

# THE HUMOUR FOUNDATION™

*Laughter is the best medicine!*



## Annual Report 2024

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Having the Clown Doctors work alongside us provides the children with a sense of fun and normalcy. They help to cheer up the families and the staff — which provides added benefits for the child. They visit weekly and are sensitive to the unique sensory needs of our children in the games and music they provide. Prior to their session they check in with staff to get an idea of the environment and they successfully engage with each child on an individual level to enhance the admission experience.

– Nicky Young  
Nurse Manager,  
Oasis Mental Health Unit,  
Monash 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 where it is unexpected, yet most needed.

Co-founded in 1996 by the late Dr Peter Spitzer, The Humour Foundation, 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. The depth of our work means it impacts:

**Cognitively** – providing diversion from medical procedures.

**Physiologically** – as laughter releases endorphins that can stimulate the immune system, lower heart rate and blood pressure, and reduce pain.

**Socially** – through connection with children, older adults, carers, families and staff.

**Emotionally** – by inducing positive emotions and reducing anxiety<sup>1</sup>.

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 2012) – benefits older adults in residential aged-care facilities, who are socially isolated, living with dementia, experiencing cognitive decline and/or palliative.

Our programs also have a positive impact on families, carers and healthcare staff.

The Humour Foundation is the only organisation in Australia providing healthcare clowning programs. Our work relies entirely on support from philanthropic organisations and individuals, corporate donors and generous regular givers.

**Our Vision**  
To bring laughter 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



“Mental health issues remain one of the fastest-growing areas of hospital admissions, compounded by the rise in chronic conditions and the significant challenges of a ageing population.”

Often, it is when we look forward, that we realise how much has been achieved in the past. It has been 28 years since The Humour Foundation’s Clown Doctors were first called to action in Tasmania in response to the Port Arthur massacre. Following this, our first regular Clown Doctors programs launched at the Sydney Children’s Hospital in 1997 and the Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne in 1998.

Since that time, The Humour Foundation has grown into a strong and vibrant organisation with a national presence. We now support not only children and their families in paediatric settings, but also the elderly living with dementia and experiencing social isolation. Our work has gained international recognition, with our research collaborations documented. Our expertise has also broadened to provide training and support for medical, health and aged care staff in the hospitals and aged care homes we serve.

We are living in extraordinary times. Mental health issues remain one of the fastest-growing areas of hospital admissions, compounded by the rise in chronic conditions and the significant challenges of an ageing population.

These factors place considerable strain on a healthcare system that is already stretched, as demand for services often outpaces available resources – all of which adds further pressure on our valuable healthcare workers. Innovative, collaborative solutions that optimise person-centred care is more important than ever.

In this context, I am delighted to open this year’s report by welcoming Emma Pollard, who began her role as CEO in October 2023. Emma brings with her a strong background in both the for-profit and for-purpose sectors. In less than a year, she has worked with the team to establish the foundations and build the momentum that will guide The Humour Foundation into an exciting new phase.

Under Emma’s guidance, the leadership team has clarified The Humour Foundation’s strategy and impact priorities. This includes expanding the breadth of our work to increase our reach and the diversity of our beneficiaries; enhancing the depth of our programs through an increase in clinical partnerships; and scaling our impact by collaborating with others to share our learnings and knowledge.

I am pleased to report that in 2024, The Humour Foundation supported 295,837 children, carers, families, patients, aged care residents, and staff across Australia. This figure not only represents the highest number of beneficiaries in our history but also marks a return to pre-COVID program delivery levels. Our presence was felt in 21 hospitals, one children’s hospice, and 25 residential aged care facilities across the country.

On behalf of my fellow Board members, I would like to acknowledge Emma’s leadership and the efforts of the entire Humour Foundation team. I would also like to thank Jackie Coles, who stepped in as Acting CEO prior to Emma starting, and our performers, who continue to bring laughter where it is unexpected, yet most needed. The Board and I look forward to working with all of you as we embark on this exciting new phase in The Humour Foundation’s development.

Rebecca Ong  
Board Chair

# Message from Our CEO



“In this changing environment, our focus has been clearly defining our strategy and establishing the foundations we need to grow.”

As I reflect on a strong and positive year for The Humour Foundation, I’m immensely proud of our team having delivered a record number of visits to hospitals and residential aged care facilities across Australia. We also supported an historic number of beneficiaries.

I have also been impressed by the agility of our performers and their expertise to support the changing needs of our beneficiaries and delivery partners as the health and aged care landscape evolves.

In this changing environment, our focus has been clearly defining our strategy and establishing the foundations we need to grow. We are setting the stage for a new phase in our development with a steadfast lens to improving patient experience and health outcomes in our hospitals, and the quality of life for older people in residential care.

To this end, we increased the number of Clown Doctors’ clinical collaborations in hospitals across Australia and are working towards a recurring clinical presence at all major hospitals nationally. We also adapted the Laughter Care program, in collaboration with Carers ACT to support and upskill carers and respite

cottage staff. This important work sets the foundation for future initiatives that support home carers.

