

The Prince Charles Hospital Foundation Steps Back from Ekka Strawberry Sundae Program After 35 Incredible Years

As The Prince Charles Hospital Foundation approaches its 40-year milestone in 2026, the Brisbane-based medical research charity has made the significant decision to step back from the Ekka Strawberry Sundae program. This move will allow the Foundation to focus more intently on initiatives that directly amplify its impact on patient care and life-saving medical research.

For 35 years, the Foundation has proudly been the custodian of this beloved program, which has symbolised the heart and generosity of a community coming together for the common good. Rest assured the much loved and iconic Ekka Strawberry Sundae will continue at the Ekka for generations to come, with all sites operated by the not-for-profit RNA.

What began as a small and humble fundraising opportunity in the late 1980s evolved into a mammoth operation, requiring nine months of planning, five busy sites, and the help of over 2,000 volunteers each year.

However, rising costs, increased risks, and the ongoing challenge of recruiting thousands of volunteers have led the Foundation to call time on managing this cherished program.

“This wasn’t an easy decision to make, but we’re confident it’s the right one,” said Steve Francia, Chief Executive Officer of The Prince Charles Hospital Foundation.

“By transitioning away from this program, we can focus even more on initiatives that can make the biggest impact in people’s lives. It’s about using our resources in the most effective way to make a real difference where it’s needed most.”

Reflecting on the legacy of the Ekka Strawberry Sundae program, Mr Francia expressed immense pride in what it has achieved:

“The program has supported groundbreaking initiatives, including the revolutionary ICU of The Future, a world-first project that saw two ICU bedspaces redesigned and reconfigured to be more patient centric and recovery focused. It also helped create a unique, village-like community area for patients living with dementia—the first of its kind in an Australian hospital—and funded medical research that pioneered a new way to transport donor hearts across the country.”

RNA Chief Executive Officer Brendan Christou said, “While we are sad to farewell The Prince Charles Hospital Foundation, who has done a spectacular job delivering this program to Ekka showgoers, we understand their decision given their focus on delivering the biggest impact possible for the communities they serve.

“We thank them and the incredible team of volunteers for their tireless work, serving up an estimated 3 million sundaes since their involvement commenced in the late 80’s.”

The Foundation said it has been a privilege to collaborate with the RNA on this iconic program for 35 years.

“We are incredibly proud of the legacy we have built together and the significant impact this program has had over the decades. It will always remain one of the most significant fundraising programs in our history and evolution,” said Mr Francia.

Mr Francia also extended heartfelt gratitude to the volunteers whose dedication made the program a success.

“To our volunteers, thank you. Your impact is immeasurable, and your contributions have left a mark on the lives of countless patients. The success of the Ekka Strawberry Sundae program wouldn’t have been possible without you.”

As the Foundation reflects on its rich history with the program, it looks ahead to its 40-year milestone in 2026 with renewed focus.

“When we consider that the first heart transplant was performed in Australia in 1984, just two years before The Prince Charles Hospital Foundation was established, it’s incredible to reflect on the progress powered by research,” said Mr Francia.

“Moving forward from this iconic program will allow us to maximise our efforts in supporting critical research, equipment, and patient care programs for the next 40 years and beyond.”

Although this chapter has come to a close, there are still many opportunities to make an impact through the Foundation. Supporters are encouraged to explore ways to volunteer, donate, or advocate for its vital work in improving health outcomes for this generation and the next.

For more information on how to get involved, visit www.thecommongood.org.au or www.tcg.org.au/strawberry-sundae.

For The Prince Charles Hospital Foundation media enquiries or requests, please contact:

Isabella Zaini (nee Robinson), Communications and Media Officer

Email: isabella.zaini@tpchfoundation.org.au

Phone: 1800 501 269

Additional Information for Media

1. The Prince Charles Hospital Foundation, through its community and fundraising initiative, The Common Good, makes an impact by funding life-changing and life-saving research, essential equipment, and impactful patient-care programs to help people live healthier for longer.
2. The Foundation is proud to support The Prince Charles Hospital (one of Australia’s leading cardiothoracic hospitals and currently home to Queensland’s second busiest Emergency Department) as well as Caboolture Hospital, which serves a growing community.
3. In FY24, the Foundation distributed \$7.8M to life-changing and life-saving medical research and patient care programs.



THE COMMON GOOD

AN INITIATIVE OF THE PRINCE CHARLES HOSPITAL FOUNDATION

4. In 2026, the Foundation will celebrate its 40th anniversary, marking four decades of contributing to life-changing medical research and improving health outcomes for Australians.
5. The Foundation offers a number of volunteering opportunities throughout the year, including hospital volunteer programs at The Prince Charles Hospital, Caboolture Hospital and Kallangur Satellite Hospital. These programs provide over 40,000 hours of volunteering each year.
6. In 2024, Queensland Gives acknowledged the Foundation as the QLD Philanthropic Foundation of the Year.