

Reducing the impact of chronic hepatitis B (CHB) *- seasonal workers in regional Queensland*



[Mareeba] Yidinji, Yirrgandji, Mamu, Djirrbalngan, Gimuy-walubarra yidi, Djiru peoples of North Queensland



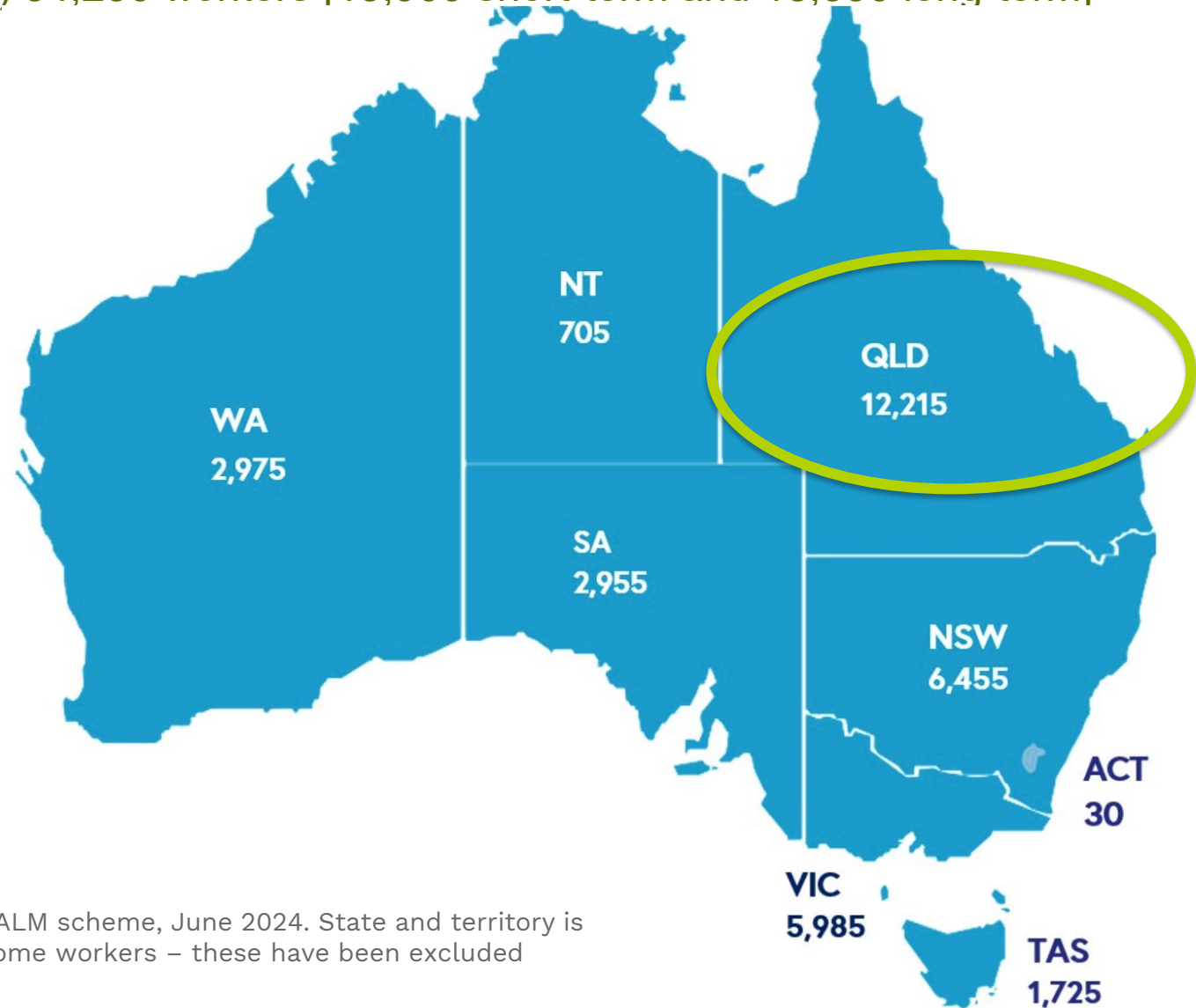
Gundungurra and Dhurug lands Blue Mountains NSW

Reducing the impact of chronic hepatitis B (CHB) in seasonal workers in regional Queensland

1. Background and context
2. PALM scheme workers – industry, home country, location
3. Burden of Hepatitis B (HBV) burden in seasonal workers
4. Our study
5. Where we are
6. Preliminary findings and messages
7. What next...

