

Health and Wellbeing Spaces in Health Libraries

Alana McDonald

Sydney Children's Hospitals Network

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0903-7972>

With thanks to staff at Western Sydney LHD, South Western Sydney LHD, Hunter New England LHD, Grampians Health, Northern Health, and Austin Health for their contributions.

I presented at the 2025 HLA conference, talking about the SCHN Wellness Space, including the ways we set it up on a minimal budget and the positive feedback we've received. Rather than writing a recap of that presentation, I put a call out to other health libraries to gather information on their spaces. Although not a comprehensive list of all wellbeing spaces across Australia, I hope this summary of what some hospitals are doing might spark new ideas for all of us and provide a bit of inspiration!

Sydney Children's Hospitals Network (NSW) Wellness Space, Children's Hospital at Westmead



The SCHN Wellness Space was created in 2024 and launched during Library & Information Week. The space is set up in a corner of the library, repurposing our old "New Journals" wall to display Health & Wellbeing titles. The space was created in collaboration with Staff Health & Wellbeing, who provided some suggestions for titles to purchase and assisted us with promoting the space across the hospital.

The space contains:

- A collection of Health & Wellbeing books (116 titles)
- Collaborative jigsaw puzzle
- Fidget toys
- Tea and coffee sachets
- Colouring sheets and pencils
- Lego
- Jigsaw puzzles for loan (new!)
- Comfortable chairs
- A book stand to display additional titles
- A plant that is slowly growing to an alarming size



As we support staff across two hospitals and several other sites, we also have a [Health & Wellbeing library guide](#) which includes information about our space, all the books we have available for loan, and collections of relevant websites and apps on topics such as mental health and mindfulness.

Western Sydney LHD (NSW)

Western Sydney LHD has a wellbeing space in all library locations, some of which are included in more detail below:

Wellness Nook, Mental Health Services Library Tracy McDonald



Nestled on the banks of the beautiful Parramatta River, the WSLHD Mental Health Service Library is a leading resource hub for mental health professionals, researchers,

and students in Western Sydney. With over 175 years of history in mental health care, our library offers a rich collection of specialised resources and a peaceful environment to support work and study.

Our wellness space offers a space for relaxation, mindfulness practice and quiet reflection.

The wellness space established within our mental health library offers a dedicated environment for relaxation, mindfulness practice, and quiet reflection. Our riverside location has proven particularly restorative; staff regularly comment on the soothing backdrop provided by the sounds of birdsong and the rustling of trees outside.



After seeing a similar wellness space created at the Sydney Children's Hospitals Library at Westmead, we contemplated establishing something comparable within our own mental health library. Initially, the decision to create this space was approached with some apprehension, as similar spaces were already available on clinical wards. However, it soon became evident that staff deeply valued having an area specifically designed for uninterrupted respite. Staff consistently expressed that the wellness space provided notable benefits, reporting a sense of improved wellbeing and gratitude following their visits.

On average, five to ten staff members make use of the space each week, however this number is increasing as word spreads. Activities such as colouring have become particularly popular, some staff members complete new pages and take them home, while others add to collaborative pieces started by colleagues, subtly fostering a sense of community and continuity among users. Additional features that enhance the ambience include puzzles for meditative engagement, gratitude colouring books, mindful art materials, origami kits, and a knitted rug made by a grateful patient. The area is adorned with healthy plants and comfortable chairs, further contributing to the calming atmosphere. A particularly memorable instance involved a staff member who, upon sampling a blend of tea offered in the space, was reminded of comforting afternoons with their grandmother, transforming a routine break into a moment of calm and emotional connection. This individual, like many others, has become a regular visitor.

Our wellbeing collection of books is also highly sought-after, evidenced by the disappearance of a title - we interpreted this as an indication of genuine need. Collectively, these personal experiences underscore the multifaceted benefits and meaningful impact of a thoughtfully curated wellness space for hospital staff, supporting both individual and collective wellbeing in the demanding clinical environment.

The Wellbeing Hub, Auburn Hospital Library **Prashanti Goluguri**



This dedicated space for wellbeing is called The Wellbeing Hub and was launched in July 2025 during Library and Information Week. Library patrons can relax with a personal development and wellbeing book from our extensive collection, unwind with a puzzle or mindfulness colouring in or just take a seat and have a break.

Chillout Zone, Westmead Hospital Library **Roopa Shah and Leah Wallis**



When our print journal subscriptions were cancelled at the beginning of the year, the once-busy journal display corner of our library suddenly fell silent. For six months, the space—with its inviting sofas, adjustable tables, and display shelves stood unused. It felt like a lost opportunity.

