



*Report on the*

# **PALM WORKER WELLNESS EVENT**

*Mareeba*

*Queensland*

*20-21 July 2024*

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

AE	Approved employer
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
NIB	NIB Health Fund (health insurer)
PALM	Pacific Australia Labour Mobility
PICQ	Pacific Islands Council Queensland
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
True	True Relationships and Reproductive Health
TSAS	Tablelands Sexual Assault Service
CLO	Country Liaison Officer
PNG	Papua New Guinea



## 1. Introduction

The PALM Worker Wellness Event, held in Mareeba, Queensland from 20-21 July 2024, is a standout example of a successful health education activity for Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme workers in Australia. The PALM scheme allows eligible Australian businesses to hire workers from nine Pacific countries and Timor-Leste when there are not enough local workers available. In October 2024 there were 30,800 PALM scheme workers in Australia and a third of them (10,775) were based in Queensland (PALM scheme 2024). The event created a fun, safe and culturally welcoming environment to provide education on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and respectful relationships, and to connect PALM workers with local services. The event was planned and implemented through a collaborative effort of local service providers, PALM scheme approved employers (AEs) and other stakeholders. The purpose of this report is to document how the event came about, the planning steps, what happened during the event and feedback from stakeholders. It is hoped that this report can help to inform future education activities for PALM scheme workers in Australia.

## 2. Background and Planning

The event was initiated by the Tablelands Sexual Assault Service (TSAS) after the service noticed a rise in the number of sexual assaults reported in the Tablelands region over 2023 and early 2024 that involved PALM workers as either perpetrators or victim-survivors.

TSAS raised their concerns during a meeting in February 2024 that was attended by staff from TSAS, True Relationships and Reproductive Health, 4 PALM AEs, Community Connections from Pacific Islands Council Queensland (PICQ) & Tablelands South Pacific Islands Association.

True's representative spoke to the current work of their Bilingual Health Educators within the PALM scheme space and the impact it has had on PALM scheme workers and AEs that have engaged with their program. The PALM AEs in attendance showed a strong interest in holding in-language health education sessions through educators with Pacific heritage.

Following the initial meeting, an online core planning group was established which included TSAS, True, NIB and PICQ. The online core planning group developed the idea of a wellness event where True's education piece would be the cornerstone of the event, supported by local service providers and Pacific style entertainment. A local stakeholder planning group was also established including TSAS, PICQ, Queensland Police Service, Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service, and Tablelands South Pacific Islands Association.

An expression of interest form was created for AEs, so that information could be gathered such as contact details, number of PALM workers, genders and nationalities. Once the event date was set, flyers were designed (see Annex 1) and distributed to the registered AEs, local service providers and other stakeholders.

Close coordination was required with AEs who would provide transport to bring their workers to the event, which was held on a Saturday and Sunday at the Mareeba International Club. Efforts were made to engage and involve Pacific Islander community leaders in the Tablelands region.

Financial contributions to stage the event included \$26,000 AUD from NIB and \$3,500 from TSAS. Expenses included travel costs for True's bilingual health educators, event venue hire, catering, signage, entertainment, and prizes.

### 3. The event

#### Event format

The event ran over two days. Each PALM worker attended the event for a few hours and during that time participated in a single-sex group education session (indoors), received a meal and had time to spend at the outdoor stalls/entertainment precinct.

#### Stalls and entertainment

The event included thoughtful elements to create a Pasifika themed, friendly and welcoming environment. These included:

- Island-style food, provided free of charge to PALM workers
- Live music between education sessions by Vanuatu string band (PALM workers)
- Coconut scraping and 'hang man' competitions, with prizes
- Address by a pastor on Sunday morning
- Women's space with weaving materials

The coconut scraping competition in particular added to the fun. Throughout the Pacific islands, coconut scraping is a common chore, thus creating a coconut scraping competition for the workers provided a unique blend of competitive spirit and cultural immersion.

Service providers that held information stalls included: Working Women Queensland, North Queensland Women's Legal Service, True Relationships and Reproductive Health (Cairns clinic), Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service, Salvation Army, Mareeba Library, Lives Lived Well and Red Frogs.