As we expand the evidence base for our work, I have also appreciated research partnerships that validate and articulate the impact of our work. Published this year, *You’re the only thing he comes out [of his room] for: A qualitative study of engagement between Laughter Care Specialists and families of people with dementia in long-term care*, highlights the benefits of Laughter Care to the families of people with dementia in residential aged care.

Alongside the growth of our programs, 2024 was an opportunity to celebrate significant milestones with key partners CommBank and Hyundai. Our 25-year anniversary with founding partner CommBank featured a multiplatform ‘Smile Month’ campaign and I acknowledge in this report, CommBank’s instrumental role in the growth of the Clown Doctors program. We also celebrated our 10-year anniversary with Hyundai Help for Kids through a social media campaign which highlighted key moments of impact throughout our partnership.

Shifting the focus internally, the 2023 Humour Foundation Conference

fostered professional growth and collaboration across our national performer and staff teams. Eight performers also completed their ‘Clowntership,’ becoming official Clown Doctors and/or Laughter Care Specialists.

In closing, my heartfelt thanks go to the many donors who support us and the beneficiaries who take the time to write or call about their experience of our programs. You power our work and make our impact tangible.

I also extend my thanks to the Humour Foundation staff team, our performers, and our hospital and aged care partners who welcome us to work alongside them. I appreciate you all, as do the over 295,000 people who have benefited from our programs this past year. Finally, to The Humour Foundation Board, thank you for trusting me with the reins of this incredible organisation. It is a great privilege and an exciting opportunity to step into the role of CEO, leading the organisation into its next phase.

Emma Pollard  
Chief Executive Officer

# Year in Review

With your support, we achieved record-breaking Clown Doctors and Laughter Care visits across Australia to reach the highest number of beneficiaries in our 27-year history.

The 2024 financial year was another remarkable chapter for The Humour Foundation. We supported 295,837 children, families and carers, aged care residents and staff across 21 hospitals, one children's hospice, and 25 residential aged care facilities across Australia. We also welcomed six new Clown Doctors and two new Laughter Care Specialists into our community. Thanks to our many donors, we continued innovating and expanding our programs, bringing laughter where it is unexpected, yet most needed.

## Expanding our reach

After a period of significant change for the health and aged care sectors, our programs returned to pre-COVID delivery levels. Our Clown Doctors interacted with 281,400 beneficiaries and recorded the highest ever Clown Doctor rounds at 1,909 — in some cases returning to locations for the first time since the pandemic. Laughter Care interactions also rose to 14,437, with a record 903 visits.

## Clinical collaborations

Ongoing demand for clinical collaborations at the hospitals we visit demonstrates the versatility and impact of our Clown Doctors program. Targeted clinic work included the Plastics and Fractures Clinic at Perth Children's Hospital, WA; the Mental Health Unit at the Women and Children's Hospital, SA; the Ear, Nose

and Throat Clinic at Alice Springs Hospital, NT; the expansion of the Victorian Forensic Paediatric Medical Service (VFPMS) to Monash Children's Hospital, VIC; and new work at the Pre-Admission Resource Centre at the Royal Children's Hospital, VIC.

## Program diversification and training

Adaptations of our Laughter Care program reflect our commitment to enhancing support for both healthcare providers and aged care residents. In the ACT, we strengthened our partnership with Carers ACT by delivering Playfulness in Care workshops to unpaid carers of people living with dementia. During these workshops, performers help participants explore ways to bring playfulness to the care of a loved one. We also initiated pilot programs for adult patients at St John of God Hospitals in Frankston and Geelong, Victoria.

## Celebrating key partnerships

We are fortunate to have the long-standing support of some wonderful corporate partners. This year we celebrated a remarkable 25-year anniversary with founding partner CommBank, which not only built awareness, but also created unique opportunities for engagement. Upping the ante this year, their annual Smile Month campaign featured CommBank staff in a celebratory

clown choir, while comedian Jimmy Rees OAM, surprised children at the Monash Children's Hospital as an honorary Clown Doctor. We also marked a decade-long partnership with Hyundai Help For Kids. This partnership has provided critical support for The Humour Foundation, including bespoke opportunities to partner with other for-purpose organisations for impact over the past ten years.

## Indigenous connections

The Clown Doctors were once again invited to attend the annual Desert Dust Up Festival. 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. This marks our fourth invitation to participate in this very special event, highlighting the trust and relationships built over the years. These connections bridge the gap between remote communities and our healthcare system. Every year we visit, we witness the growing confidence and curiosity of the children — and they now participate in storytelling, circus demonstrations, and even singing original songs.

## Peter Spitzer Scholarship

The annual Peter Spitzer Scholarship, named in honour of our late co-founder, is open to all Humour Foundation staff and performers.