That changed after a visit to the Children's Hospital Westmead's Wellness Zone. Inspired by their creative use of space to promote wellbeing, we saw potential in our vacant corner. And so, the idea of transforming it into a wellness space for our staff and students was born.

At first, it had no official name, just our little "wellness zone." But after canvassing ideas from the team, we landed on a name that stuck: Chillout Zone. It felt right, especially considering the large number of students and young people who frequent our library.

With no budget initially, and a lot of heart, we began the transformation. We picked up affordable items from Kmart: colouring pencils, adult colouring books, jigsaw puzzles. Staff generously donated a Rubik's cube and ball, a chess set, crossword and word puzzle books, local newspapers, and magazines. The adjustable tables were replaced with sturdier ones better suited to puzzles and games. The old journal display shelves now house a small but growing selection of books available for borrowing.



We had a soft launch in June 2025. We also created a feedback wall, inviting users to share their thoughts via post-it notes. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

Encouraged by this, we officially launched the Chillout Zone during Library and Information Week with a ribbon-cutting ceremony led by Director MM and a celebratory morning tea. Around 30 people attended, and the reaction was fantastic. Attendees were delighted and surprised by how thoughtfully the space had been reimagined.

Promotion for the launch appeared in *The Regular Dose* and *The Pulse*, as well as through posters and word of mouth. Corporate Communications even sent a photographer, and a story was featured in *The Regular Dose*.

Since then, the Chillout Zone has become one of our most popular areas. People drop in to sit quietly, colour, complete a puzzle, play chess, or simply enjoy a few moments of calm in a busy day. While we've had the odd pen or book go missing, the overall response has been deeply encouraging.

We continue to monitor feedback and regularly update the resources available in the space. Looking ahead, we're exploring the idea of developing a wellness collection of books that can be borrowed across the district—bringing the spirit of the Chillout Zone to even more people.

What began as an empty corner is now a vibrant, welcoming space dedicated to mental wellbeing, creativity, and community. It's a testament to how small changes—guided by a shared vision—can make a big impact.

South Western Sydney LHD

Judy Reading



We have tried to make the whole Library a welcoming wellbeing space with plants and a fish tank. We also allow people to eat and drink in the Library and have free tea and coffee facilities.

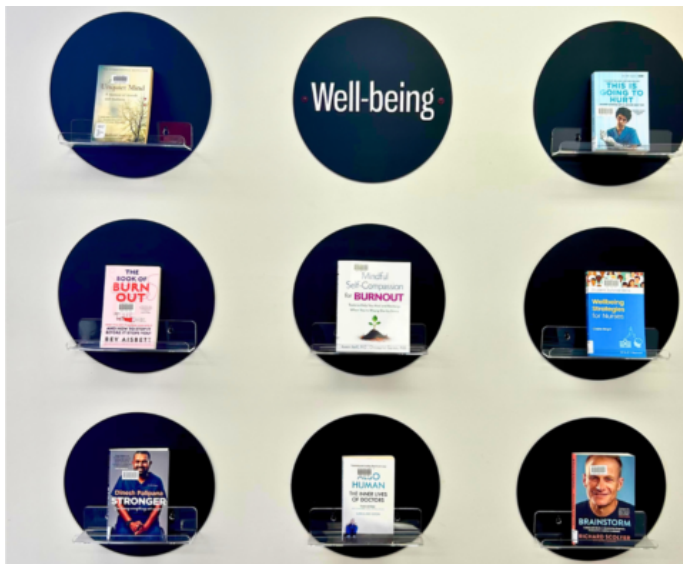
In our recent survey we received many comments about how attractive the Library is – people said it was a lovely peaceful space to study and they appreciated the fishtank and the tea and coffee facilities.

Quotes from the survey include:
"It's always super tidy and I love the fish tank they maintain as it helps provide a calming space. It's a decent size without feeling too big (like working in a nice café)."
"Great quiet place to study before placement or ICM class. I love the complementary tea and coffee"
"A really nice place to study"
"I really love the blue shrimp in the fish tank. 10/10."



We are thinking of getting some games, jigsaws, adult colouring books to have for the students.

