

# THE HUMOUR FOUNDATION™


*Laughter is the best medicine!*



## Annual Report 2023

# Contents

About The Humour Foundation	03
Message from the Chair	04
Message from the CEO	05
Year in Review	06
Our Impact	08
The Clown Doctors	11
Laughter Care	15
Evidence-informed Practice	19
Board of Directors and Governance	21
Financial Summary	22
Acknowledgements	24

Distraction therapy is vital in reducing pain and anxiety in children and parents. Quite simply – when the patient is calm and connected to the playful antics of the Clown Doctors, our job becomes easier, allowing us to concentrate more on the procedure. 

– Kristen Storey  
Nurse, Queensland Children's Hospital

# About The Humour Foundation

The Humour Foundation is a national charity dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of vulnerable Australians. Our vision is to bring laughter and connection where it is unexpected, yet most needed.

Co-founded in 1996 by the late Dr Peter Spitzer, it draws on international research that reveals the physiological and psychological benefits of humour therapy to relieve fear, pain and the ill-effects of social isolation. This includes the:

**Cognitive effect** (distraction from medical procedures)

**Physiological effect** (the release of endorphins that stimulate the immune system, lower heart rate and blood pressure and reduce pain)

**Social effect** (improving social interaction between the performer and child/resident)

**Emotional effect** (inducing positive emotions and reducing anxiety).

Our two core programs involve purpose-trained performers collaborating with medical and healthcare professionals:

**Clown Doctors** (established 1997) – benefits children and young people in hospital and palliative care.

**Laughter Care** (established 2011) – benefits older adults in residential aged-care facilities, who are socially isolated and/or living with dementia and/or palliative.

Both programs are multi-faceted, positively impacting families, carers and healthcare staff.

The Humour Foundation is Australia's only organisation that provides

medical clowning programs. Our work relies on the support of philanthropic organisations, corporate donors and generous individuals to service 21 hospitals, 1 hospice nationally and 21 residential aged-care facilities in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

## Our Vision

To bring laughter and connection where it is unexpected, yet most needed.

## Our Mission

To enhance wellbeing, lift spirits, and improve health through insightful connection, creative play, and joyful humour.

## Our Impact and Beneficiaries



Children



Older adults



Carers



Staff

## Our Values



Respect

We uphold respect for ourselves, others and the work that we do



Compassion

We connect with kindness, empathy, and sensitivity to make a lasting impact



Optimism

We are solution focused, resilient and open to new ideas and opportunities



Creativity

Creativity is at the core of what we do. Playfulness nurtures our creativity, and we approach our work with imagination, curiosity and inventiveness.

<sup>1</sup>Sridharan, K – Therapeutic clowns in paediatrics: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials, 2016



# Message From Our Chair



‘The Humour Foundation’s work continues to grow and with it has come an expanding audience seeking to connect and engage with us.’

It has been another successful year for The Humour Foundation with much to celebrate over the past 12 months. This year saw the organisation mark its 25th birthday, a major milestone for any charity to achieve and something we are all proud of reaching. We also launched the inaugural Peter Spitzer Scholarship in honour of our late co-founder. The scholarship will be awarded annually, providing staff and performers the opportunity to expand their skills and share their knowledge to benefit our healthcare clowning work.

Despite the pandemic being disruptive, it required us to think more broadly about how we engage with people around us and continues to demonstrate to us the importance of human connection.

Seeds planted during the pandemic came to life and the Board and I have been encouraged to see a broader application of our organisational principles by way of new program pilots and a growing social enterprise

business including delivering paid workshops to medical professionals. Interest in, and awareness of, The Humour Foundation’s work continues to grow and with it has come an expanding audience seeking to connect and engage with us. Through this work, we have diversified our revenue so that seven per cent of our total income now comes from fee for service program delivery, with plans to continue to grow this revenue over the coming years.

Like all Australians, we were confronted by the findings from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. These findings affirmed the importance of a holistic definition of ‘care’ — something that our Laughter Care program has been built upon since its beginning. Over the year we welcomed several aged care providers committed to the expansive definition of care. Aligning with our vision and mission, we continue to work collaboratively with providers to improve the healthcare

experience for people living with dementia and upskill their staff with techniques to increase engagement with their residents.

This year also saw the departure of our long-standing CEO Tony Warner, after five and a half years of dedicated service to our cause. On behalf of my fellow Board members, performers and staff I would like to sincerely thank Tony for his passion, warmth and leadership and wish him all the very best in his future endeavours.

To each of our financial supporters, volunteers, my fellow Board members, performers and staff, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude for another productive year as we seek to bring laughter where it is unexpected, yet most needed.

  
**Rebecca Ong**  
Board Chair

# Message From Our CEO



‘As an organisation, we have placed a strong focus on research, to grow our evidence base and articulate the value of medical clowning.’

The 2023 financial year has been a year of application and validation. We continued to investigate new markets to deliver our programs and pursue opportunities to measure both the qualitative and quantitative impact our programs have provided for our beneficiaries.

It is fitting we celebrated our 25th anniversary with our largest fundraising year to date, raising \$5.5m through the determination and persistence of our fundraising and marketing team. My congratulations and thanks go to each of them.

Through our relationship with Associate Professor Amy Gray and the Education Hub at Royal Children’s Hospital in Melbourne, we developed and delivered targeted workshops for a variety of medical professionals, including junior doctors. These workshops explore the Humour Foundation’s principles of connection and rapport, incorporating a range of techniques attendees can practise with each other. Regular delivery of these workshops has led to the formation of new relationships


with other hospitals, including the Australian National University requesting we deliver a workshop series to their body of medicine students. Continued investment in improving patient health care outcomes by building the skills of the next generation of doctors aligns strongly with our strategic plan. My thanks to Clare Bartholomew and Phoebe Mason for their assistance in developing the content for these workshops.

As an organisation, we have placed a strong focus on research, to grow our evidence base and articulate the value of healthcare clowning. It has been delightful to observe our Artistic Director, David Symons invited to speak at a range of conferences and seminars, as well as research being published in several publications. This has helped increase awareness and has provided new opportunities for future research collaborations and outcome measurements.

