, and gender equality can sometimes contribute to incidents of abuse or exploitation.² Combined with language barriers and cultural differences, these challenges highlight the need for proactive, culturally safe engagement to ensure PALM workers are informed, and supported.

True, PICQ and TSAS partnered to deliver the second annual PALM Workers Wellness Event in Mareeba on October 18th, 2025. The event aims to engage with the PALM worker community and provide a culturally safe space for education and connection. The event focused on safe and respectful relationships and sexual and reproductive health education, delivered both in language, and in easy-English to help workers understand Australian laws and values, and navigate the health system. In addition to education, the event fostered community connection, linking PALM workers with local health services and support networks to promote wellbeing and reduce isolation.



EVENT PLANNING

Following the success of last year's event, an online core planning group was formed, bringing together TSAS, True, and PICQ. This group collaborated to design a wellness event with True's education component as the cornerstone, complemented by local service providers and culturally grounded community-led performances.

Planning meetings were held fortnightly from March through October. Insights from the previous year guided key decisions, such as hosting the event on a single day rather than two and scheduling it on a Saturday to avoid conflicts with religious commitments. The initial target date was July as it is an optimal period for engaging Pacific Island workers outside of transition phases. However, unavoidable funding delays pushed the event to October.

Funding was secured mid-August, allowing planning to progress. The chosen venue, Mareeba Bowls Club, offered sufficient space and resources to accommodate the event. Traditional Pasifika cuisine was delivered by the Salvation Army, reinforcing the event's commitment to inclusivity and respect for cultural traditions.



EVENT FORMAT

EDUCATION SESSIONS

Each session ran for two hours and featured a comprehensive education component delivered by True, focusing on safe and respectful relationships and SRH. In addition, participants heard short presentations from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and the Tablelands Sexual Assault Service, outlining the support available to PALM workers.

Three sessions were held in total:

- **Two men's sessions** (one delivered in Bislama and one in Easy English)
- **One women's session** (delivered in Easy English)

To create a safe and comfortable environment for open discussion, separate spaces were designated for men's and women's education sessions. These sessions were facilitated by True's bilingual health educators, ensuring cultural and linguistic accessibility. Same-gender groups encouraged participants to ask questions freely and engage without hesitation.

Two men's sessions were delivered in Bislama (spoken in Vanuatu) and Easy English. Due to the smaller number of women attending, one session was held in Easy English.

Topics covered included:

- Navigating the health system
- Healthy and unhealthy relationships
- Consent
- Reproductive anatomy and menstrual health
- Contraception choices
- Safer sex and STI prevention
- Pregnancy options
- Cancer screening
- Understanding menopause



STALLS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Stalls and entertainment were available throughout the day, allowing attendees to participate before or after their education sessions. The event was designed to create a warm, Pasifika-themed atmosphere that felt friendly and welcoming. Key elements included:

- Island-style food, provided free of charge to PALM workers by the Salvation Army
- Live music between sessions, performed by a Vanuatu string band made up of PALM workers
- Coconut scraping and 'Hangman' competitions, complete with prizes
- A dedicated women's space featuring weaving materials

The coconut scraping competition was a highlight, blending cultural familiarity with a sense of fun and friendly rivalry. As coconut scraping is a common chore across the Pacific Islands, this activity offered both cultural connection and entertainment.

Information stalls were hosted by a range of service providers, including:

- Working Women Queensland
- North Queensland Women's Legal Service
- Lives Lived Well
- Salvation Army
- PALM Scheme Support Service
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations



EVENT OUTCOMES AND REFLECTIONS

Building on previous successes, the event offered meaningful opportunities for learning and connection. However, there was a significant reduction in workers attending the event as compared to the previous year. There were forty PALM workers in attendance (2 females; 38 males from Vanuatu and Solomon Islands), representing three approved employers from across the region. Participating employers included: CTR Bananas, Rockridge Farming, and Howe Farming. Despite the lower number of workers, those who attended the event appeared to enjoy themselves and reported highly valuing the education sessions. The service providers also reported enjoying the event and appreciated being able to engage with the PALM workers. Feedback from the core planning group, PALM workers, service providers, and other attendees highlighted several key strengths and insights:

WHAT WENT WELL

- Funding from DEWR and NIB Insurance played a critical role in bringing this event to life.
- PALM workers shared that the information was highly relevant and much needed, delivered in a way that felt culturally appropriate and respectful which is something they rarely have access to elsewhere.
- The event fostered strong connections between PALM workers and local service providers, which added real value for participants.
- For True staff, who deliver similar sessions nationally, the involvement of local services stood out as a unique strength of this event.
- The venue choice with its larger size and resources allowed for safe, comfortable, and distraction-free spaces for education sessions.
- Lucky door prizes and goodie bags were well received and added an element of fun, helping to boost engagement.

