Edition 25 **May 2024**

primary focus

Partnering to provide perinatal mental healthcare across Queensland

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what's inside

Image on cover: Queensland Health Minister Shannon Fentiman and Mater Executive Director, Regional Health Chris Went in Townsville to announce a partnership to open North Queensland's first perinatal mental healthcare service for mothers and babies.

In this issue

Stay up to date with the latest research, treatments and services with sMater—Mater's podcast by clinicians for clinicians. From breakthroughs in maternal-fetal medicine to the value of live tissue banks and the success of neurological therapies, Mater clinicians discuss advances in surgery techniques, diagnostic tools and digital healthcare. New episodes are uploaded weekly.

sMater A learning community by clinicians for clinicians

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Reconciliation

In the spirit of reconciliation, Mater acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community.

We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

Learn more about our Reconciliation Action Plan at **mater.org.au/rap**

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A message from the Group Chief Executive

Collaboration is key to a *healthier Queensland*

Providing healthcare in the post-COVID world is even more challenging than many clinicians anticipated.

We have seen the financial costs of care jump significantly in both the public and private sectors in the last two years and the number of patients seeking treatment also continues to rise.

These pressures mean public-private partnerships in healthcare are more important than ever.

> **Last year—with the support of the Queensland Government and more than $17 million in community donations—Mater opened Catherine's House for Mothers, Babies and Families at our South Brisbane campus.**

It is Queensland's first and only integrated centre for new mothers experiencing anxiety, depression and other perinatal mental health challenges.

The service's success over the past 12 months in caring for more than 100 in-patient women and their babies led to the announcement earlier this month that Mater and the State Government will partner to expand perinatal mental healthcare across the state.

Through funding from the State Government, Mater will deliver an eight-bed mother and baby perinatal mental healthcare unit at our hospital in Townsville, delivering the only service of its kind to the North Queensland region.

In addition, Mater will provide additional beds at South Brisbane as well as a dedicated mother and baby unit at the new Mater Public Hospital Springfield, currently under construction and expected to open in early 2026.

You can read more about our pioneering perinatal mental health service in the pages ahead, along with other examples of other successful partnerships designed to improve access to healthcare services across the state.

These include the expansion of Mater's eConsultant service which allows GPs to seek direct and prompt guidance for patients from a wide range of Mater specialists.

> **The service delivers better healthcare for regional and remote patients and is being utilised by an ever-growing number of GPs.**

The future of healthcare will present many challenges, but collaboration between health professionals and agencies will provide many of the solutions.

Dr Peter Steer
Group Chief Executive

Mothers and babies

Mater is putting mothers' *mental health first*

Perinatal depression and anxiety is one of the most damaging mental health crises facing Australia today —but Mater is rising to the challenge.

Tegan Luker received care at Catherine's House with her twins, Reuben and Hazel.

It is now a year since Catherine's House for Mother's, Babies and Families—Queensland's first integrated centre for new parents experiencing mental health challenges—opened at Mater's South Brisbane campus in partnership with the State Government.

And now women in Townsville and Springfield are also set to receive expert in-patient care, thanks to an expansion of the successful public-private partnership.

Health Minister Shannon Fentiman announced funding to support the creation of a new in-patient unit at Mater Private Hospital Townsville at the recent Future Townsville health summit.

> **The new eight-bed unit will enable women to remain with their babies while they undergo assessment and receive treatment.**

Ms Fentiman and Mater also announced additional beds in Brisbane, and a dedicated mother-baby unit in Mater Public Hospital Springfield, expected to open in early 2026.

Mother Tegan Luker, 37, knows the importance of specialist perinatal mental health support for new mothers, after she was admitted to Catherine's House following the birth of her twins Reuben and Hazel.

Diagnosed with severe perinatal depression and anxiety, Ms Luker said her seven-week stay at Catherine's House, with her twins by her side, saved her life.

"My mood, thoughts, and behaviour were totally out of character. Everything seemed so overwhelming," she said.

Ms Luker, who is now recovered and enjoying each day of motherhood, is one of 100 women who have received in-patient care at Catherine's House in the past 12 months.