NIB also hosted a stall where PALM workers were able to check their insurance cover, update information such as physical addresses, email addresses, and mobile numbers. NIB staff were also able to prompt workers to download the NIB mobile app and demonstrate how to use it.

There were also stalls selling Pasifika clothing and other items.

Having service providers, diaspora members and PALM workers in close proximity allowed attendees to connect and form relationships. Service providers expressed that this was the first time they had been able to meaningfully connect with the PALM workers.

## PALM worker attendees

The event was attended by over 350 PALM workers, representing 7 employers from across the region. The employers who participated included Mackays Group, CTR Banana Group, Addex Group PTY Ltd, Rock Ridge Farming, Costa Group, Howe Farming Enterprises and Owen Pacific Workforce. Some PALM workers came from as far as Lakeland, over two hours from Mareeba by bus.

373 PALM workers were registered to attend, as follows:

- Saturday: 176 males from Fiji (10), Samoa (52), Solomon Islands (14), Tonga (4) and Vanuatu (96).  
68 females from Samoa (23), Solomon Islands (16), Tonga (2) and Vanuatu (27).
- Sunday: 98 males from Papua New Guinea (15) and Vanuatu (83).  
31 females from Papua New Guinea (5) and Vanuatu (26).

## Education sessions

Separate men's and women's spaces were designated for the education sessions which were delivered by True's bilingual health educators. The men's sessions were delivered in Bislama (Vanuatu), Tok Pisin (PNG), Pijin (Solomon Islands) and easy English. The women's sessions were delivered in Samoan and easy English.

Some groups were highly vocal and engaged while others were quieter, likely due to cultural sensitivities around discussing taboo topics or fatigue from prior activities. Sessions with mixed groups of PALM workers from different AEs or groups that included too many outside observers may have contributed to some participants being more reserved and quiet.

Key topics covered in the sessions included healthy relationships, consent, cancer screening, menstrual health, sexually transmitted infections, contraception and unplanned pregnancy.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with participants appreciating the opportunity to discuss pressing issues, including a recent alcohol-related incident that had affected the community.

An information table was provided in each of the indoor education rooms, with free leaflets, condoms, lubricant and menstrual products.

In addition to True's education sessions, other organisations were also allocated some time to speak with PALM workers. They included:

- Queensland Police Service – focus on domestic and family violence
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations – information from PALM scheme Worker Support Team
- NIB – information on health insurance.
- Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service – information on services.

## 4. Reflections

The below reflections come from the core planning group, as well as feedback received from PALM workers, service providers and other event attendees.

### What was done well

- PALM workers were blown away. The information was so needed and important, but there's nowhere else where they could get that information (and delivered in such a culturally appropriate way).
- Connection and engagement with approved employers were essential for ensuring high participation levels from PALM workers. The AEs assisted with transport, timeliness and were important to get the right messages out to PALM workers prior to the event.
- Funding from NIB was critical in making the event a success.
- It was so beneficial having NIB present, explaining health service navigation and how to make health insurance claims.
- Service providers mentioned they had been talking about the PALM worker communities on the Tablelands for over two years, but this was the first opportunity they had to meet them and start to understand their needs.
- For True staff who deliver similar sessions for PALM workers across Australia, a standout factor in this event was the presence of and important connections built with local services.

- The event was an opportunity for PALM workers to see the police as a friendly and approachable service.
- The team improvised and came up with creative solutions to decorate indoor spaces that were sub-optimal for session delivery.
- The core planning group were approached by a media outlet to cover the event. The request was declined in order to protect the privacy of PALM workers participating in the event.

## What would be done differently

- Consider holding the event on a Friday and Saturday and not Sunday as Sunday is considered a holy day and important day of rest for many PALM workers.
- Provide clearer guidance to guest speakers about how much time they have and key messages to convey. Have a timekeeper to keep sessions running to time. (Quite a lot of time is needed for True's core education sessions).
- Police presence during one of the sessions jeopardised the culturally safe space. Ensure minimal outsiders when delivering sensitive content.
- Consider using a talanoa style format to gather event feedback from PALM workers (as well as current evaluation forms).
- The PALM country liaison officers (CLOs) could be engaged earlier in the planning stages and utilised to relay messages to PALM workers regarding the event. The CLO monthly network meeting could be an opportunity to brief CLOs.