It provides funding to support skills and knowledge development and ensure the continuous improvement of healthcare clowning in Australia. The 2023 scholarship was awarded to Artistic Associate, Jo Cohen, who sought to explore the power of lullabies in fostering connections and inclusivity within a healthcare setting. Jo travelled to France to observe the work of Le Rire Medicine and the French Clown Doctors team as they engaged with high-risk mothers and babies at Kremlin-Bicetre Hospital. Her insights have since become a valuable component of our performers' professional training as you will read below...

## Transcending language and culture

A critical aspect of medical clowning is connecting with patients and families in unique ways. Incorporating lullabies from various cultures is a powerful technique which can foster comfort and familiarity during challenging times, while also celebrating the diversity of languages and cultures in our country.

Following Jo Cohen's visit to Le Rire Medicine, we identified the most-spoken languages in each state and began upskilling our performers by adding a variety of lullabies to their professional toolkit. Some of these include *Frere Jacques* in French, Vietnamese and Greek; *Twinkle Twinkle* in Mandarin and Spanish and *In Annay Gupu Wanna* — an Indigenous lullaby sung all over Australia and many other lullabies in Arabic, Hebrew, Filipino, Samoan, Maori, Russian, Japanese, Gaelic, German, Portuguese and Italian.

## Building strong foundations

We welcomed 2024 by strengthening our digital presence with a new website and expanded online engagement, investing in a Human Resource Information System (HRIS) to streamline operations, and completing the Australian Childhood Foundation recertification process to reinforce our commitment to best practices.

We also moved into our new head office, 'Clown Central,' in Chatswood, NSW — an inviting space for our team, especially during interstate visits. These foundations underpin our future growth, positioning us to make an even greater impact.

Our Clown Doctors interacted with 281,400 beneficiaries and recorded the highest ever Clown Doctor rounds at 1,909 — in some cases returning to locations for the first time since the pandemic. Laughter Care interactions also rose to 14,437, with a record 903 visits.

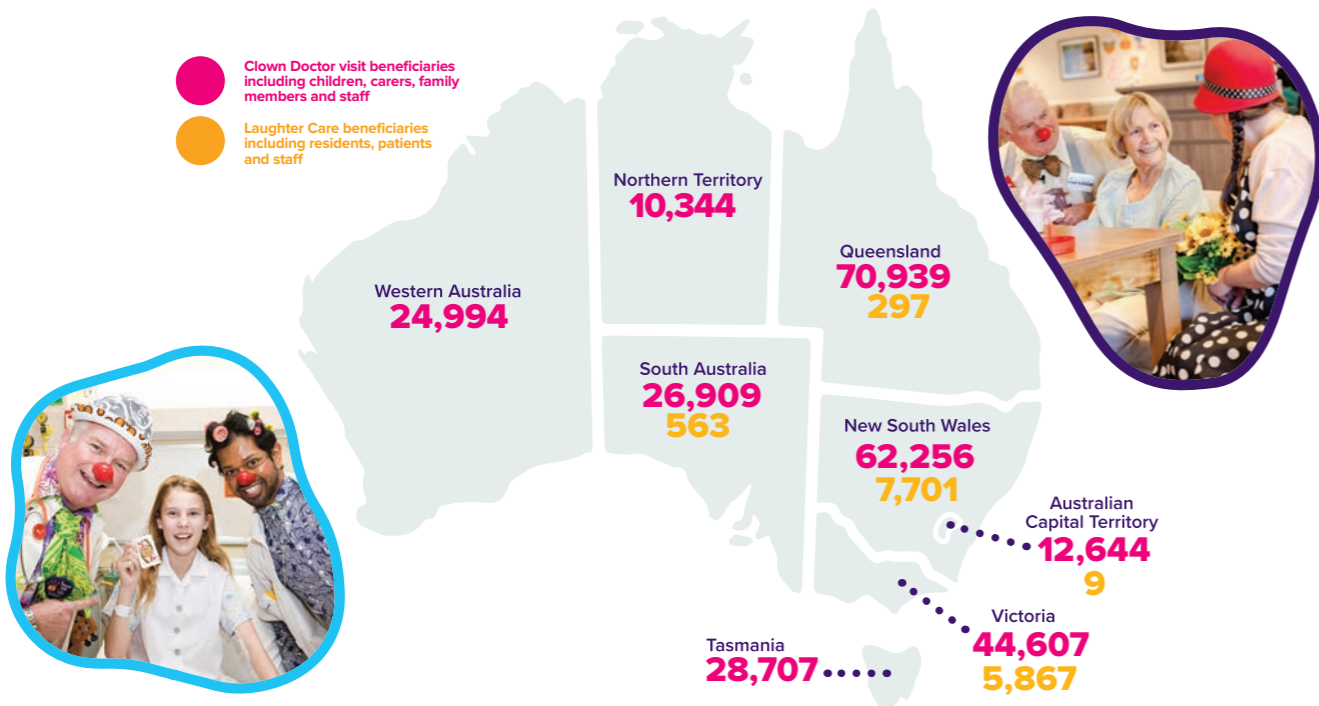


# Your impact in numbers

Because of you, we were able to bring laughter where it is unexpected, yet most needed