Mater Executive Director, Regional Health Chris Went said the same model of care would be provided at the new units in Townsville and Springfield.

"Suicide remains the leading cause of death for new mothers, with one in five Queensland mums experiencing perinatal mental health challenges in the first year after their baby's arrival," she said.

"Existing services are unable to meet this demand."

Ms Went said Mater had a long history of caring for mothers and baby, along with world-recognised expertise in maternal fetal medicine, neonatology and women's health.

Image left Mater's Chris Went (centre) joined other healthcare leaders at the Future Townsville summit. **Image right** Dedicated perinatal mental heatlhcare at Catherine's House for Mothers, Babies and Families

"Meeting the mental healthcare needs of mums is a natural extension for Mater in caring for women and their babies," she said.

The units at Townsville and Springfield are expected to accept their first patients in 2026.

Image right Mater Private Hospital Townsville's Stephanie Barwick (centre) Health Minister Shannon Fentiman (right) and Townsville University Psychiatry Registrar Dr Kiran Sharma.

How to refer

Refer to Catherine's House

07 3163 2299

CatherinesHouse.Reception@mater.org.au

Watch the Future Townsville highlights

Placenta linked to higher risks for baby boys

A new Mater Research study has found that higher rates of stillbirth and adverse health outcomes in baby boys may be linked to dysfunction in their mother's placenta.

Previous studies have established that male babies face a significantly higher risk than females of stillbirth, as well as premature birth and serious neonatal health problems.

The Mater Research team, based at South Brisbane, examined placental tissue samples from women across Australia who gave birth to smaller than average newborns.

They found evidence that placental dysfunction—which causes babies to receive less oxygen and fewer nutrients—was higher in male babies born between the 10th and 30th birthweight percentiles, but was normal for females in the same range.

Mater Research's Queensland Family Cohort Lead Professor Vicki Clifton said babies affected by placental dysfunction often failed to reach their full growth potential in the womb.

"Babies whose fetal growth has been compromised by placental insufficiency face a greater risk of adverse outcomes, including respiratory distress, asphyxia, stillbirth, neonatal death, and cognitive and neurological deficits and disability as they age," Prof Clifton said.

> **"Our findings provide evidence that small male newborns may be at a greater risk of adverse outcomes than small females due to placental dysfunction."**

Prof Clifton said the placentas of male babies do not adapt to changes and stresses in pregnancy as well those of female babies and that more research is required to fully understand the mechanisms behind this.

The study has been published in the journal Placenta[1], with data analysis by Translational Bioinformatics Research Group Leader Associate Professor Adam Ewing.

A separate Mater Research study published in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (ANZJOG)[2], last year found that male babies have a higher risk of being born preterm and requiring instrumental or caesarean birth than female babies.

The study of more than 130,000 Queensland births found that boys are also at increased risk of mortality and being sicker immediately after birth.

Image Mater Research Queensland Family Cohort Lead Professor Vicki Clifton.

The overall rate of mortality was, however, very low at 0.12% for male infants compared to 0.06% for female babies.

1. Placenta, vol. 149, pp 37-43
2. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, vol. 63, issue 4, pp. 550-555.

Find the Placenta study

Find the ANZJOG study

Health Technology

Surgery revolutionises pancreatic *cancer treatment*

Patients with pancreatic cancer now have access to robotic-assisted Whipple surgery that is saving lives and improving patient outcomes at Mater Private Hospital Brisbane.

The standard Whipple procedure has not radically changed since it was pioneered in the 1940s and is associated with operations of up to eight hours, significant trauma, lengthy hospital stays and extended recovery periods.

However, two Mater surgeons are now completing the procedure using robotic-assisted keyhole surgery at Mater Private Hospital Brisbane to significantly improve the procedure's outcomes.

Data from operations performed by the pair using the da Vinci XI surgical robot shows post-operative mortality rates have more than halved when compared with leading hospitals around the world.