- Some Pacific diaspora organisation members did not attend the event because their request to be reimbursed for their time was not granted. PALM event organisers need to consider if they are over-reliant on the goodwill of diaspora communities and need to be conscious of Pacific cultures regarding reciprocity.
- Events like this need a lot of lead time. It takes time to build momentum and get buy in from Pacific communities (diaspora).
- On the second day, a group of workers attended the church service, got their food and then left through a rear gate without attending the afternoon education sessions or engaging with services. It appeared that these workers had not been properly briefed about the event. Future events should include better engagement with Approved Employers to ensure that they are providing workers with the event information including an expectation that they will attend the education sessions. The space can also be managed better to encourage workers to engage with all aspects of the program (eg close off the rear access).

## Feedback from services

*We were able to find the right balance with the vibe between the serious issues (SGBV) and Pasifika happy vibes. The women said they felt safe.*

True Bilingual Health Educator

*The workers are open when we speak in their own language. We get the message in. It takes time to get the messages across, but after the session, they came forward and asked a lot of questions in Pijin and Bislama.*

True Bilingual Health Educator



*One of my favourite moments was early in the day when I heard the women giggling and laughing in their session. My heart filled as I heard them enjoying themselves. I believe that when people are safe, regulated and having fun, it provides the best opportunity for them to learn and connect with others.*

TSAS staff member

## Feedback from PALM workers

- *I really appreciate the opportunity you guys offer, it's really helpful.*
- *Good content*
- *I really enjoyed the program.*
- *I am very happy about learnt new things about the topic*
- *The presentation was absolutely helpful and relevant in our case. As a foreigner here in Australia, we've learnt a lot and putting these tips into consideration, thanks.*
- *I have learnt more about the program because it my great opportunity.*
- *I learnt a lot, I like this teaching.*
- *It's good to have in both languages, English and Samoan.*
- *Thank you so much for today. I've learn a lot of things, some of the things that I never know of.*  
*Thank you*
- *I've learnt a lot of new things today and I'm very happy to be here, learning new things.*  
*Everything I've learnt today will eventually help me a lot during the future. Keep up the good work and the service. Thank you tumas.*
- *In this session I learn anything new, that's I never known. I'm so happy for learn new things about female body and kind of sick [diseases]. Thank you*
- *I feel more confident to talk more freely about every topic we have been through and it is safe.*
- *The best health learning which should have been held every season*
- *Happy with all the activity*

- *I am happy with all the information. It helps me and my family back in Vanuatu.*
- *I just want to say thank you for this health workshop*
- *This is my biggest opportunity to learn different section of laws and regulations affecting workers coming to work in Australia*

## 4. Discussion and conclusion

The topics that the PALM Worker Wellness Event aimed to address – SGBV and SRHR – are challenging issues within Pacific communities given the endemic levels of violence against women and the sensitive and taboo nature of sexual and reproductive health in the Pacific Islands (Pacific Women Lead 2023, Kelly-Hanku et al 2023).

When delivering services to people of Pacific heritage in Australia, best practices include the creation of genuine partnerships between services and communities, and an understanding of the beliefs and needs of Pacific people to create culturally safe spaces (Kingi et al 2021; Brisbane South Primary Health Network 2020).

The Mareeba PALM Worker Wellness Event was able to navigate these sensitivities and set a new benchmark for PALM health education. It was a multi-stakeholder collaboration where local organisations took the lead however also engaged state and national organisations. Cultural safety was at the heart of every decision and the result was an event where PALM workers felt welcome and learnt new information that will support them with relationships and sexual and reproductive health decision making while they are in Australia.

## References

Brisbane South Primary Health Network 2020, Pasifika and Māori Health and Wellbeing: A Strategic Framework and Action Plan for Brisbane South 2020-2025, <https://pasifikamaorihealthstrategy.org.au/health-strategy>

Kelly-Hanku A, Aggleton P and Malcolm A (Eds) 2023, Sex and Gender in the Pacific: Contemporary Perspectives on Sexuality, Gender and Health, Routledge.

Kingi R, Erick W, Nosa VH, Paynter J and de Silva, D 2021, Pasifika preferences for mental health support in Australia: focus group study. *Pacific Health Dialog*, 21(7), 373-379.