One of the most memorable experiences of the year was being contacted by the Jongno Foundation for Arts and

Culture. Based in Seoul, South Korea, the foundation is seeking to establish a medical clowning organisation and travelled to Australia to learn from The Humour Foundation about our governance structure, fundraising and marketing strategy. Several Korean actors also attended and took part in a two-day clowning workshop lead by David Symons with the help of Paul Wilson (Dr Silly Billy) and Andy McDonell (Dr Toot). It was an honour to share our expertise with our guests knowing that children in South Korea would benefit from the experience. We will continue to stay connected and follow their progress.

Thank you to everybody who helped make this year such a success; our donors, staff members, volunteers and performers all working towards a common goal. The recipe for success requires all these ingredients.

  
**Tony Warner**  
Chief Executive Officer

# Year in Review

With the help of our generous supporters, we continued to build on the breadth and depth of our work to maximise our impact at hospitals and aged care facilities.

In FY23 over 251,000 children, aged care residents, carers and staff benefited from our work, in 21 hospitals, one hospice and 21 residential aged care facilities around Australia. We welcomed eight new Clown Doctors and Laughter Care performers to our community and delivered over 2,751 visits nationally, representing a return to pre-COVID visits delivered.

## Hospital collaborations

An exciting and innovative pilot program with Perth Children's Hospital in its Plastics and Fractures Outpatient Clinics was launched, reflecting the significant value of Clown Doctors involvement with therapeutic teams. For the first time in Western Australia, Perth Clown Doctors have been embedded into a hospital clinic team, visiting twice a week, to improve patient experience and foster a positive environment. A knowledge exchange in both directions was integral with Clown Doctors sharing their expertise in patient engagement and diversion with hospital staff. Overwhelmingly positive feedback sets the stage for us to continue to leverage our work in other outpatient clinics and clinical areas nationally.

## Indigenous connections

Our Western Australian Clown Doctor team was invited to attend their third Desert Dust Up Festival after a COVID pause. An annual event held in the remote Indigenous town of Warakurna in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, the festival

brings together seven schools in a celebration of performance, sport, community, and culture. The Clown Doctors bridge the gap between hospitals and remote communities – encouraging confidence, raising awareness about our hospital presence and bringing fun, laughter and performance opportunities. This year, the Clown Doctors reported the children's involvement in their performances has grown, and they now participate in storytelling, circus demonstrations, and even singing original songs.

## Adapting to need

In South Australia we successfully adapted our Laughter Care program to a hospital environment, supporting patients over 65 years at Flinders Medical Centre. Normally delivered in residential aged care facilities, this 'hybrid' format of the program is a first for The Humour Foundation – enabling Clown Doctors and Laughter Care performers to visit paediatric wards in the mornings and geriatric wards in the afternoons, utilising their skills in two very different circumstances.

## Laughter Care expansion

Generous grant funding enabled the successful delivery of Laughter Care for the first time in Queensland across two residential aged-care facilities in Bli Bli and Lawnton, bringing together medicine and the arts to improve the quality of life of aged care residents in a unique, person-centric way.

## Mental health support

In New South Wales, targeted funding for mental health enabled us to focus on this growing area of need at The Sydney Children's Hospital. Hospitalisations for mental health conditions has been steadily increasing over the past decade and we are proud to be at the forefront of seeking how medical clowning can help. Collaborative research from our work at Stepping Stones, an inpatient mental health unit in Victoria, revealed 96% of clinical staff thought Clown Doctors were beneficial to young people in mental health wards; and that adolescents reported heightened levels of fun, mood and feeling following a visit. The Clown Doctors also visit the mental health ward at the Sunshine Coast University Hospital.

## Supporting nurses

After a successful presentation on our work in procedural distraction at a pain management study day for nurses at The Royal Children's Hospital in Victoria, we have continued developing a partnership with the hospital's Code Grey Team with the goal of assisting the team in their work to pre-empt situations of physical violence. While in Tasmania, Clown Doctors were invited to participate in a presentation at Launceston General Hospital, encouraging nurses to specialise in paediatrics.

## International recognition

In FY23, the significant impact of our work with the Victorian Forensic Paediatric Medical Service was published in the UK Journal, *Child Abuse Review*. A collaboration with The Royal Children's Hospital in Victoria, this pilot program involves Clown Doctors supporting children during examinations for suspected physical abuse or neglect. Clown Doctors are required to draw on a wide range of skills as they focus on the unique needs of each child throughout the process, which can take up to four hours. Working in partnership with medical and nursing staff their aim is to reduce fear and anxiety and even bring moments of joy in what can be stressful and confronting situations. The accompanying research of the pilot reveals that 96% of carers believed the Clown Doctors improved their child's willingness to cooperate with the examination, 89% of children felt positive about coming back to the hospital after meeting the Clown Doctors and 96% of paediatricians believed that the Clown Doctors helped to reduce the child's feelings of fear, tension or apprehension. Plans to scale the program are underway with a view to rolling out the program further at Monash Children's Hospital in FY24.

## Building our skills

Sharing skills and knowledge is critical for ongoing development. A visit from Pedro Fabiao, a master Clown Doctor trainer from Portugal, enabled targeted workshops for all our performers nationally, to hone new humour therapy skills. While one of our performers, Emilie Bloom (Dr Fizzy Whizzy), headed to Israel to be mentored by Dr Shoshi of Israel's Dream Doctors.

## Training for doctors

The value and expertise of our purpose-trained performers extends beyond the patient wards. In Victoria, Clown Doctors for Medical Doctors pilot workshops were held at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne with a goal of improving the capacity for healthcare staff to develop effective therapeutic relationships. The workshops were developed in response to a PhD finding that Clown Doctors were highly skilled at quickly developing connection with patients and families.

## Training for carers

Our Laughter Care work in Canberra led to discussions with Carers ACT – a member-based organisation providing support to unpaid carers. After approaching The Humour Foundation to provide training for their staff and carers, we delivered our Playfulness in Care workshop, where we shared principles and techniques for those caring for people with dementia at home. Planning is now underway to continue delivering these workshops for carers and staff next year.





# Our Impact

In FY23, The Humour Foundation commissioned new social return on investment (SROI) reports for the Clown Doctors and Laughter Care programs.

