

EMBARGOED UNTIL 8.45am on Tuesday 14 May 2024

14 May 2024

St John of God Health Care announces plans for a scheduled closure of its Bunbury private maternity services

St John of God Health Care has today announced the closure of its maternity service at St John of God Bunbury Hospital from 25 June 2024.

The difficult decision has been made due to ongoing challenges in delivering private obstetric care in the regional community.

The service has experienced a chronic shortage of employed midwives and decreasing availability of obstetricians, GP-obstetricians and paediatricians locally, and an overall decline in demand for private maternity services at the hospital.

St John of God Bunbury Hospital Chief Executive Officer Jeffrey Williams said a comprehensive review of the service was undertaken last year and discussions with local obstetricians, GP obstetricians, and midwives have been ongoing.

"Whilst we have implemented a number of changes over the last 12 months to ensure we continue to maintain safe and high quality care maternity services, unfortunately, through the review we have been unable to identify any sustainable models of care that would enable the service to continue for the foreseeable future," he said.

"Our priority is to now support the safe transition of maternity care for women who were planning to birth at our hospital, and we are working closely with our colleagues at Bunbury Regional Hospital to support any increased demand for their services."

We have consulted Bunbury Regional Hospital on the scheduled closure and we will work closely with them to support throughout the transition period.

A range of personalised information and support is being provided to women who were booked to have their babies at St John of God Bunbury Hospital. This includes transitioning their care to public hospitals, with the option to be treated as private patients and cared for by their chosen obstetrician, or transferred to one of our private hospitals in Perth.

"We are extremely proud of the maternity services we have offered at Bunbury for more than 84 years, and we know this announcement will disappoint our patients, their families, the wider community, and impact our caregivers and doctors," Jeffrey said.

"It has been a very difficult decision to make given the long history but patient safety is our number one priority in considering the future of clinical services and ultimately this has been the deciding factor."

Over the next six weeks, all of St John of God Bunbury Hospital doctors, midwives and nurses will be supported through this change. Where possible, impacted caregivers will be

offered re-deployment within St John of God Bunbury Hospital or at our Perth-based maternity services.

During this period, St John of God Bunbury Hospital will maintain its existing arrangements to manage some of the current challenges, including bypass arrangements with Bunbury Regional Hospital for expectant women who go into spontaneous labour overnight.

St John of God Health Care Chief Operating Officer Ben Edwards said the organisation remained committed to the south west region.

“We want to reassure the south west community that St John of God Bunbury Hospital is not closing and all other services continue as normal,” he said.

“We are working to reposition Bunbury for the future and we are in active discussions about what this will look like going forward.”

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About St John of God Health Care

St John of God Health Care is one of the largest Catholic providers of health care services in Australia. Established in Western Australia in 1895, we are a not-for-profit private health care group and a ministry of the Catholic Church.

We employ more than 17,000 caregivers, operate 27 facilities comprising more than 3,300 beds in Australia and New Zealand, as well as home nursing, disability services and social outreach programs.