PALM scheme workers by state and territory

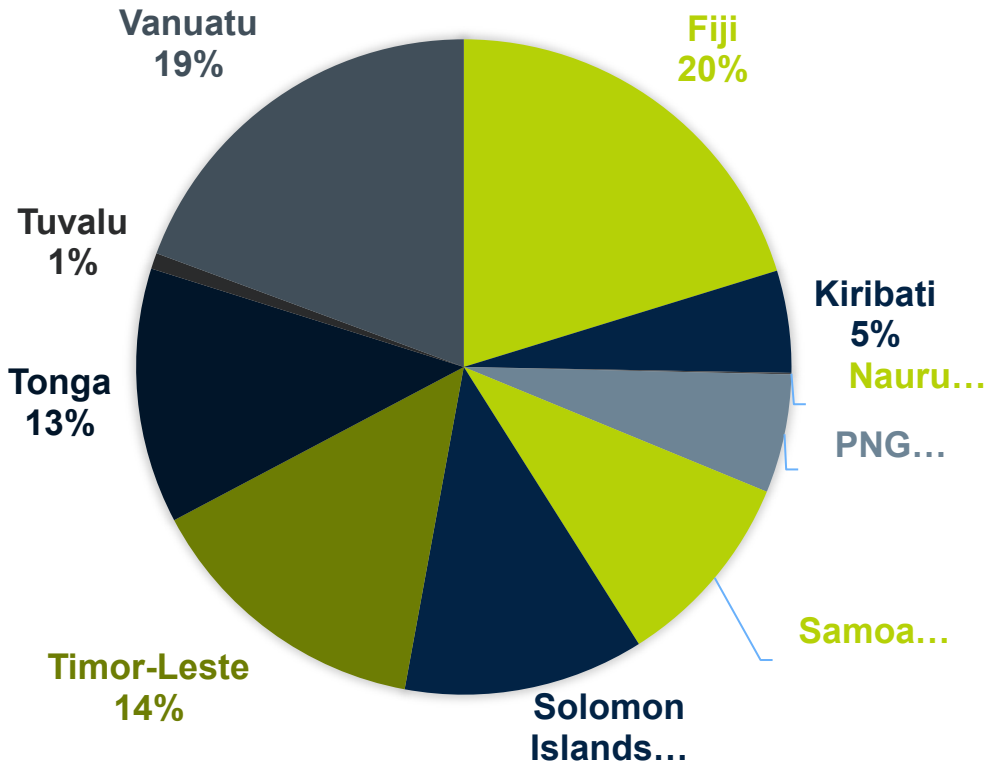
(June 2024) 34,230 workers [15,900 short-term and 18,330 long-term]



Source: DEWR, PALM scheme, June 2024. State and territory is unavailable for some workers – these have been excluded from the above.

<https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/palm-scheme-data>

PALM scheme workers



Mostly **agriculture** (54%) & **meat processing** (38%)
 ~ 80% male, 20% women

Fiji	Kiribati	Nauru	Papua New Guinea	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Timor-Leste	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu
6,695	1,665	25	1,935	3,245	5,085	4,750	4,165	260	6,400

HBV / CHB – disease of inequity

- Two-thirds of HBV infections concentrated in WHO Western Pacific (116 million) & African (81 million) regions ¹
 - [HBV elimination as a public health threat by 2030?]
- The number of Aust PALM workers is increasing
- PALM seasonal workers bring many benefits
 - Support Australia's economic competitiveness
- Australia – duty of care for PALM seasonal workers
 - Supporting health is a critical investment as well as a human right



Our study - *Reducing the impact of chronic hepatitis B (CHB) in seasonal workers in regional Queensland*

Aiming to...