The **Clown Doctors** SROI report focuses on our work in clinical spaces and builds on an earlier 2015 report of our broader work in hospitals.

The 2015 SROI report found that when the Clown Doctors program is delivered in a **broad range of hospital spaces**, an investment of \$1 returns \$4.20 of social benefit to the community.



The 2022 SROI report found that when the Clown Doctors program is delivered in **specialist clinics**, an investment of \$1 returns \$9.90 of social benefit to the community.



Using the 2015 social return on investment calculation, The Clown Doctors program delivered over **\$20,608,500** in value nationally in FY23.

The **Laughter Care** SROI report is a three-year forecast of the future benefits.

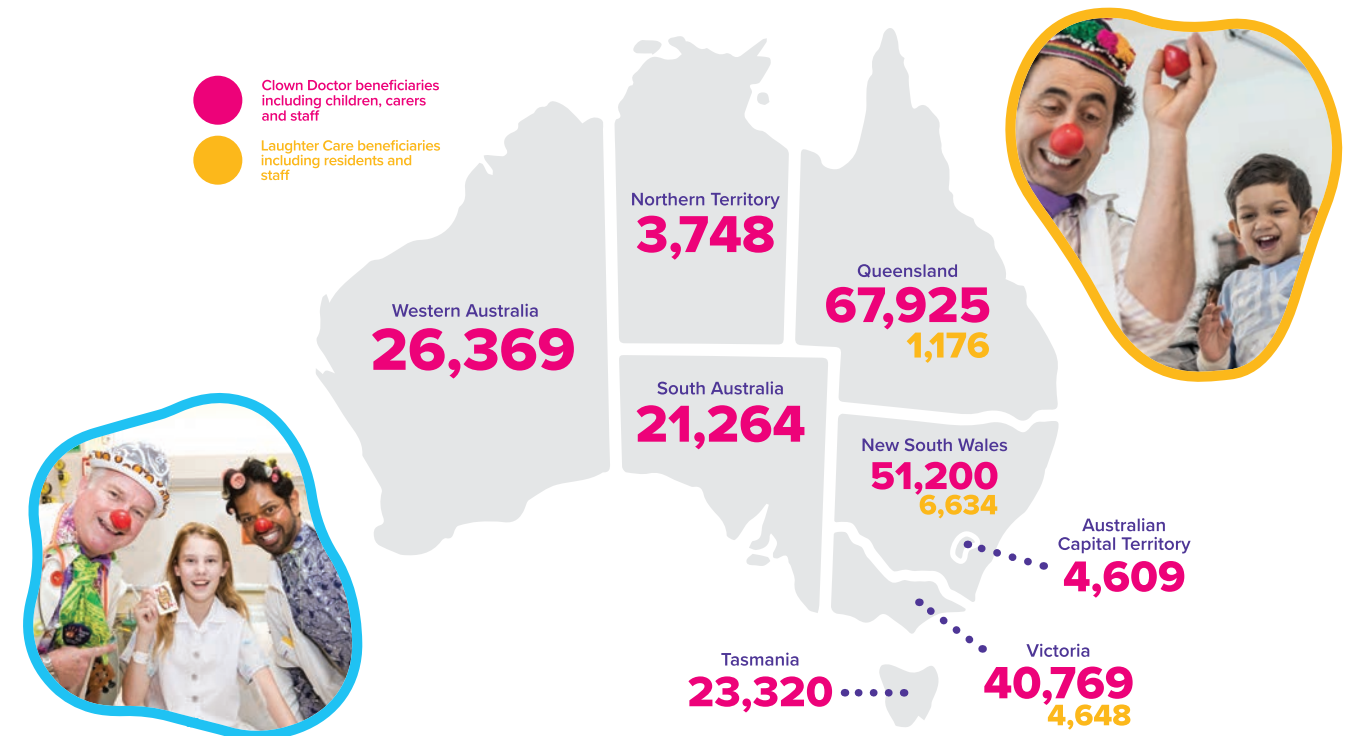


The 2022 SROI report found that an investment of \$1 in the Laughter Care program would return \$4.20 of social and economic value by generating positive outcomes for aged care facility residents, their families and facility staff.

Your support helped us bring laughter where it is unexpected, yet most needed.