> **"Data from the first 70 robotic-assisted pancreatic cancer surgeries at Mater shows a mortality rate of 1.6 per cent compared with the international best-practice benchmark of 3-6 per cent," Dr Mehan Siriwardhane said.**

Dr Shinn Yeung said the data also shows a reduction in the need for further surgical, endoscopic and radiological interventions, and life-threatening complications, from more than 30 per cent down to 14.5 per cent.

Pancreatic cancer is the third biggest cancer killer in Australia, claiming around 3,500 lives a year, and surgery involves the removal and reattachment of parts of the pancreas, bowel and stomach.

Hafeez Ali Khan, 68, had a large cancer removed from his pancreas using the da Vinci XI and was walking two days after surgery. He is now recovering well with little pain or restriction of movement.

Dr Siriwardhane said it was not necessary to open the patient's entire abdominal wall to perform the Whipple procedure with the da Vinci XI robot.

"Rather, we operate within the abdominal cavity via small incisions improving surgical outcomes and reducing recovery times," he said.

> **"The cuts in the abdomen are measured in millimetres, not centimetres, there's less bleeding, and recovery is much faster."**

Mater has been an early adopter of robotic surgical systems and Mater Private Hospital Brisbane was recently recognised as a Centre of Excellence in Minimally Invasive Surgery by the US-based SRC agency.

Image Mater Private Hospital surgeon Dr Mehan Siriwardhane (left) with patient Hafeez Ali Khan in front of the da Vinci X robot.

Watch the Whipple procedure

How to refer

Dr Mehan Siriwardhane
Specialty: General Surgery
Clinical Interests: Laparoscopic and robotic hepato pancreato biliary surgery

Mater Private Hospital Brisbane

07 3397 2588

Referral information

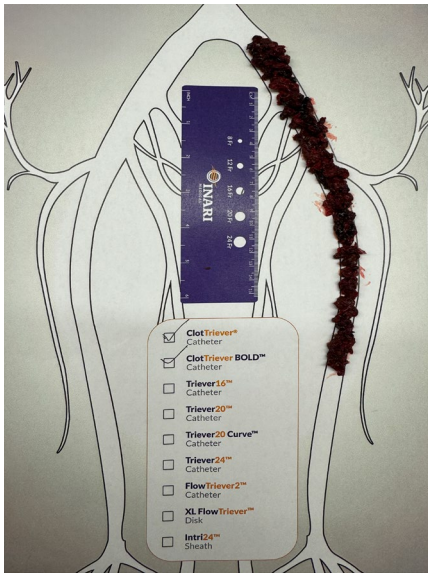
Health Technology

Pioneering procedure to remove blood clots

A 30-centimetre blood clot was removed from a mother's leg just days after she gave birth by caesarean section using a new device that extracted the clot by a 1cm incision.

Mater Vascular Surgeon Dr Danny Hagley pioneered the Inari ClotTriever procedure in Queensland, supported by a multidisciplinary team of specialists.

> **"Without the ClotTriever, this patient would have had significant risk of bleeding from her caesarean section surgery or have to go undergo major open surgery and would have faced a lengthy recovery time," Dr Hagley said.**



"Her surgery was so successful that she was up and walking the next day and out of hospital the same week."

Dr Hagley said the ClotTriever device utilises a metal ring which opposes the edges of the vein connected to a mesh collecting basket.

The basket is inserted directly into the vein and surrounds the clot, which is then safely removed out of the bloodstream.

"She was originally admitted to hospital and treated with standard blood thinners, but unfortunately this did not improve her symptoms," Dr Hagley said.

> **"She had terrible leg swelling and pain, making it impossible for her to even walk to the bathroom."**

He said clot-busting drugs usually used to treat Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) would have threatened her baby's life.

How to refer

Dr Daniel Hagley
Specialty: Vascular Surgery
Mater Hospital Brisbane
07 3831 4499
Referral information

Image top Mater Vascular Surgeon Dr Danny Hagley performed the first Inari ClotTriever procedure in Queensland.
Image left The 30cm Deep Vein Thrombosis Dr Hagley removed using the new ClotTriever device.