Pacific Women Lead 2023, Thematic brief: Ending violence against women in the Pacific, Pacific Community (SPC), <https://pacificdata.org/data/dataset/pwl-thematic-brief-ending-violence-against-women-in-the-pacific/resource/4cf275c7-ea06-419f-845e-7b49cff21e96>

PALM scheme 2024, PALM scheme data, <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/palm-scheme-data>

# Annex 1 : Event flyer

## PALM WORKER WELLNESS DAY

20th & 21st July 2024  
Mareeba International Club  
10 Vaughan Street, Mareeba

2 hour Education Sessions covering topics:

- Healthy Relationships
- Reproductive Health
- Sexual Health
- Drugs and alcohol
- Mental Health
- Health Insurance

Workers must be registered by their employer to attend

LUCKY DOOR PRIZES

ISLAND FEED

MEET LOCAL SERVICES

PASIFIKA SONG & DANCE

TSAS

nib

Pacific Islands Council of Old Settles

true  
relationships &  
reproductive health



## Annex 2 : Event photos



*Figure 1 PALM workers speak with the local library and other services*



*Figure 2 PALM workers engage with women's support service staff*





*Figure 3 Local police weaving with PALM workers*



*Figure 4 PALM workers engaging with Cairns True staff*





*Figure 5 Coconut scraping competition*



*Figure 6 String band made up of Ni-Van PALM workers*



*Figure 7 Signage for the women's session*



*Figure 8 Display table at the women's session*



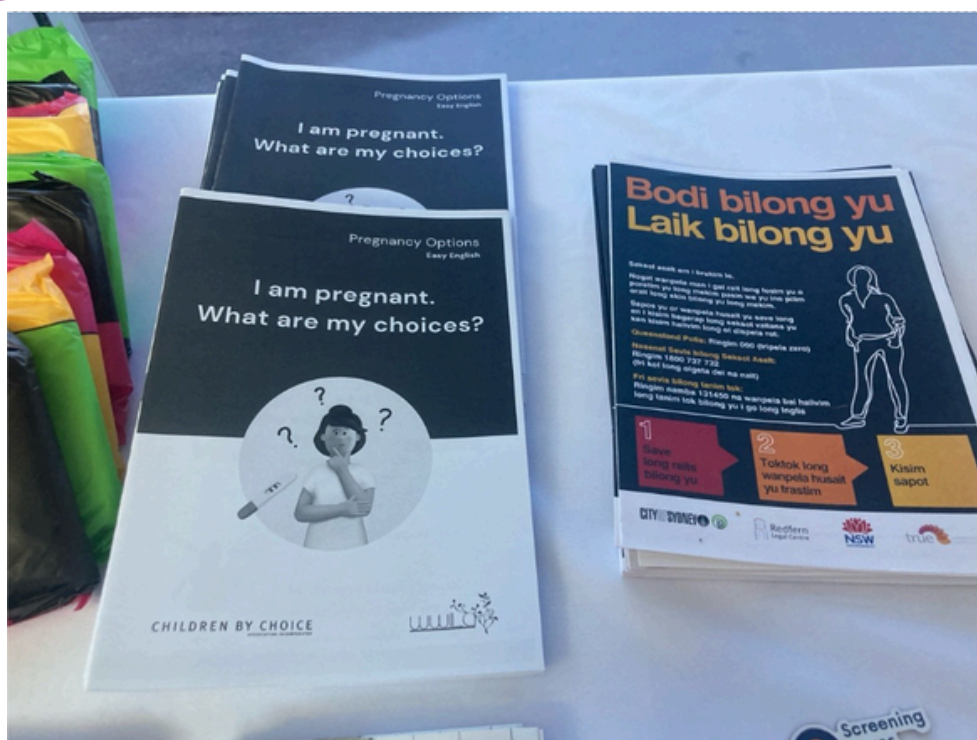


Figure 9 Pregnancy options and sexual assault information (Tok Pisin)



Figure 10 Cervical screening information (Samoan)



*Figure 11 Women's session on healthy relationships*



*Figure 12 Sign for men's session*





Figure 13 Men's session on sexually transmitted diseases



Figure 14 Health insurance role play session by NIB