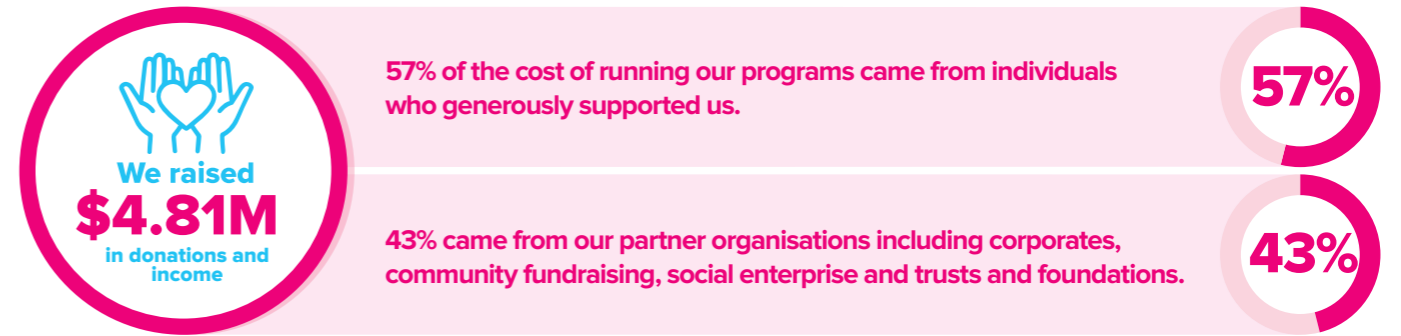
## You are making a difference around Australia



## We brought laughter and joy around Australia



## Thanks to your generosity we delivered impactful programs across the country



## We are committed to understanding and improving the impact of our programs

A 2015 Social Return on Investment (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.



A subsequent 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 and 2022 Social Return on Investment calculations, The Humour Foundation's Clown Doctors program delivered value of over **\$24,878,000** nationally in FY24.



In the 2024-2025 financial year, The Humour Foundation will be developing a Social Impact Measurement Evaluation Framework for the Clown Doctor and Laughter Care programs. This framework will build on prior studies of our impact, including Social Return on Investment reports, to ensure we can effectively and efficiently understand and communicate the impact of our programs to key stakeholders.



# Clown Doctors

Clown Doctors is The Humour Foundation's flagship program – bringing laughter, joy and connection to children facing illness and hospitalisation. Our purpose-trained performers engage and uplift young patients, and their families and carers and working in partnership with medical and healthcare professionals they alleviate the emotional and psychological stress that often accompanies a child's stay in hospital. Our goal is to improve health outcomes for children and transform the hospital experience for children, their families and carers and hospital staff across Australia.



“Clown Doctors make your life that little bit more bearable on some of the darkest days... When you don't expect to be in this situation, and then you're here, you really see the impact of every cent and what it does for families.”

- Courtney, Kenley's mum

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

The hospital experience can be traumatic:

- children may be scared due to unfamiliar surroundings, separation from family and fear of treatment
- families can suffer chronic stress in witnessing their child's pain or anxiety
- anxiety may be heightened for children and their families and carers from Indigenous or non-English speaking backgrounds
- hospital staff may face decreased efficiency and heightened stress levels when caring for highly anxious children of all ages.

### How the Clown Doctors help

Clown Doctors are purpose-trained to collaborate with medical and healthcare professionals in sensitive hospital environments. They address both physiological and psychological needs – distracting sick or frightened children, empowering long-term patients, encouraging resilience, providing respite for anxious family and carers, and supporting hospital staff. Clown Doctors build connection, responding to the needs of the child at any given moment. This insightful humour can take many forms; it can be energetic and silly, but also soft and gentle. 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 from the program. 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 support from philanthropic organisations and individuals, corporate donors and our community of generous regular donors.

The program is represented in every state and territory nationally, and in Financial Year 2024 was delivered in 21 hospitals and one 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

## Lifeline of laughter: how the Clown Doctors transform hospital stays for children like Meera

Since 2014, the Clown Doctors have been brightening the halls of Canberra's Centenary Hospital for Women and Children with laughter, joy, and connection. They are a lifeline for families like Priya's, whose daughter Meera has a lifelong health condition and has been a frequent visitor to the hospital for over seven years. 'The Clown Doctors are just brilliant' Priya shares. **'Through some of the toughest times, they have brought us lots of smiles, happiness, and memories that we still talk about.'**

Priya emphasises how their presence not only impacts her daughter, but also provides a much-needed distraction for her as a parent. **'Watching my child feel happy when the Clown Doctors are there has been a true lifeline, as her time in the hospital can sometimes be quite traumatic.'**

She recalls moments when the Clown Doctors' timing was impeccable, offering much-needed distraction and relief. 'The Clown Doctors' ability to read the room is astonishing. There was one time when everything seemed so overwhelming for us; they were there at the right time and just stayed and

played and distracted, which was the most helpful thing for us.'