Education

GP Education

Register for an upcoming GP Education program with Mater specialists. The sessions deliver updates on the latest evidence and research, as well as important advances and issues related to improving patient outcomes.

Mater Private Hospital Brisbane

Date Tuesday 10 July 2024

Topic Pathways for breast and endocrine cancer treatment— Interactive case study workshop

Venue Level 3, 14 Stratton Street Newstead 4006

How to register

Click the link below to register your interest or phone Mater's Medical Community Engagement Manager, Trudy Braybrook
0447 277 818
Register your interest

Mater Private Hospital Redland

Date Tuesday 23 July 2024

Topic Skin Cancer, General Surgery and General Medicine

Venue TBC

How to register

Click the button below to register your interest or phone Mater's Medical Community Engagement Advisor Carla Kent
0410 252 467
Register your interest

Mater Private Hospital Redland

Glimpse into the future of *eye surgery*

Mater Private Hospital Redland is the first hospital in Australia to commission Bausch + Lomb's new fully digital SeeLuma microscope.

The microscope provides cutting-edge 3D visualisation of the surgical field and enhanced surgical ergonomics, allowing for more complex eye procedures.

Ophthalmic surgeon Dr Sunil Warrier was the first Australian surgeon to use the new technology.

> **"When surgeons can see better, we can perform neater, cleaner surgery and treat more patients sooner," he said.**

"It's allowing us to perform more complex procedures than ever before with improved patient outcomes."

The microscope has capabilities beyond the cataract and glaucoma surgery, with the ability to see behind the eye for intricate ocular nerve and retinal surgery.

Redlands retiree Mal Knight was among the first to undergo cataract surgery supported by the SeeLuma microscope.

"Having Australian-first technology here in the Redlands is spectacular for residents like me," Mr Knight said.

He said his vision hugely improved following the procedure.

"The colours are spectacular—it makes you appreciate what you were missing in colours and clarity," he said.

> **"It's a whole new way of seeing things."**

Image One of the first SeeLuma microscope procedures performed at Mater Private Hospital Redland.

How to refer

Dr Sunil Warrier
Specialty: Ophthalmology
(07) 3488 0770
Referral information

Mater doubles theatre capacity in the Redlands

Two new operating theatres are planned for Mater Private Hospital Redland, expanding local endoscopy, ophthalmology, orthopaedic, urology and other specialist services.

The additional two modular theatres will double the hospital's theatre capacity and deliver an estimated 66 per cent increase in procedural capacity.

Mater Private Hospital Redland General Manager Chris Junge said the additional theatres would allow more complex surgeries to be delivered locally and allow new services to be introduced to the community.

"There is potential to provide telemetry capability enabling growth in cardiac care services," he said.

"And we are looking at introducing low-risk neurosurgery services for the first time in the Redlands, enabling people to receive these procedures close to home."

Mr Junge said the new theatres would also meet the needs of gastroenterologists, complete with the required imaging devices.

"They would be contemporary facilities that would allow surgeons to deliver more complex retinal procedures, low-risk neurosurgery, robotic-assisted orthopaedic surgery and more locally," he said.

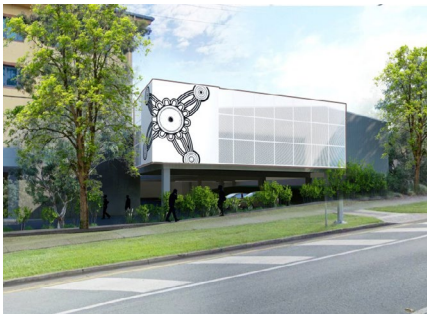


Image An artist's impression of the facade of Mater Private Hospital Redland's new modular theatres.

Mater Pathology

Surge in vaccine-preventable respiratory infections

As we brace for another severe flu season, Mater Pathology Director of Clinical Microbiology, Dr Nikki Townell points out several more respiratory infections are on the rise.

In addition to the usual acute respiratory infections—COVID-19, Influenza and RSV—Dr Townell says 2024 has seen a surge in Mycoplasma pneumonia and Pertussis (Whooping cough) infections.