- Better understand the experiences of seasonal workers with Chronic Hepatitis B (CHB) in regional Queensland accessing health care & services
- Better understand the experiences of health care and service providers who provide care & support for PALM seasonal workers
- Identify equity gaps in Hepatitis B policy in Australia



'Regional Queensland' as defined by the ABS - both inner and outer regional areas

Who we are...

Project team / Investigators



Dr Haylee Fox,
CQU School of
Health, Medical
and Applied
Sciences



Dr Robyn Preston,
CQU School of
Health, Medical and
Applied Sciences



A/Prof Catherine
O'Mullan, CQU School
of Health, Medical and
Applied Sciences



Dr Geraldine Vaughan,
CQU School of Health,
Medical and Applied
Sciences

Investigators, Steering committee

Central Queensland University

Prof Janya McCalman, Jawun Research Centre

Prof Chris Doran, Health Economics; Centre for Indigenous Health Equity Research

Prof Adrian Miller, Centre for Indigenous Health Equity Research

Dr Rachel Claydon, Refugee Health Network Queensland

Ms Zhihong Ghu, Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland

Dr Katelin Haynes, Brisbane South Primary Health Network

Dr Gary Jones, United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

A/Professor Billingsley Kaambwa, Flinders University

Hepatitis Queensland

Methodology

Mixed method sequential research design



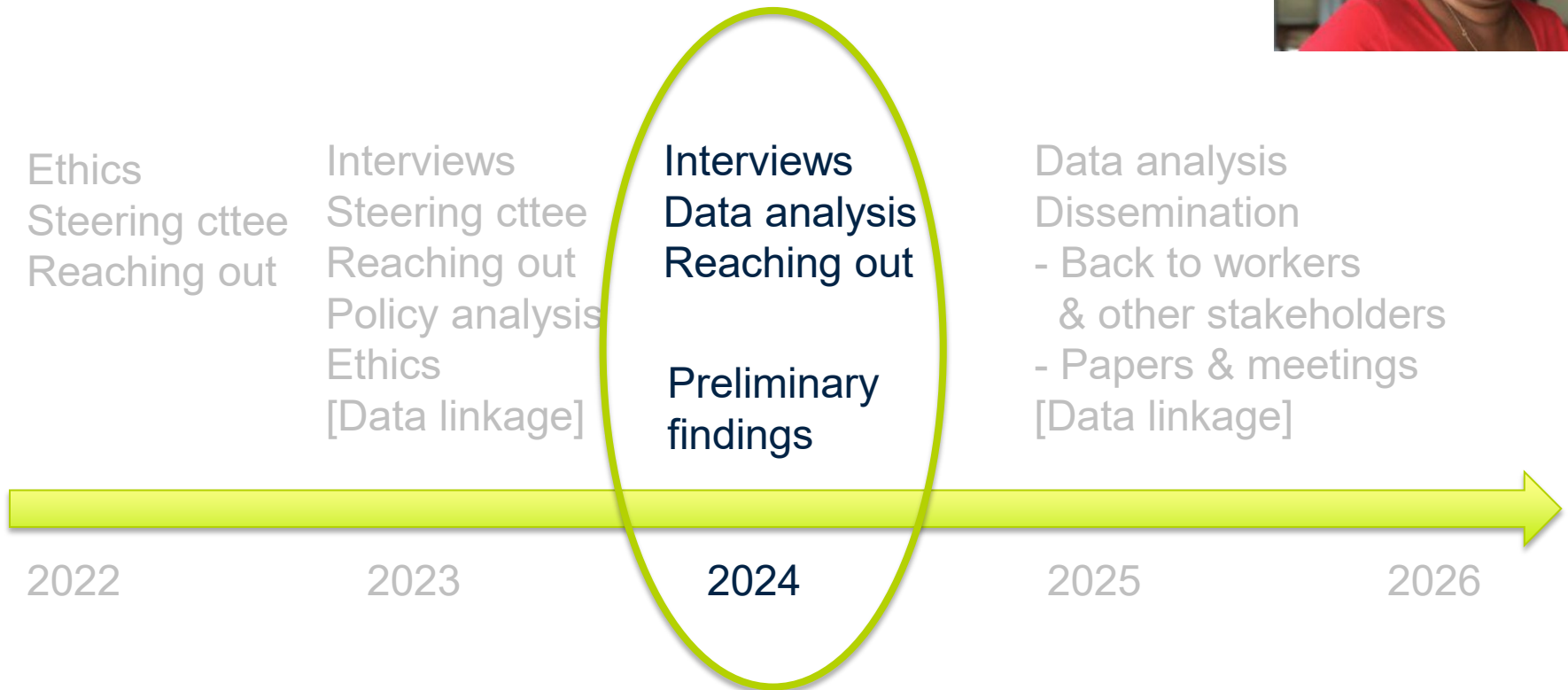
Qualitative interviews with Seasonal Workers and health care and service providers in regional Queensland