Beyond entertainment, ACT Clown Doctors, Dr Snooze, Dr Holiday, Dr Peek-A-Boo, and Dr Whoops, become companions on a challenging journey. 'Their funny antics and cheeky humour have created lasting impressions,' Priya shares. 'Dr Whoops, in particular, would do anything to make my daughter laugh – acting out all the shenanigans of a funny rollercoaster story.'

Priya attests to the profound impact of the Clown Doctors and their role in bringing not just smiles but also happiness and hope. **'I know personally when my daughter has seen them over the years, she just feels like her day has gotten better and she can get through it.'**

In a clinical healthcare system, the Clown Doctors stand out. They enable Priya's family, and many others, to experience the transformative power of humour and human connection.



**'The Clown Doctors ability to read the room is astonishing. There was one time when everything seemed so overwhelming for us; they were there at the right time and just stayed and played and distracted, which was the most helpful thing for us.'**

## Laughter Care

The Laughter Care program is a world-leading initiative that incorporates person-centred care and the arts to enhance the quality of life 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 living with dementia, this program validates a person for who they are, not who they used to be, transforming aged care by prioritising emotional and social well-being alongside physical health.



**'This afternoon I've had the absolute privilege of witnessing the magic that is Laughter Care. I recommend it fully to anyone. The difference it's made to our residents has been unreal. It was wonderful to see the interactions. It's just amazing to watch how they light up and that's what they need. It was beautiful. They have touched my heart so much this afternoon. They've connected with residents, they've made them laugh, they've made them smile. I've seen a lady who hasn't really engaged in anything in the whole year I've been here get up and perform the Pride of Erin. It was a moment of magic.'**

**- Katie, Staff member from UPA Bracken House, Dubbo**



## The Laughter Care program uses humour and reminiscence to improve the 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:

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

### How Laughter Care helps

Purpose-trained Laughter Care Specialists undertake regular visits to residential aged care facilities. Using humour, reminiscence and creative engagement, they support 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 briefing and debriefing with staff on duty to ensure targeted resident support, followed by both one-on-one and group interactions. Humour therapy ‘Laughter Boss’ workshops are also delivered to facility staff before program commencement to share skills and extend 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 can be isolated if they have a lack of visitors and or are 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 residents and 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 the 2024 financial year the program was delivered in 25 facilities and hospitals in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and ACT.



## 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

## A dance to remember: how Laughter Care helped Nancy rediscover joy

On her first day at Gillawarna Village residential aged care home, Laughter Care Specialist Bonnie headed towards Nancy's room. Stephen, a carer at Gillawarna Village, looked concerned and reluctant. 'Nancy never leaves her room; she rarely engages, is very confused and somewhat depressed.' Bonnie's eyes lit up as she exclaimed, 'Let's visit her!'

Reassured by Bonnie's enthusiasm, they knocked on Nancy's door. The room felt gloomy and dark; the curtains were drawn, both at the window and between the two beds that divided the shared room. Nancy was alone and looked anxious as she nervously sifted through a few papers and the few possessions she had in her bedside drawer.

In a marked shift, Nancy's eyes widened at the sight of Bonnie standing at the doorway in her 1950s red tartan dress buttoned from top to bottom. Nancy smiled as she noticed Bonnie's colourful yellow stripy socks, which clashed stupendously.

She laughed and exclaimed, 'Don't you look marvelous!'

Bonnie moved closer and introduced herself, commenting on the beautiful cardigan Nancy was wearing. Nancy looked down at herself and then back at Bonnie, surprised, as though she hadn't received a compliment in some time.

She smiled and invited Bonnie to sit with her. Before long, Bonnie and Nancy were talking about various topics: from tartans to letter writing, to summer clothes, and to mothers that didn't always approve.

It didn't take long for Nancy to open up to Bonnie. Nancy began relaying stories of when she would go ballroom dancing as a young girl. Bonnie pulled

out a small speaker from her colourful bag and played some ballroom music. She invited Nancy to dance. Nancy's eyes showed trust in her newfound friend, and together, next to her bed, they held hands and slowly danced.

Nancy's face was vibrant and happy. She occasionally laughed at Bonnie's attempts to keep up. Bonnie was surprised to see several staff members crowded at Nancy's doorway, each with smiles of surprise on their faces. Some taking photos in disbelief. Nancy had not engaged much in recent times.

A new friendship was born — one that, in future weeks with regular visits, resulted in Nancy finally leaving her room with Bonnie to go on other 'adventures' together.