> **"Year to date, we've seen over a 100 fold increase in Mycoplasma pneumonia presentations, and more than ten times the usual number of Pertussis cases," she says.**

"While a significant proportion of cases indicate transmission is occurring within schools, it is subsequently spreading through the community via close contacts."

In respect to increasing Pertussis notification, Public Health has been very active undergoing contact tracing and identifiying high risk individuals in the community.

Testing and diagnostics

Mater Pathology's respiratory virus panel, Mycoplasma and Pertussis testing routinely deliver results within 24-hours.

It is most important to test high-risk patients such as the elderly, neonates and immuno-suppressed patients, who can present with ongoing and evolving symptoms.

"Symptoms can present differently, depending on their underlying conditions and co-morbidities which make diagnosis difficult without respiratory testing," she said.

"Mycoplasma and Pertussis require specific antibiotic treatment highlighting the need for accurate diagnosis."

What can GPs do?

"It is worthwhile testing for Mycoplasma and Pertussis if patients have been coughing for more than two weeks," Dr Townell says.

Ultimately, she says the surge in outbreaks highlights the importance of vaccination in the community.

This includes seasonal flu vaccine and COVID boosters.

Image Mater Pathology's Director of Clinical Microbiology, Dr Nikki Townell, has seen a surge in Mycoplasma pneumonia and Pertussis (whooping cough).

There is the newly introduced RSV (Arexvy) vaccine for elderly patients.

Pertussis vaccination, which is included in the childhood immunisation schedule, is also recommended for women who are pregnant and for those caring for infants less than six months old.

> **"With vaccine-preventable conditions on the rise—it's no secret that one of our greatest defences is immunisation," she said.**

More information

Dr Nikki Townell
Specialty: Pathology
07 3163 8500

Mater Mothers

Water immersion for Mater mums

Two new birth pools have been installed at Mater Mothers' Hospital Brisbane, providing more mums with the chance to birth their baby underwater.

The new additions bring the total number of birth pools to four at Mater Mothers' South Brisbane campus.

The pools include handrails and a safety seat, improving functionality and safety for women throughout the labour process.

There is also an option to use multi-color LED lighting and Bluetooth connectivity to enable women and families to further customise their birthing experiences.

Warm water immersion in labour can diminish stress hormones (catecholamines) and reduce pain by increasing the body's production of endorphins.

It can also ease muscular tension and help women to relax between contractions.

To have a water birth at Mater Mothers' Hospital, women must meet the below eligibility criteria:

- Ability to provide consent.
- Be in spontaneous labour between 37 and 42 weeks pregnant.
- Be pregnant with one baby only.
- Be pregnant with a baby that is facing head down.
- Pose a low obstetric risk.

First Nations people plan a *healthier future*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare, research and management professionals from across Queensland are co-designing a study with Mater Research aimed at improving health and wellbeing outcomes for First Nations families.

More than 400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people have collaborated with Mater over the past two years in preliminary research that has identified the key healthcare needs of families during pregnancy and the first few years of their babies' lives.

Access to child health, mental health and social and emotional wellbeing services have emerged as key priorities for growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island families.

Project lead, Associate Professor Kym Rae, said findings from the preliminary research would inform the co-design of the longitudinal Strong Families Study.

> **"A key consistent finding is the need for parents to have greater access to social and emotional wellbeing services, and for better access to specialist care that can identify children at risk of poor neurodevelopmental outcomes, like cerebral palsy," Assoc Prof Rae said.**

The Strong Families Study has been funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council and is being co-designed by an indigenous steering committee comprising 30 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who met in Brisbane recently to develop the study protocol together.

"The group agreed that a study that enabled parents to self-refer to social and mental wellbeing support that is culturally appropriate and delivered by a psychologist is a crucial step," Assoc Prof Rae said.

"Ensuring that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare worker can be involved if the parent desires is important for cultural safety for families.

"The psychological support would be provided through telehealth, and this could be done at the parents' local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community healthcare centre if preferred, or in their own home if they feel comfortable and have the technology.