WHAT WE LEARNED AND WILL CARRY FORWARD

- Timing matters: October coincided with a transition period for many PALM workers, which impacted attendance. For future events, July would be an ideal date when engagement is likely to be higher.
- Sustainable funding is key: This event reinforced the importance of ongoing investment in PALM health education, so we'll continue to explore long-term funding options.
- Engagement strategies: Attendance was significantly lower than last year. The success of the 2024 event was primarily due to having several of the larger Approved Employers on board who provided transport and strongly encouraged their workers to attend. Early and consistent engagement with Approved Employers and CLOs is essential.

SATISFACTION AND FEEDBACK FROM PALM WORKERS

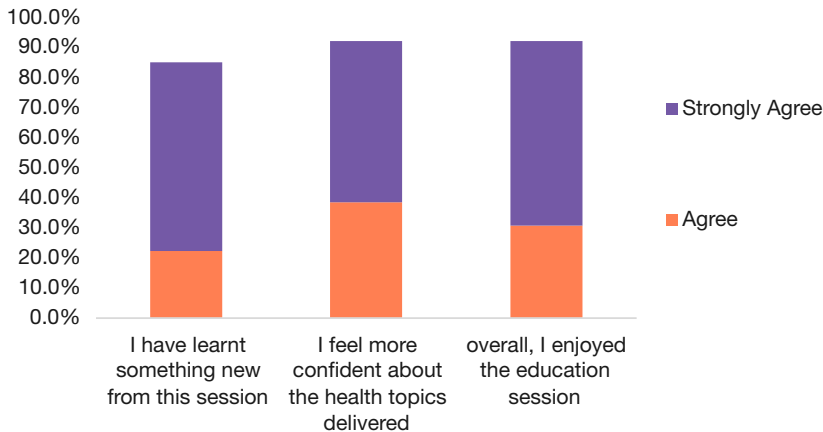
Feedback from PALM workers was overwhelmingly positive. Of the 40 PALM workers in attendance, twenty-seven (67.5%) completed survey responses:

85% agreed or strongly agreed that they learnt something new from the session

92% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more confident about the health topics delivered

92% agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed the education session overall.

PERCEPTION OF EDUCATION SESSIONS



A recurring theme in the qualitative (open-ended) responses was that participants gained new knowledge, valued the opportunity to discuss these health topics, and expressed a strong interest in continuing to learn more.

“It is my pleasure to attend this kind of training. It gives me more information about my own body parts. I wish to have more of this in the future, thank you”

“Learn new things today and would like to know more.”

PALM workers highlighted specific topics they would like to learn more about including information about insurance benefits, emergency services, and domestic violence laws in Australia.

“I would like to know more about benefits of NIB Insurance.”

“Would like more information about emergency services.”

“Good to know laws of Australia and want to learn more on domestic violence.”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The second annual PALM Workers Wellness Event demonstrated the critical role of culturally safe health education and engagement in supporting PALM workers' wellbeing. Despite planning challenges delaying the ideal timing of the event, the day facilitated strong engagement between local organisations and government support services with fifty PALM workers. Feedback from PALM workers was overwhelmingly positive feedback and indicated a desire for further education sessions covering a broader range of topics in a similar format.

The need for more initiatives like the PALM Workers Wellness Day event is underscored by broader trends. The PALM scheme has grown rapidly, with over 31,000 workers in Australia as of September 2025, up from fewer than 6,000 in 2019 representing a 450% increase in five years.^{3,4} This surge has amplified health and social challenges, including limited access to SRH services and rising concerns about STI outbreaks among PALM cohorts.⁵ Additionally, reports reveal gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and exploitation within the scheme, with thousands of workers enduring poor conditions and abuse.² These vulnerabilities are compounded by language barriers, cultural differences, and exclusion from Medicare, making culturally safe, accessible education and community engagement not just beneficial but essential.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Secure sustainable funding to embed PALM health education as a core component of worker support.
- Schedule events earlier in the year (e.g., July) to align with peak worker presence and avoid transitional periods.
- Strengthen partnerships with approved employers and Country Liaison Officers (CLOs) and Approved Employers to improve outreach and participation.
- Expand content to include topics requested by workers, such as insurance benefits, emergency services, and domestic violence laws.
- Scale the initiative nationally, leveraging bilingual educators and culturally safe practices to address systemic health inequities.

Continued investment in culturally responsive, community-driven engagement will help PALM workers navigate Australian laws, health systems, and social norms confidently, reducing risks of exploitation and improving health outcomes. As the PALM workforce continues to grow, these initiatives are vital to safeguarding worker wellbeing and strengthening Australia's commitment to fair and respectful labour mobility.

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