**6 Nancy's face was vibrant and happy. She occasionally laughed at Bonnie's attempts to keep up. Bonnie was surprised to see several staff members crowded at Nancy's doorway, each with smiles of surprise on their faces. 9**

Our evidence-based practice is underpinned by international research that has demonstrated the physiological and psychological benefits of laughter to health and well-being.

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 healthcare 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 that deepens understanding of 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, older adults, families and their carers, and healthcare staff.

This commitment was demonstrated through our collaboration with St John of God Health Care to evaluate the delivery of Laughter Care in an adult hospital setting. This project not only explored the integration of our programs in this new setting, but also led to detailed evaluation of the outcomes of these interventions. The findings reinforced the value of our approach and will inform future program enhancements, ensuring that our work continues to meet the highest standards of effectiveness and impact.

To better understand and deepen our impact and ensure our programs are driving meaningful outcomes, The Humour Foundation has also appointed For Purpose Evaluations to develop a social impact measurement framework for both the Clown Doctors and Laughter Care programs. This framework will enable us to continually measure the impact of our work, identify areas for improvement, and communicate the value of our programs to stakeholders with greater clarity and precision.

Our Artistic Director, David Symons is frequently invited to speak at industry conferences and seminars about our research. Our Clown Doctors work has been documented in several publications including *Child Abuse Review and Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, which has provided new opportunities for future research collaborations and outcome measurements. This year, novel research on the Laughter Care program has also been documented in *Palliative & Supportive Care*.

Through program delivery and expansion, research, collaboration and partnerships we can strengthen the recognition, awareness, value, integration and acceptance of Clown Doctors and Laughter Care in the health sector and grow the body and depth of evidence about the Clown Doctors and Laughter Care Program's 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 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 where we deliver our programs.



**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 Indigenous Sports Network, Image Sportivo Internazionale Pty Ltd, Sports Health Check Foundation, the Community Concussion Research Foundation and Chairman of Iris Aged Care.



**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), Master of Applied Positive Psychology  
 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.



**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.



**DAVID PETTIGREW**  
 Bachelor of Arts History and Economics  
 David was appointed as a director on 24 June 2009. David has worked in the charity sector since 1997 as a fundraiser. He is the founder and director of two companies that provide services to the not-for-profit sector. Nourish nfp provides consultancy services and GivingInsight is a fundraising software application designed for fundraisers.

# Financial Summary

Total revenue for the year was \$4.8 million.

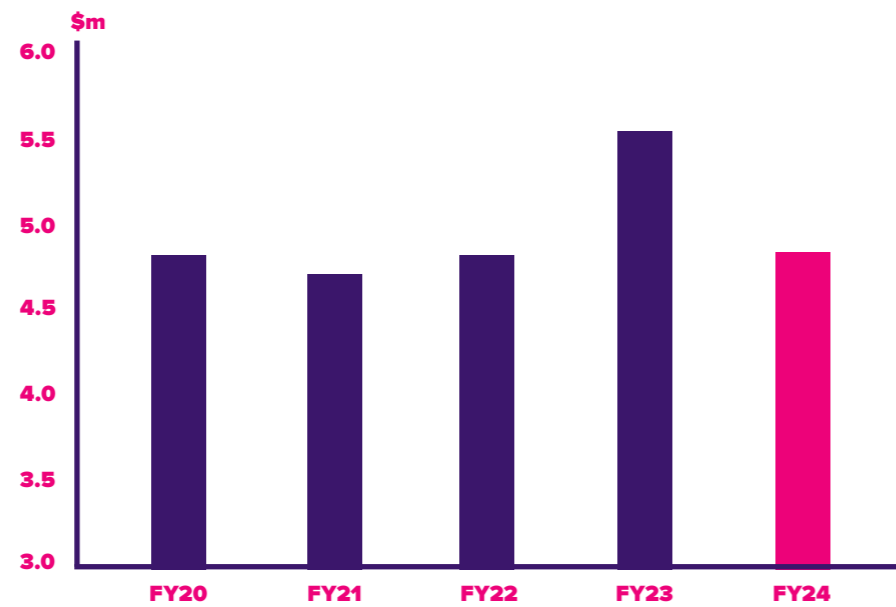
More than half our income came from individual donors, the vast majority making an ongoing monthly contribution. A commitment to regular donations is one of the best ways to support The Humour Foundation because it provides us with the financial confidence to invest in long-term, high impact projects. We also received \$495.5k fee for service income from our Laughter Care program, representing 10 per cent of our total revenue.

Income was lower than the prior year, but pleasingly program delivery returned to pre-COVID levels. The operating deficit for the year ending 30 June 2024 was \$321.9k; with last financial year's operating surplus at \$158.2k.