## You are making a difference



## We brought laughter and joy around Australia





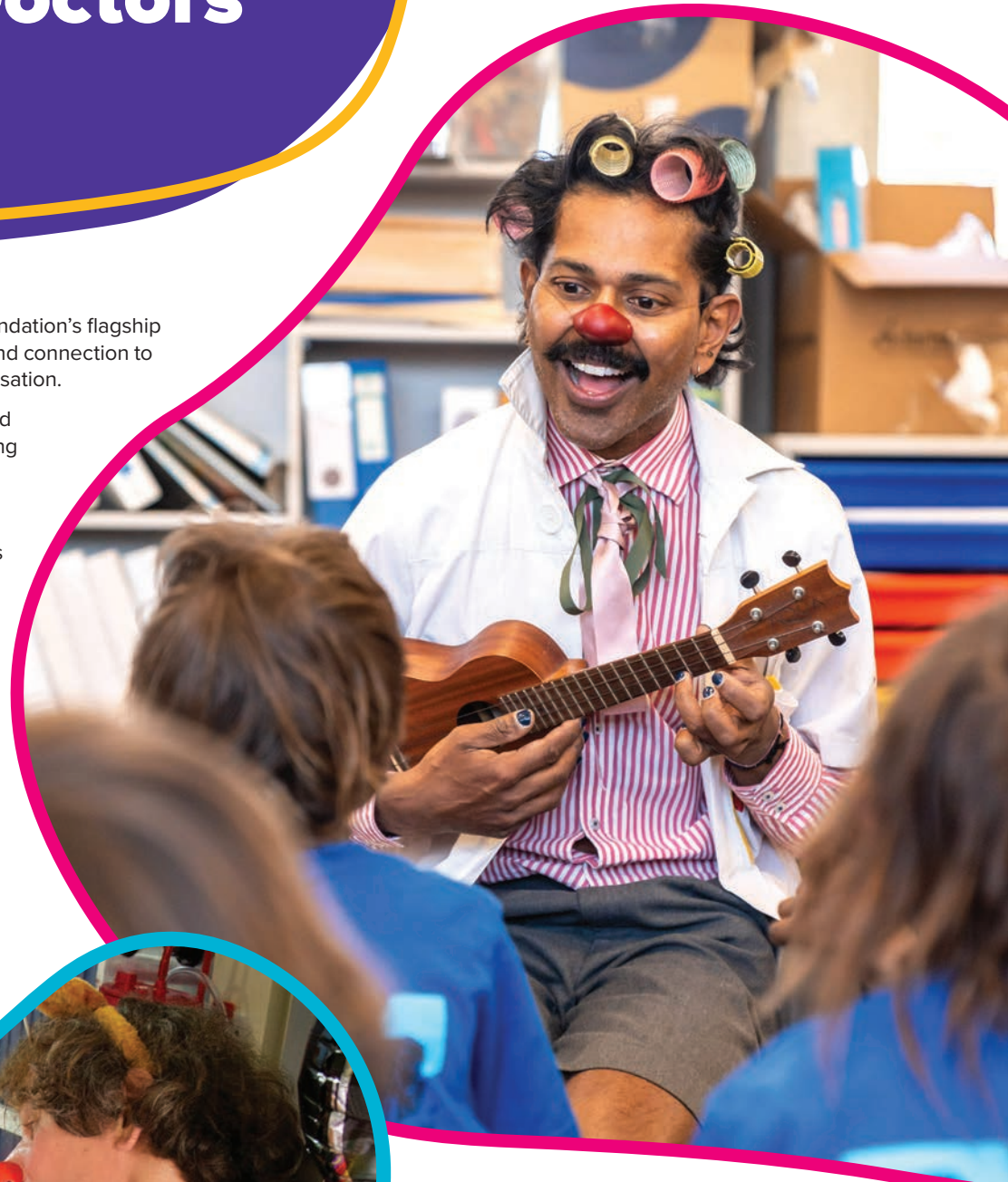


# Clown Doctors

Clown Doctors is The Humour Foundation's flagship program – bringing joy, laughter, and connection to children facing illness and hospitalisation.

Our highly skilled team of dedicated performers engage, and uplift young patients and carers, while working in partnership with medical professionals to alleviate the emotional and psychological stress that often accompanies a child's stay in hospital.

Through ongoing support, we can continue to improve the healthcare experience for children, carers and hospital staff across Australia.



“I really hope it is recognised just how significant the Clown Doctors are to a child's treatment journey. It is absolutely invaluable; the kindness and laughter that they have brought to both our daughters' lives during such a horrible time. I really cannot express our gratitude enough!”

- Sheridan, parent



## The Clown Doctors program uses evidence-informed humour therapy to improve quality of life for children, young people and their families during hospital visits.

The hospital experience can be traumatic:

- children may be scared due to unfamiliar surroundings, separation from family and fearful of treatment.
- hospital staff may struggle to treat highly distressed children of all ages
- families can suffer chronic stress in witnessing their child's pain/anxiety
- anxiety may be heightened for families/children from Indigenous or non-English speaking backgrounds

### How the Clown Doctors help

Clown Doctors are purpose-trained to collaborate with medical and healthcare professionals in a sensitive hospital environment. They address both physiological and psychological needs – distracting sick or frightened children, empowering long-term patients, encouraging resilience, providing respite for anxious parents and supporting hospital staff. Clown Doctors build connection, responding to the needs of the child at that time. This may take the form of silliness and humour, but it may also be gentle play or a soft lullaby.

Clown Doctors work in pairs and are usually at a hospital or palliative care centre for five hours. Each visit includes communication with healthcare staff to ensure patients most in need benefit. It is not uncommon for repeat medical appointments to be scheduled around Clown Doctor visits.

### Benefits

- children are empowered and distracted during procedures, long hospital stays and repeat treatments, turning a fearful, stressful experience into a positive one.
- families and carers experience respite and stress relief from witnessing the illness, pain or anxiety of their child during a hospital stay.
- hospital staff have support to treat highly distressed children which enables greater efficiencies during treatment.
- the program transcends cultural backgrounds through laughter, music, play and drawing.

The Clown Doctors program is provided at no-cost to the hospitals we visit. It relies entirely on philanthropic support.

The program is represented in every state and territory nationally and is currently running in 21 hospitals and 1 palliative care facility.



## The Clown Doctors Program Logic

### ISSUES

- Hospitals can be traumatic for children
- Hospital staff may struggle to treat highly distressed children
- Families can suffer chronic stress in witnessing the illness, pain, or anxiety of their child during illness or a hospital stay
- Children can feel a loss of control
- Children may be fearful of separation from family, home and friends
- Siblings of sick or hospitalised children can feel a sense of guilt that they are healthy

### INPUTS

- Clown Doctors are highly trained performers working with children primarily in pediatric hospitals
- Performers receive ongoing expert supervision, support and professional development
- Long term partnerships with hospitals and hospices nationally
- Strong international history of medical clowning
- Child Safe Certification through Australian Childhood Foundation
- Research and evidence
- Experienced board, management and staff

### OUTPUTS

- Clown Doctors use humour to playfully parody the medical system
- Children are distracted during painful procedures
- Assist in examinations and procedures including burns, pathology and emergency
- Accept referrals and take direction from hospital clinicians and allied health acting as an additional support to these roles
- Visit 22 pediatric hospitals or hospices nationally



### OUTCOMES

Children	Families	Hospitals
<p><b>SHORT TERM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reduced emotional distress associated with pain during procedures</li> <li>● Hospital is normalised</li> <li>● Express themselves through laughter, smiles and active engagement</li> </ul>	<p><b>SHORT TERM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Less distress where a child is able to tolerate pain or discomfort</li> <li>● Respite</li> <li>● The whole family can participate in the fun</li> </ul>	<p><b>SHORT TERM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Children are distracted during painful procedures reducing the need for anesthetics</li> <li>● Staff supported in their work through referrals and reliable clinic attendance</li> </ul>
<p><b>MEDIUM/LONG TERM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reduced emotional distress associated with pain during procedures</li> <li>● Hospital is normalised</li> <li>● Express themselves through laughter, smiles and active engagement</li> </ul>	<p><b>MEDIUM/LONG TERM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reduced anxiety and stress during ongoing or repeated treatment</li> <li>● Increased ability to cope</li> <li>● Create positive memories of a traumatic time</li> </ul>	<p><b>MEDIUM/LONG TERM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Less stress as children are happier to return for ongoing treatment</li> <li>● Hospital environment is transformed through humour and a sense of community</li> </ul>



### IMPACT

Hospitals are less threatening and medical procedures are less traumatic, resulting in an improved healthcare experience for children, families and staff



## A dose of laughter from the Clown Doctors supports teen mental health

In the waiting room of the Emergency Department at the Women's & Children's Hospital in Adelaide, Kerry\* and her daughter sat in despair.