"We will also identify any children at risk of poor neurodevelopmental outcomes, like cerebral palsy, through screening tests, physiotherapists and other health professionals that will form part of this project.

> **"As part of this, the healthcare workers will teach parents how to deliver activities that can support improved outcomes for any children who are in need."**

First Nations families interested in participating in the Strong Families Study can email indigenoushealthresearch@mater.uq.edu.au

Image Associate Professor Kym Rae (second from right) with members of Mater Research's Indigenous Health Research Group.

Mater Health Hub, Springfield

Mater hub is putting women's health first

Women in the Greater Springfield community have access to a suite of new specialist services focused on women's health.

From breastfeeding support to pelvic health physiotherapy, Mater Health Hub, Springfield Manager Amanda Carr said the new services filled gaps in existing healthcare delivery in the region.

"By focusing on women, families and children, we're recognising and responding to gaps and emerging health issues by enabling access to support for their particular health needs," Ms Carr said.

Mater Health Hub, Springfield offers services to support women through pregnancy and beyond, including lactation consultancy, women's health physiotherapy, antenatal and postnatal classes, dietetics and adult psychology.

> **"Supporting women during major health events in their lives, including during pregnancy and after birth, can significantly improve their quality of life and enable them to return to optimal function," Ms Carr said.**

The physiotherapy team offers individual appointments as well as antenatal and postnatal group classes run by an experienced pelvic health physiotherapist.

"We recognise many pregnant women who live in the Springfield region give birth in Brisbane and that driving long distances to attend postnatal appointments with a new baby requires additional time and expense—and sometimes causes unwanted stress," Ms Carr said.

Families counting down to the birth of a child can also participate in First Aid for Babies in the Mater Education wing of the health hub.

Mater Health Hub, Springfield—based at Southern Cross Circuit, Springfield Central—also provides Men's Health Dietetics and Physiotherapy for both pre-and post-prostate cancer surgery recovery.

Learn more here

Maternity services to start in Springfield in 2026

Maternity care in Springfield will be transformed in 2026 with the opening of the new Mater Public Hospital Springfield.

As well as 174 public beds, an Emergency Department and an Intensive Care Unit, the new hospital will also be home to a new maternity service—Mater Mothers' Springfield.

The service will provide personalised support to families from preconception through pregnancy and birth into early motherhood, caring for both private and public patients.

Currently under construction alongside Mater Private Hospital Springfield, the new birthing and maternity facility will offer antenatal care, birthing suites, postnatal care, neonatal care and lactation consultation services.

The facility will include 20 spacious maternity rooms, six birthing suites (including two pools for water births), 16 special care neonatal cots and a Pregnancy Assessment Centre (PAC).

The PAC will deliver around-the-clock experienced and compassionate guidance and care from the very beginning of pregnancy until six weeks after birth.

The construction and delivery of Mater Public Hospital Springfield is the result of a landmark partnership between Mater and the Queensland Government.

Digital Health

GPs get more specialist support via *eConsultant*

Mater's eConsultant service for GPs has expanded, with access now available to specialists across eight different specialities.

eConsultant enables GPs to request advice from a Mater specialist who then reviews the request and responds with information on treatment, management, monitoring and diagnosis.

More than 350 patients living in rural and remote areas of Queensland have accessed the service through their GPs.

The average time for an eConsultant to respond to a GP request is two days, with patients avoiding specialist wait lists and face-to-face visits in 87 per cent of cases.

Queensland GPs now have access to timely specialist advice for patients needing care across:

- Obstetric medicine
- Cardiology
- Dermatology
- Endocrinology
- Respiratory and sleep medicine
- Renal medicine
- Neurology
- Infectious diseases.

Image Director of Obstetric Medicine at Mater Mothers' Hospital, Dr Jo Laurie

Mt Isa GP Dr Jos Pouesi has accessed the program to obtain clinical advice for First Nations patients and said timely feedback from specialists has been extremely useful.