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

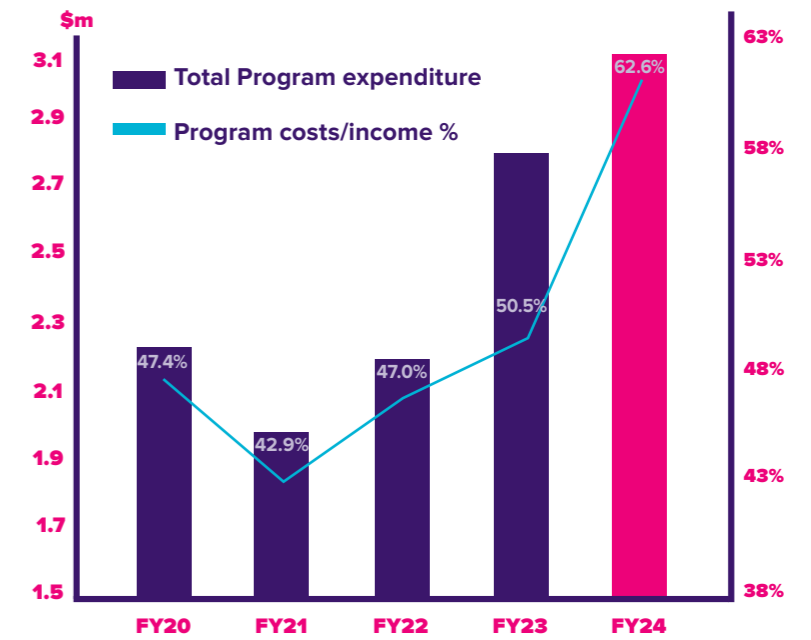
## Five-year income performance

Income was lower year on year as the prior year benefited from some one-off corporate support. The economic environment also had an impact on our philanthropic grants and individual donations which were lower than the last financial year.

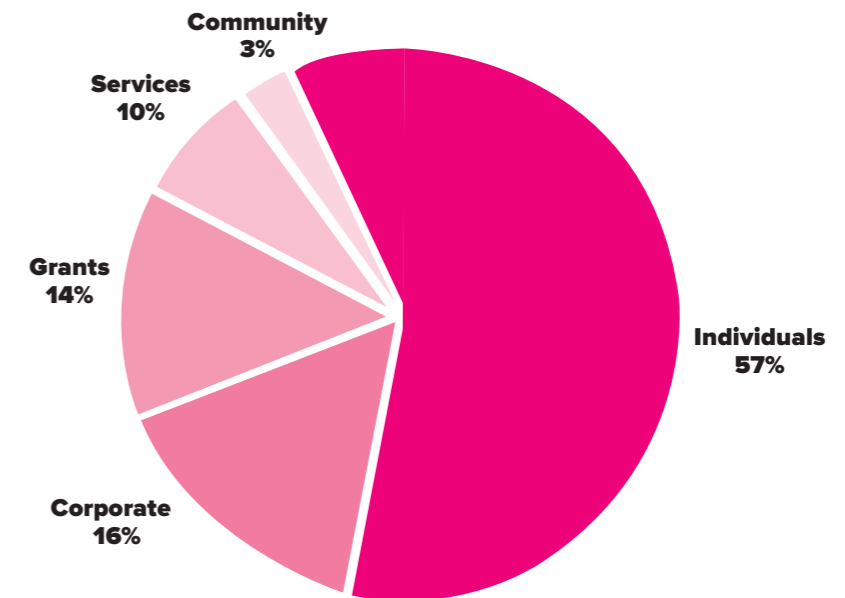


## Program expenditure

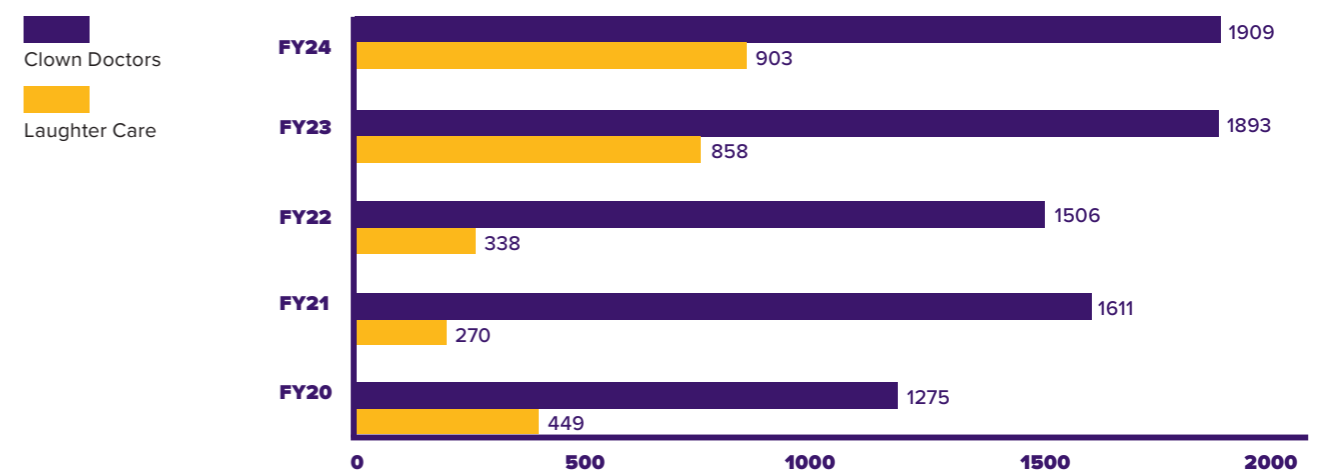
Program delivery exceeded pre-COVID levels. We delivered the highest number of visits to the highest number of beneficiaries across both the Clown Doctors and Laughter Care programs in the organisation's 27-year history. As a result, our program expenditure increased by 8 per cent to \$3.0m.