Kerry's daughter, a teenager on the autism spectrum, had endured immense mental health struggles and the trauma of sexual assault. As a single parent with three children, Kerry had faced family violence and carried the weight of her daughter's recent suicide attempt. The hospital waiting room became a symbol of their darkest moments.

But as they sat waiting, two Clown Doctors - Dr Bananas and Dr Dodo - entered the room. Kerry, initially skeptical, couldn't ignore the magic they conjured as they serenaded a child nearby with 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow'. To her surprise, Kerry noticed a newfound spark in her daughter as she listened to them play. The Clown Doctors, seeing her reaction, wandered over and offered to fulfill a special request.

Kerry mentioned her daughter's love for The Killers' 'Mr Brightside.' The Clown Doctors, initially unsure, gave it a try. With instruments in hand, they played an impromptu version, and before long Kerry's daughter was singing along, igniting the emergency department with a joyful symphony.

Unaware of the family's recent struggles, the Clown Doctors brought light to a deeply painful time. Kerry wished she could capture the scene forever, as they turned her despair into a treasured memory, reminding her of the profound significance of human connection, even in adversity.

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- Kerry, parent\*

\*names have been changed

## Laughter Care

The Laughter Care program is a world-leading initiative that merges medicine and the arts to enhance the lives of aged care residents.

Laughter Care Specialists, chosen for their empathy and performance skills, receive specialised training to connect with people living with dementia and those experiencing social isolation.

With nearly half a million Australians facing dementia, this program validates who the person is now, not who they used to be, transforming aged care by prioritising emotional and social well-being alongside physical health.



Some of our residents do not have family or friends visit so this one-on-one connection they experience gives them a lift for the day... [The Laughter Care] interactions enhance the residents' social and emotional well-being. This valuable work is an integral part of holistic care for the residents at our facility. The staff also benefit from this laughter therapy, bringing in a lighter atmosphere as they care for the residents.

- Narelle Cramb,  
Sunshine Coast North Chaplain,  
BlueCare



## The Laughter Care program uses humour and reminiscence therapy to improve quality of life for aged-care residents, who are socially isolated or living with dementia.

It is widely evidenced that in a typical aged-care facility, over half the residents will have dementia and up to 40% may not see a visitor all year. The combined loss of connection, familiarity, dignity, and independence impacts the whole facility:

- 68.1% will have moderate to severe cognitive impairment.
- 54% will have dementia, of which 84% require high levels of care due to the associated behavioural and psychological symptoms (aggression, agitation, delusions, wandering, depression).<sup>2</sup>

### How Laughter Care helps

Purpose-trained Laughter Care Specialists visit residential aged-care facilities weekly, using humour, reminiscence therapy and creative engagement to bond with individual residents through play, music, dance, props, stories and improvisation – often finding connection pathways untapped by staff and loved ones.

Unlike their Clown Doctor counterparts who visit in pairs, Laughter Care Specialists visit on their own. A typical visit is three hours, including communication with the health care staff on duty to ensure targeted patient support, followed by one-on-one and group interactions. Humour therapy 'Laughter Boss' workshops are also provided to facility staff before program commencement to share skills, extending program benefits between visits.

### Benefits

- humour therapy reduces agitation, resulting in less reliance on chemical and physical restraints
- regular person-centred care supports the mental health of aged-care residents, who are often isolated through lack of visitors and suffering from cognitive decline.
- social connections are created by bringing residents together, uplifting the atmosphere of the facility and elevating workplace culture
- interactions restore dignity and happiness at a time often characterised by immense loss for residents and their families.
- facility staff and families learn new skills to connect with their loved ones.

Laughter Care is typically provided as a fee-for-service program in residential aged-care facilities and adapted for delivery in geriatric hospitals and rehabilitation facilities.

In 2022-23 the program was run in 21 facilities and hospitals in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.



## Laughter Care Program Logic

### ISSUES

- Dementia affects almost half a million Australians - estimated to more than double in the next 40 years
- Aged care providers may lack the time or skills to care for people living with dementia
- Restrictive practices impact the liberty and dignity of older people in residential care
- Task based care does not meet social and emotional needs or support people to make choices.
- Families and friends unsure how to respond or connect to loved one with dementia.
- 40% of residents receive no visitors
- Poor mobility in older people results in falls and fractures

### INPUTS

- Our practitioners are highly trained, sensitive performers who engage and connect with those living with dementia
- Performers receive ongoing expert supervision, support and professional development
- Partnerships with Residential Aged Care Facilities
- Co-funded through fundraising and fee for service
- Research and evidence
- Experienced board, management and staff

### OUTPUTS

- Provide reminiscence therapy, creative engagement and humour therapy
- Working with people living with dementia and socially isolated older people
- Provide dementia care training and mentorship for facility staff
- Reporting
- Partner with Residential Aged Care Facilities
- Provide group and/or individual regular sessions
- Encourage mobility for older people through music and dance
- Engage families and staff



### OUTCOMES

Older People	Families	Facilities & Staff
<p><b>SHORT TERM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Exhibit improved mood, wellbeing and positive behaviours</li> <li>● Isolation is eased</li> <li>● Regain a sense of self, enjoy recollecting and expressing themselves through laughter and active engagement</li> </ul>	<p><b>SHORT TERM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Feel their loved one is receiving quality care</li> <li>● Aim to be present during a visit to better engage with loved ones</li> </ul>	<p><b>SHORT TERM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reduce the need for chemical restraints</li> <li>● Gain confidence in providing care to those living with dementia</li> <li>● Facility culture is improved</li> </ul>
<p><b>MEDIUM/LONG TERM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improved quality of life</li> <li>● Decrease in stress and anxiety of being in care</li> <li>● Feel validated, have control and choice</li> <li>● Physical mobility can be maintained or increased</li> </ul>	<p><b>MEDIUM/LONG TERM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Trust is gained and anxiety reduced</li> <li>● Reconnect with loved ones with understanding and re-forming connections</li> </ul>	<p><b>MEDIUM/LONG TERM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Positive cultural shift as facilities strive for excellence in care</li> <li>● Become person centered in their care with a focus on empathy and fostering connection</li> </ul>