Document review and policy analysis of public health Hepatitis B policy documents in Australia

Follow-up surveys informed by interviews – seasonal workers and service providers

Qld Health linked dataset & economic analysis

Where we are...



Preliminary findings

Interviews with 18 **seasonal workers** across regional Qld (mostly agriculture, meatworks)

Key messages

- Low awareness of Hep B status
- Cultural stigma and shame around HBV
- Healthcare system doesn't meet workers' needs
- Access to health services generally
- Health insurance issues
- Reproductive health issues
- Inconsistent and confusing policies

"If you're going to get sick, you can't work, you can't survive, you can't pay for anything. You're better off to go home."

"Why would I want to go and see the nurse for an hour? I need to make money now and if I die from hepatitis B or liver cancer, well, that'll probably happen later on. I'll just forget about that for now"

Preliminary findings

27 service providers (health services, policy-makers, public & sexual health, community, seasonal worker management/ coordination, farm managers)

Key messages

- Low awareness of Hep B status in seasonal workers
- Confusion among health service providers re (pre) screening HBV
- Targeted support for treatment – medication, monitoring required
- Support better health literacy – workers’ native languages
- BBV working in eg meatworks
- Healthcare system doesn’t meet workers’ needs
 - Access to health services generally
 - Health insurance issues
 - Inconsistent and confusing policies
 - Reproductive health
- Need better collaboration with key stakeholders - local services, insurance

“If they come with a pre-existing medical condition, it's hard to provide any medical treatment ... because the health fund does not pay for it” – Clinician

“In the event that they return a positive [Hepatitis B] result, what are we going to do about that? They're non-Medicare funded.... So that would be the reason why we would not often screen for that” - GP

Document review and policy analysis of public health Hepatitis B policy documents

Health policy analysis on Hep B policies in Australia
compared to Canada and New Zealand

Key messages

- Reviewed policies emphasise testing and awareness in priority populations
- *But ...* despite acknowledging challenges for temporary visa holders, policies lack specific provisions for seasonal workers.
- Underscores the need to prioritise equity for temporary seasonal workers to achieve hepatitis B elimination goals by 2030.
 - Inclusive policies that explicitly recognise temporary seasonal workers as a priority population, aligning with international human rights commitments to health care for all.

What's next

- Survey
- Data analysis continues
- Feedback
 - To Workers, Service providers & other stakeholders
- Write up our findings
- Dissemination
 - Papers
 - Meetings
- [Data linkage]

References

- Hsu, Y-C, Huang, DQ & Nguyen, MH 2023, 'Global burden of hepatitis B virus: current status, missed opportunities and a call for action', *Nature Reviews Gastroenterology & Hepatology*, vol. 20, no. 8, pp. 524-537.
- Woodring J, PR, Brink A, Ishikawa N, Takashima Y, Tohme RA. 2019, *Progress Toward Hepatitis B Control and Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of Hepatitis B Virus — Western Pacific Region, 2005–2017*, *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2019;68:195–200, viewed August 2024.
- Palm Scheme <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au>

Thank you ...

...to the seasonal workers and service providers and others who have been so generous with their time and perspectives...

Acknowledgements

*Our funders - Australian government Department of Health
Grant #4-H3C9CYJ (2022-26) and CQUniversity*

Palm Scheme <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au> (information and images)