> **"Having an expert available within a 24-hour period through eConsultant may help reduce anxiety for an Indigenous patient, as well as the treating doctor," Dr Pouesi said.**

Mater Director of Obstetric Medicine Dr Jo Laurie provides specialist advice to regional and rural GPs through the eConsultant program.

"We already practice a fair amount of telehealth and digital health, so we know we can provide that very high-level care without having to see the patient in person," Dr Laurie said.

"This is a really important service for ensuring people who live in regional and rural Queensland receive specialty care."

Learn more about Mater eConsultant program here

Mater at Home Direct eases the pressure on EDs

A partnership between Mater and Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) is helping to reduce avoidable ED presentations and ambulance ramping.

The Mater at Home Direct service has been piloted within a 40km radius of Mater's South Brisbane health campus since July 2022.

The Mater at Home Direct team receives referrals directly from the QAS Clinical Hub, providing an alternative care pathway for low acuity Triple Zero callers who can be assessed and managed in their own homes.

Mater at Home Direct then provides a comprehensive in-home, face-to-face nursing assessment with medical input via telehealth or in-person, based on acuity.

The pilot's outcomes show that over 80 percent of patients had their care substituted in the home and avoided transfer to the hospital.

The most commonly presenting patient complaints include catheter malfunction, infection follow-up and wound management.

The service has so far reviewed 595 patients and continues to increase capacity.

Nine out of 10 patients treated by Mater at Home Direct rated the quality of treatment and care as 'very good.'

The service is also open to referrals from all clinicians, including general practice, and is available for all patients who are safe enough to be managed at home.

Image Mater at Home Direct provides comprehensive in-home nursing assessments for low acuity Triple Zero callers.

Learn more about Mater at Home services

Mental Health

Midwives trained to *identify eating disorders*

An Australian-first trial run by Mater is training midwives to identify the signs of eating disorders in pregnant and post-partum mothers.

Image Dr Grace Branjerdporn and her team are on a mission to help midwives better identify the warning signs of eating disorders in pregnant and post-partum mothers.

Dr Grace Branjerdporn, Research Team Leader at Catherine's House for Mothers, Babies and Families, said before and after birth were high-risk times for mothers to develop an eating disorder.

Dr Branjerdporn said the signs of eating disorders, such as nausea, vomiting and decreased or increased appetite, often matched common signs and behaviour in pregnancy.

"The perinatal period can trigger the development of an eating disorder for the first time or may aggravate a pre-existing condition," Dr Branjerdporn said.

The trial, called Eating disorders in the peripartum: Creation and evaluation of an online module for health professionals and peer workers, is funded by a $25,000 grant from the Australian Eating Disorders Research Institute and will deliver training to better equip staff to recognise the signs of eating disorders.

Dr Branjerdporn said asking pregnant women about eating disorders should be a prerequisite when taking their patient history.

Mater Research

Queensland research team targets ovarian *cancer vaccine*

Mater Research is spearheading the development of a ground-breaking vaccine to treat ovarian cancer thanks to a $670,000 Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation (OCRF) grant.

Ovarian cancer claims the lives of around 1,000 Australian women each year and is the deadliest gynaecological cancer, with a five-year survival rate of 49%.

Professor Kristen Radford, of Mater Research and The University of Queensland, said the vaccine would be used to treat active cases of ovarian cancer and not as a preventative tool.

The vaccine will target 'dendritic' cells, which are key to the body's immune system.

"Ovarian cancer is very challenging to treat because it comprises over thirty distinct disease types, many of which don't respond to conventional chemotherapy and standard care protocols," Prof Radford said.

> **"In ovarian cancer patients, the dendritic cells are somewhat dysfunctional, which might help explain why, to date, ovarian cancer hasn't responded to immunotherapy as well as other cancers."**

The grant will enable Professor Radford's team to investigate which molecules on dendritic cells can be targeted to train the immune system to more effectively fight ovarian cancer.

Mater is the leading treatment and research centre for ovarian cancer in Queensland, treating around 130 of the 285 women who are diagnosed with the disease in the state each year.

Image Professor Kristen Radford is part of the Mater Research team spearheading the development of an ovarian cancer vaccine.