## Where our income came from in FY24



## Hospital visits at record levels. Increased Laughter Care visits



# Thank You

We extend our sincere gratitude to our community of individual donors, corporate partners, philanthropic funders, volunteers, and hospital and aged care delivery partners, whose support enabled us to deliver the Clown Doctors and Laughter Care programs this year.

## Donors

With thanks to our community of regular donors, the impact of the Clown Doctors and Laughter Care programs grew this year. Regular monthly donations allow us to sustainably plan our services and invest in pilot programs. They are also vital to program continuity and longevity.

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, Neil and Lynda Wallis and the Tasmanian Roadside Appeal team who donate their time, effort, and goodwill to help raise funds to support the Clown Doctors program. Additionally, as beneficiaries of the Unite4Kids lunch in 2024, we would like to acknowledge Kim and Ben Mead and the Unite4Kids committee.

## Corporate Partners

We acknowledge the continued contributions of our corporate partners, who generously support the Clown Doctors program nationally. This year marked a special milestone in our partnership with founding partner, the **CommBank Foundation**, as we celebrated 25 years of partnership and

collaboration. To commemorate this anniversary, CommBank launched a multi-platform 'Smile Month' campaign, continuing their tradition of organising Smile Day events and generously matching contributions dollar for dollar. Their unwavering support over the past quarter-century has made a significant impact. **Moose Toys** once again demonstrated their sustained support for the Clown Doctors across Australia and generously facilitated their return to the Ngaanyatjarra Lands for the annual Dust Up Festival. This year also marked the 10th anniversary of our valued partnership with **Hyundai Help for Kids**, whose ongoing support has been instrumental in driving our programs forward. Their contributions, including the provision of much-needed vehicles, continue to be vital to our operations. We acknowledge **Stressless®** who donated a valuable furniture package, which was successfully auctioned at the Unite4kids gala lunch and **Turosi Giving** for once again running their hugely successful annual golf day raising much needed funds for the Clown Doctors program.

## Trusts and Foundations

We gratefully acknowledge the grants received through various state and national trusts, foundations, clubs and councils which help to sustain our programs, and offer opportunities for new initiatives. In Financial Year 2024, these included:

**Allport Bequest**  
**Campsie RSL**  
**Channel 7 Telethon Trust**  
**Chatswood RSL**  
**Community Benefit Fund, Queensland**  
**Dooleys Lidcombe Catholic Club**  
**Dora Creek & District Workers Club**  
**Humpty Dumpty Foundation**  
**James N Kirby Foundation**  
**John James Memorial Foundation**  
**Marian and EH Flack Trust**  
**Margaret Lawrence Bequest**  
**Masonic Charities Trust**  
**Mosman Club**  
**Mounties Group**  
**Pierce Armstrong Foundation**  
**Raymond E Purves Foundation**  
**South Sydney Junior Rugby League Club**  
**Stan Perron Charitable Foundation**  
**Toronto Workers Club**  
**The Trevor & Joy Hill Foundation**  
**Thyne Reid Foundation**  
**Wenty Leagues**  
**Wishlist (Sunshine Coast Health Foundation)**

Some of these funders are long-standing and multi-year partners, which we'd particularly like to recognise. These include **Wishlist** at the Sunshine Coast University Hospital, Qld; the **Humpty Dumpty Foundation** at Royal North Shore Hospital, NSW; the **John James Foundation** at the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, ACT; and in Western Australia, both **Channel 7 Telethon** and the **Stan Perron Charitable Foundation** which support us at the Perth Children's Hospital and Fiona Stanley Hospital respectively.

## Remembering Kerry Reid



We would especially like to honour and celebrate the life of one of our long-standing performers, Kerry Reid, who sadly passed away this year.

Kerry joined The Humour Foundation in 2009, bringing her beautiful, playful, cheeky, irreverent, sensitive, big-hearted work to thousands of children, parents and carers in South Australian hospitals as Dr Prim-Rose – and to many aged care residents as Rosie Prim-Rose in her role as a much-loved Laughter Care Specialist.

A truly gifted performer, colleague, and friend, she is deeply missed by all who knew and loved her. Kerry leaves behind a legacy of many joyful moments through her work in South Australia, and she will always be remembered.





## 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!*

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