### IMPACT

An improved quality of life for residents with dementia or socially isolated – Residential Aged Care Facilities are providing person-centered, empathetic care within a positive workplace culture

<sup>2</sup>Australian Institute of Health and Welfare



# Evidence-informed Practice

## Laughter Care and the power of human connection

In the quiet halls of Blue Care in Bli Bli, Victoria, a resident who had grown increasingly withdrawn, was experiencing a newfound joy thanks to her blossoming friendship with Laughter Care Specialist Juney.

Victoria had become confined to her room, but Juney's weekly visits, made possible by generous funding from the Eastern Star Foundation, had breathed life back into her days. Juney's ability to connect with Victoria was extraordinary.

Their bond began as they discussed the news of the Queen's passing and their thoughts on Charles. With time, their conversations drifted to the memories of Victoria's youth, making the connection between them even stronger.

Music played a pivotal role in rekindling Victoria's past, and Juney offered to play one of her favourite songs. The change in Victoria was evident. Staff members, who had grown accustomed to her withdrawn demeanour, couldn't believe the remarkable improvement in her mood and engagement.

Juney's red nose served as an invitation to play, encouraging residents like Victoria to relax and interact on their

terms. This person-centred approach results in genuine relationships and connections, as evidenced by Victoria's request to see Juney again. The heartwarming relationship between Juney and Victoria exemplifies the transformative impact of the Laughter Care program. The program not only enhances the well-being of residents, but also fosters happiness and well-being among the facility's staff members.

Victoria's story is a testament to the incredible power of human connection and laughter, which have the ability to reach even the most withdrawn hearts and bring joy back into their lives.

**Music played a pivotal role in rekindling Victoria's past, and Juney offered to play one of her favourite songs. The change in Victoria was evident. Staff members, who had grown accustomed to her withdrawn demeanour, couldn't believe the remarkable improvement in her mood and engagement.**

International research has demonstrated the physiological and psychological benefits of laughter to health and well-being, and this underpins our evidence based practice.

International research has demonstrated the physiological and psychological benefits of laughter to health and well-being, and this underpins our evidence-based practice. It is widely evidenced that laughter can combat many common ills – with research revealing it can help lower blood pressure, release endorphins, improve circulation, stimulate the nervous system, heighten the immune system and strengthen the heart.

Research has also demonstrated the specific benefits of Medical Clowns who have a long history of using humour, games, and improvisation to create a more positive atmosphere and develop trust between the health care team and patients.<sup>3</sup> Reported benefits include cost saving measures for hospitals, increases in staff efficiency, better patient outcomes, and lower stress in medical staff.

The Humour Foundation is committed to building on this evidence-base and to research and evaluation to further understand the impact of our work in the lives of our beneficiaries. We are also committed to sharing our learnings with others to improve the therapeutic benefits and outcomes for children and older adults with dementia or experiencing social isolation.

During the year our Artistic Director, David Symons was invited to speak at a number of conferences and seminars about our research and work, which has been documented in several

publications including *Child Abuse Review* and *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*. This work has provided new opportunities for future research collaborations and outcome measurements.

We continued our collaboration with patients and hospital staff in the Adolescent Mental Health Ward (known as Stepping Stones) at Monash Medical Centre. The project involves training with a series of workshops and activities focused around integrating arts in health and creating positive engagement between Clown Doctors, staff and patients. The project includes a research element brought about by the pro-bono involvement of experienced researchers from Monash Health and Monash University.<sup>4</sup>

We also shared our expertise this year with the South Korean Jongno Foundation for Arts and Culture. Seeking to establish a healthcare clowning organisation, several Korean actors attended and took part in a two-day clowning workshop during their visit. By sharing our expertise we are confident children in South Korea will benefit from their learnings.

Through program delivery and expansion, research, collaboration and partnerships we can strengthen the recognition, awareness, value, integration and acceptance of Clown Doctors in the health sector and grow the body and depth of evidence about the Clown Doctors' therapeutic benefits and outcomes.



<sup>3</sup> Raviv, A – The clown's carnival in the hospital: a semiotic analysis of the medical clown's performance, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Melvin, G – The Impacts of a Clown Doctor Program on an Adolescent Psychiatric Unit: A Mixed Methods Investigation, 2023





# Board of Directors and Governance

The Humour Foundation is a public company limited by guarantee and is governed by an independent Board of Directors chaired by Rebecca Ong. The Directors do not receive payment or benefit of any kind. The Board meets regularly throughout the year. The Humour Foundation is led by the CEO who is strongly supported by the leadership team who have held senior roles across the commercial and not-for-profit sectors. The Humour Foundation is a national organisation with an office in Sydney and staff located in other states.



**PETER W JESS**  
 Diploma of Business Studies (Accounting), Post Graduate Diploma Finance & Planning, Masters of Commercial Law, Chartered Accountant, Certified Public Accountant, Chartered Tax Advisor, Chartered Secretary & Administrator  
 Peter was appointed as a Director on 17 January 1997. Peter was a founding member of the Foundation and is currently Treasurer. Peter is the principal of PJA Accountants and a Director of the Nova Peris Foundation, Image Sportivo Internationale Pty Ltd, Sports Health Check Foundation and the Community Concussion Research Foundation.



**REBECCA ONG**  
**CHAIRPERSON**  
 Bachelor of Commerce (Finance), Bachelor of Laws  
 Rebecca was appointed as a Director on 21 September 2016 and Chair in October 2021. Rebecca is currently General Counsel and Company Secretary at MA Financial Group Limited with responsibilities for legal, compliance and company secretarial activities across the group. Previously she was Regional Counsel at UBS, with responsibilities for UBS' Asset Management businesses across the Asia Pacific. Rebecca has over 15 years of experience across a broad range of areas that include mergers and acquisitions, funds management, corporate, regulatory and governance. She was admitted as a Solicitor in New South Wales in 2005.



