

A very healthy outlook

By Matt Crossman

"We're trying our damndest to do what's best for our town and we're doing it extremely well."

That's the philosophy outgoing Sunbury Community Health chairwoman Mary Rush says led to the organisation being recognised as the premier's primary health service of the year.

News of the major state award added to the celebratory feel of the service's 40th annual meeting last week.

Ms Rush, who will remain on the board, said that while waves of population growth posed challenges, the award win was proof SCH was meeting community needs.

"We believe we've been an award-winning centre for all 40 years," she said.

"When you actually sit down and assess your organisation ... our application was amazing in that we do so many of the things the government wants health services to do."

With the support of more than 200 staff and volunteers, SCH provides a long list of programs and services, ranging from early intervention and dental to counselling, walking groups, diabetes education and aged care.

Ms Rush said partnerships with Hume council, the government's Healthy Together program and Sunbury Business Association continued to help the service foster health-affirming factors such as strong families, social cohesion and mental health, as well as fight the prevalence of risks such as obesity, tobacco, alcohol and drug use, family violence, problem gambling and vulnerabilities arising from low incomes or ageing.

"I'm most proud of how we are a very strong values-based organisation," she said.

"Our philosophy is all about connecting with the community – we not only say it, we do it."



Mary Rush with Sunbury Community Health chief executive Phillip Ripper. (Damijan Janevski)

Ms Rush, who was full of praise for chief executive Phillip Ripper and his team, said the service had also set itself up for future challenges.

"Population growth is going to test our services, absolutely," she said.

"It will be across the board, because we

provide services from birth all the way through to aged care.

"But now we're a company limited by guarantee ... that's something that gives us stability because we've been able to not be concerned about the threat of being taken over by a large organisation."