Trialling new treatments

A new diagnostic and treatment approach for bladder cancer will undergo a clinical trial in Queensland.

Led by Mater Research and The University of Queensland's Honorary Professor John Hooper, the trial will use technology that is theranostic—combining diagnostic imaging with targeted treatment.

"It will make cancerous tumour cells more easily identifiable on a scan to inform, target and personalise treatments," he said.

> **"We hope that the imaging will successfully detect bladder cancer by homing in on a particular protein."**

Around 570,000 people are diagnosed with bladder cancer worldwide each year and a significant proportion develop an advanced and aggressive form of the disease.

The trial has been funded by a Medical Research Future Fund grant.

Image Mater Research Professor John Hooper and his team are bringing a new diagnostic and treatment approach for bladder cancer to market.

Drug trial patient defies lung cancer odds

Ipswich grandmother Jan Mundt was diagnosed with stage four lung cancer and given less than a year to live in 2018.

However, her participation in a clinical trial run by Mater Research has allowed her to defy the odds.

Originally presenting to her GP with chest pain, an X-ray later revealed a 6.5cm tumour on Mrs Mundt's lung.

Following a biopsy, Mrs Mundt was referred to an expert panel at Mater Hospital Brisbane, consisting of oncologists and cancer researchers.

She took part in the trial which involved two immunotherapy drugs for lung cancer and, over the next 15 months, the tumour shrunk to 5cm.

Mrs Mundt, 64, has recently entered a second immunotherapy trial which is training her immune system to recognise and seek out cancer cells.

Mater Cancer Care Centre Director of Medical Oncology Dr Vikram Jain said the treatment was the first in Australia to use combined immunotherapy for lung cancer.

> **"Lung cancer treatment has come a long way in the last six years—and much of that is down to the success of clinical trials and the participation of patients like Jan," Dr Jain said.**

Lung cancer is Australia's biggest cancer killer, claiming an estimated 8,690 lives each year, with a five-year survival rate of just 24 per cent.

Monday 20 May was International Clinical Trials Day, held to mark the beginning of the very first clinical trial by Royal Navy surgeon James Lind in 1774.

Mater Research, based at Mater's South Brisbane health campus, is currently supporting more than 200 clinical trials across areas including cancer, neurology and women and babies' health.

Dr Jain said clinical trials are essential to cancer care and give clinicians the ability to treat patients with some of the newest and most innovative cancer treatments.

> **"The increased cancer survival rates we see today are because of access to trials, and from successful trials becoming the standard of care," Dr Jain said.**

Mater Research clinical trials in a range of therapeutic areas including:

- Maternal and Neonatal Health
- Medical and Gynaecological Oncology
- Neuroscience
- Respiratory Disease
- Infection and Haematology
- Liver Disease
- Metabolic Medicine
- Intensive Care
- Surgery.

Clinical trials are an essential component of healthcare, providing the evidence to evaluate the safety and efficacy of new treatments and diagnostics, and provide alternative treatment options for patients with unmet needs.

At Mater, we're dedicated to providing top-quality healthcare by offering patients the chance to participate in clinical trials. These trials are vital for transforming scientific discoveries into exceptional patient care and outcomes.

Learn more about Mater clinicial trials ›

Our Mater Network

Operating the largest not-for-profit network of public and private hospital and healthcare services in the state, Mater brings together collective expertise across health, education, and research, with a shared vision of empowering people to live better lives through improved health and wellbeing.

Mater Health comprises all our hospitals and healthcare services across Queensland. These services combine to help Mater offer comprehensive healthcare which meets identified community need.

Mater Education is a nationally accredited, hospital-based independent Registered Training Organisation—the only one of its kind in Queensland. It offers a range of courses for students, through to highly experienced practising clinicians.

Mater Research is an internationally recognised leader in medical research, which connects its findings from bench to bedside—translating medical research into clinical practice to deliver better outcomes for our patients and the wider community.

Mater Foundation raises funds by engaging people and businesses to partner with Mater to improve health through a wide range of fundraising and philanthropy.

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