**MIKE O'BRIEN**  
 PhD, FRCSI (Paed), FRACS (Paed)  
 Mike was appointed as a director on 8 March 2017. He went to medical school at University College Cork, graduating in 1989. His early career was spent working in a number of UK hospitals, before relocating to Melbourne. Mike is a Paediatric Urologist at The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne and has been the Medical Ambassador for the Clown Doctors since 2015.



**DAVID PETTIGREW**  
 Bachelor of Arts History and Economics  
 David was appointed as a director on 24 June 2009. David has worked in the not-for-profit sector for over 25 years and is currently the Founder and Director of Nourish NFP Pty Ltd, a consultancy to the not for profit sector. He is also the Director of Nourish Analytics a software provider to the not for profit sector.



**DAMIEN MEREDITH**  
 Bachelor of Education, Masters of Business Administration  
 Damien was appointed as a director on 24 June 2009. Damien is the Chief Executive Officer of Kia Motors Australia. Damien is also Chair of The Nova Peris Foundation, a director of The Community Concussion Board and D. Meredith Pty Ltd.



# Financial Summary

Total revenue for the year was \$5.5m, significantly up from last year.

More than half our income came from individual donors, the vast majority making an ongoing monthly contribution. A commitment to regular donations is one of the best ways to support The Humour Foundation because it provides us with the financial confidence to invest in long-term, high impact projects. We also received fee for service income from our Laughter Care social enterprise of \$400.3k.

Our expenses increased by 18 per cent to \$5.4m, largely due to increased

program costs. This increase in program costs was driven by a material year-on-year increase in interactions following the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions. Our net surplus for the year was \$158.2k, slightly lower than last year.

**Our audited financial statements have been lodged with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission (ACNC) and are available on their website.**

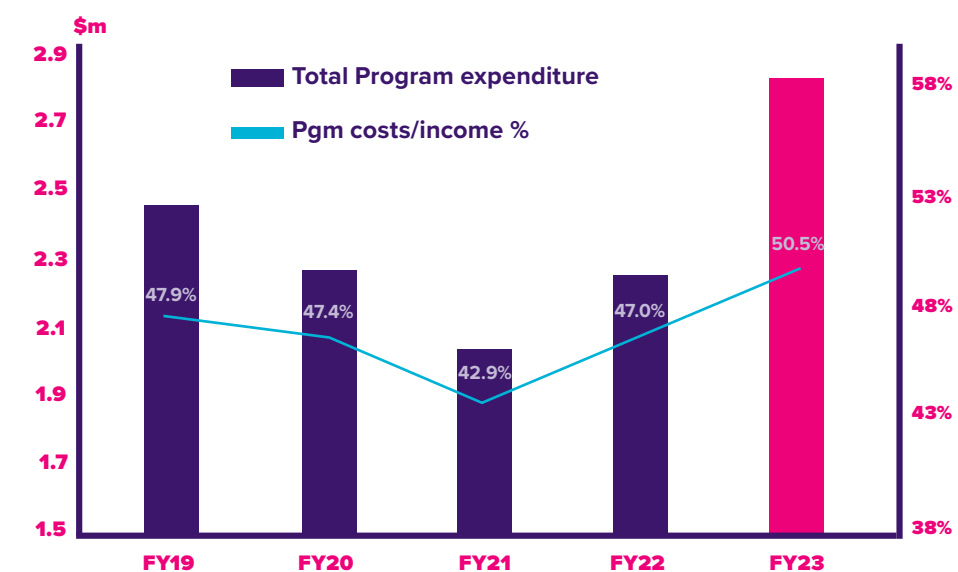
## Five-year income performance

The Humour Foundation secured record income in the 2023 financial year. This increased income was the result of greater corporate support and income from trusts and foundations and fee for service activities. The economic environment however, adversely impacted donations from individuals and the community which were lower this year.