Hunter New England LHD Well-Being Collection, Tamworth Hospital Angela Smith

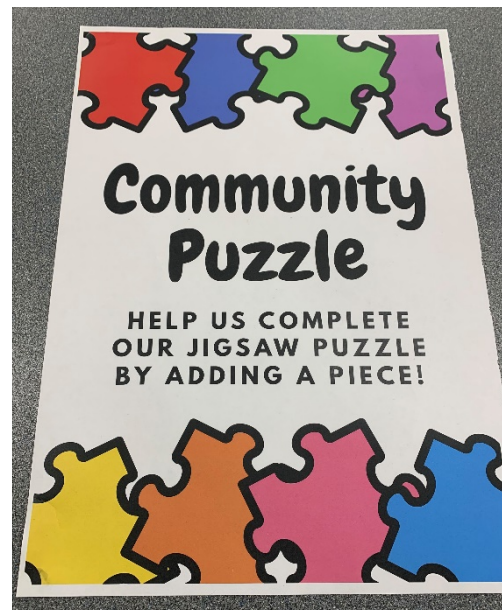


Our Tamworth library is currently undergoing a series of enhancements to better support staff and students. One of the newest additions is the **Well-Being Collection** Installation, thoughtfully curated to promote mental health, resilience,

and personal growth. We are planning to create a wellbeing space at our Mater branch as well.

Grampians Health
Gemma Siemensma

In our hospital library, wellbeing is nurtured through thoughtful resources that offer moments of calm and mental escape from the clinical environment. We provide a welcoming space where staff can engage with community jigsaw puzzles, adult colouring books, crosswords, comfortable chairs and a book swap shelf. These simple yet meaningful activities promote relaxation, reduce stress, and support emotional wellbeing—creating a quiet refuge for reflection, creativity, and connection within the hospital setting.



Northern Health
Tania Barry

Here at the Northern Health Library, we offer a range of resources and activities to support staff wellbeing, some in the Library and some in individual department spaces. We don't really have a name for our space – we refer to it collectively as the Wellness Space.

In the Library:

- Communal jigsaw puzzles for staff to work on together
- Colouring books and puzzle books
- Leisure reading collection
- The NH "Pet Wall" featuring staff pets (has really encouraged lighthearted connection between teams)

The Library also supports small spaces in some staff areas with books, puzzle books and jigsaws for quiet breaks and downtime.

Austin Health
Monica Simpson

At Austin we don't have a dedicated wellbeing area, but over the last two years have incorporated wellbeing activities into the Library space and our messaging about what the Library offers all staff and students at Austin Health and Mercy Heidelberg.

In our messaging we always try to include that we are open to all staff - clinicians, students and non-clinical staff - and that the Library space is available not only for study, but also for relaxation and as a place to “chill out”.



Wellbeing Collection

In 2024 we created a Wellness Collection and launched it during the Austin Wellbeing Festival. The topics focus on general wellbeing and self-care, with a focus on healthcare workers wherever possible.

In September 2025 we also created a [Wellbeing for healthcare staff Library Info Guide](#).

Leisure Reading Collection

Early 2025 we retired our Little Free Library (where people could take or donate a book) and instead created a Leisure Reading Collection from which people can borrow. This collection consists of some latest release fiction books covering a wide range of genres.



Puzzle table

We have a puzzle table that is popular (but sometimes the 1000 pieces can be a bit tricky!). I've just added a small poster with QR codes to two online puzzle sites: [Te papa](#) and [Melbourne Museum](#).

Puzzles and games

Along with the table we have a small collection of puzzles and games for people to use.

Relaxation spaces (i.e. nice chairs and comfy couches)

We have an area inside the Library with two nice comfy chairs, a couch and coffee table. We find people like to sit here, even have a nap every now and again. We also have 2 other couches that are tucked away, but near large windows so there is natural light.



Treats

I think one of our most popular wellness activities is the treat bowl! During Library & Information Week, Valentines Day, Easter, Christmas, Halloween and any other occasion we can think of we put out a bowl of lollies/chocolates. A little treat seems to give people a huge lift.

Some final thoughts...

Alana McDonald (again!)

It's great to see so many different ways health libraries are implementing health & wellbeing in their spaces. Thank you to everyone who contributed and I'm particularly keen to see if we can get a fishtank at SCHN now!

Wellbeing spaces can be anything from a small box of activities or a collection of books, through to being embedded throughout the service as Austin Health has done. Although the spaces vary, the philosophy of wanting to give hospital staff a much-needed space to relax and recharge is consistent across all services, highlighting the ways in which we provide value to staff and students beyond the typical services we provide. With space being at a premium in most hospitals, the importance of libraries cannot be overstated. We offer something unique and valuable in the health landscape, and we must ensure libraries remain a protected space into the future.