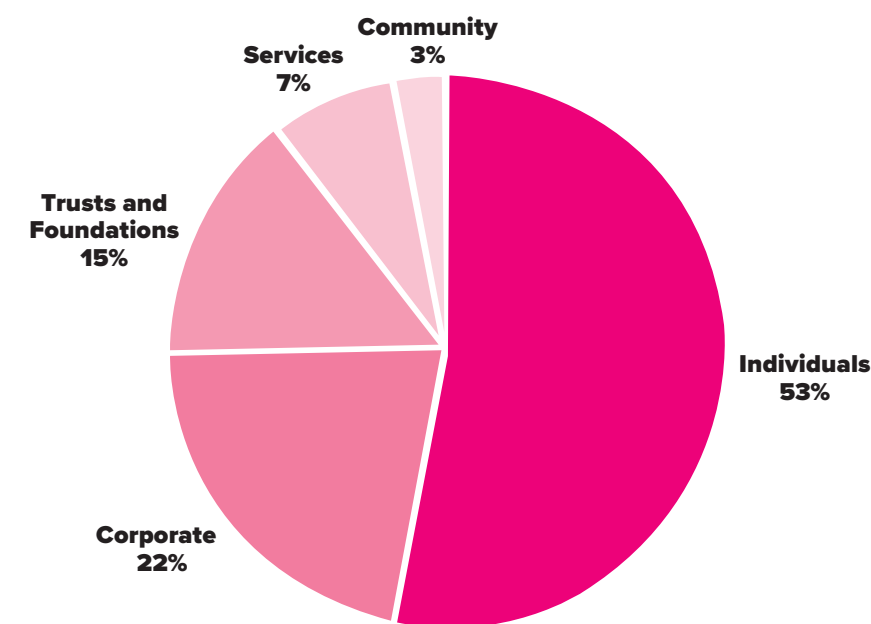


## Program expenditure

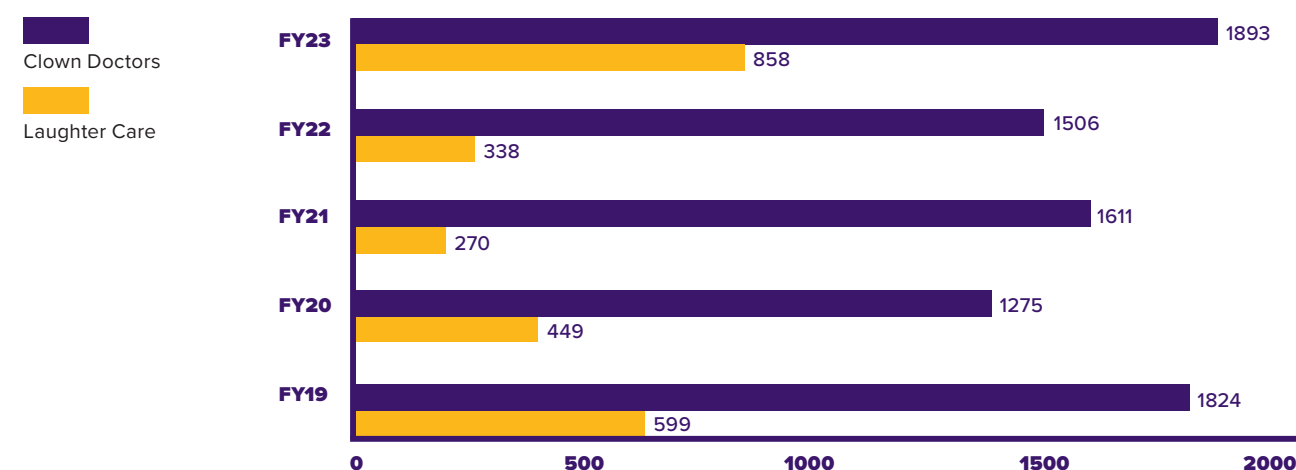
In the first months of the year COVID-19 continued to impact our program delivery. Pleasingly however after this period, our program delivery returned to normal, resulting in a 50 per cent increase in people seen on last year. As a result, our program expenditure increased by 24 per cent to \$2.8m.



## Where our income came from in FY23



## Visits return to pre-COVID levels





# Thank You

We extend our sincere gratitude to our community of individuals, partners, fundraisers and volunteers, whose support helped us deliver the Clown Doctors and Laughter Care programs this year.

## Donors

With thanks to our community of individual and family donors, the impact of the Clown Doctor and Laughter Care programs grew this year. Regular monthly donations allow us to sustainably plan our services and are vital in ensuring the program's longevity - maximising the positive benefits of humour in a hospital setting for even more families.

We also extend our sincere thanks to those who generously contribute to our bi-annual fundraising appeals, community events, and campaigns.

## Fundraising Support Groups

We are immensely grateful for the many volunteers and community groups, including Tricia Fortier OAM, Paul and Jan Stevens-King and Neil and Lynda Wallis, who all donate their time, effort, and goodwill to help raise funds to support the Clown Doctor program. Additionally, as beneficiaries of the Unite4Kids lunch in 2023, we'd like to acknowledge organisers Kim and Ben Mead.

## Corporate Partners

We acknowledge the continued contributions of our corporate partners, who generously support the Clown Doctor program nationally.

**The Commonwealth Bank Staff Foundation** our esteemed founding partner, continued their tradition of organising Smile Day events throughout April, generously matching staff donations dollar for dollar. **Moose Toys** once again demonstrated their unwavering support for our Clown Doctor visits across Australia and also generously facilitated the Clown Doctors' return to the Ngaanyatjarra community and the Dust Up Festival. **Hyundai Help for Kids** continued to play a pivotal role with their ongoing support instrumental, including providing much-needed vehicles for our programs and partnerships. Hyundai Help for Kids contribution to the Clown Doctor tour from Yulara to Warakurna was both necessary and deeply appreciated. **Ekornes** generously supported us through their Christmas sales and also helped promote Smile Month. **Zipline** made a tremendous impact through their creation of Miles for Smiles with their employees running many kilometres during this special event. **Turosi Giving** supported us through their annual golf day with lots of hard work and dedication making the day such a success.

## Trusts and Foundations

We gratefully acknowledge the grants received through various state and national Trusts, Foundations, Clubs and Councils which help to sustain programs, and offer opportunities for new initiatives. In particular:

**Aged Persons Welfare Foundation**  
**Annie Danks Trust**  
**Bowlers Club of NSW**  
**Central Coast Leagues Club**  
**Channel 7 Telethon Trust**  
**Chatswood RSL**  
**City of Sydney RSL**  
**Community Benefit Fund**  
**Dooleys Lidcombe Catholic Club**  
**Eastern Star Foundation**  
**Humpty Dumpty Foundation**  
**James N Kirby Foundation**  
**Jemena**  
**John James Memorial Foundation**  
**Toronto Workers Club**  
**Morialta Charitable Trust**  
**Mosman Club Mounties Group**  
**Parramatta Leagues Club**  
**Pierce Armstrong Foundation**  
**Randwick City Council**  
**South Newcastle Rugby League Club**  
**The Marian and E.H. Flack Trust**  
**The Raymond E Purves Foundation**  
**The Wests Group Australia**  
**Thyne Reid Foundation**  
**Wenty Leagues**  
**Wishlist**







## How you can help

### DONATE

Whether you're able to give a one-off contribution, become a regular giver or leave a bequest in your Will, you can donate today by visiting the website [www.humourfoundation.org.au](http://www.humourfoundation.org.au) or calling 02 8978 4500.

### PARTNER WITH US

There are a range of ways to build mutually beneficial partnerships – from sponsorship, cause-related marketing, pro bono or in-kind support, workplace giving, staff engagement and more.

### SPREAD THE WORD

Follow us on one of our social media platforms and help us share our stories:

 @ClownDoctors

 @humourfoundation

 HumourFoundation

If you're into personal challenges or just want to celebrate an occasion, be it a trivia night, garage sale, mufti day, you can contact us at: [info@humourfoundation.org.au](mailto:info@humourfoundation.org.au)



**THE  
HUMOUR  
FOUNDATION™**

*Laughter is the best medicine!*

Suite 2, Ground Floor,  
Building 2,  
20 Bridge Street,  
Pymble NSW 2073  
[humourfoundation.org.au](http://humourfoundation.org.au)