A healthier future

Annual Report 2024

Merri Health
Healthcare that moves with you

Acknowledgement of Country

Merri Health acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land, water and skies where we work.

We acknowledge and pay our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge sovereignty was never ceded.

We also recognise our role in working towards reconciliation; to listen to and be led by the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to honour truth-telling so we can learn from the wrongdoings of the past, and to do the heavy lifting to lead change.

Merri Health creates healthy, connected communities through local health services for people at every age and stage of life. One of Victoria's largest not-for-profit community health organisations, we've been part of your community for over 45 years.

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Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the financial support received from the Victorian and Federal Governments in addition to several local government areas and revenue we generate through our other activities to support service delivery.

merrihealth.org.au

Our purpose

To enrich diverse communities through quality healthcare and support services.

Our promise

To provide you with an outstanding customer experience through genuine relationships, positive outcomes and community presence.

Our values

We are **MERRI:** we Motivate, Engage, Respect, Respond, and Innovate

La nostra missione

Arricchire varie comunità attraverso servizi sanitari e assistenziali di qualità.

La nostra promessa

Offrirvi un'esperienza eccezionale attraverso relazioni autentiche, risultati positivi e presenza nella comunità.

I nostri valori

Seguiamo la filosofia **"MERRI"**: motiviamo, coinvolgiamo, rispettiamo, rispondiamo e innoviamo.

Ο σκοπός μας

Είναι ο εμπλουτισμός ποικιλόμορφων κοινοτήτων μέσω ποιοτικής υγειονομικής περίθαλψης και υπηρεσιών υποστήριξης.

Η υπόσχεσή μας

Είναι να σας προσφέρουμε μια εξαιρετική εμπειρία πελάτη μέσω γνήσιων σχέσεων, θετικών αποτελεσμάτων και παρουσίας στην κοινότητα.

Οι αξίες μας

Είμαστε το Κοινοτικό Κέντρο Υγείας **MERRI: που** παρακινούμε, δεσμευόμαστε, σεβόμαστε, ανταποκρινόμαστε και καινοτομούμε.

هدفنا

دعم المجتمعات المتنوعة من خلال تقديم خدمات الرعاية الصحية والدعم رفيعة المستوى.

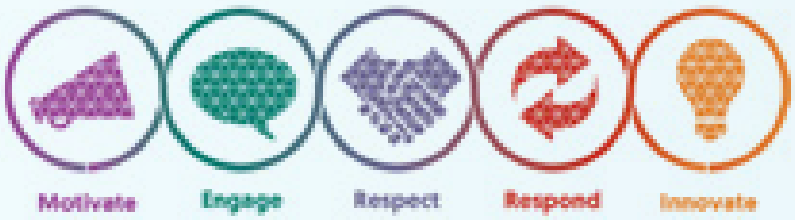
التزامنا

توفر لكم تجربة عملاء رائعة من خلال علاقات حقيقية ونتائج إيجابية ووجود مجتمعي

قيمنا

نحن في **Merri**:

نُحفز ونُشارك ونحترم ونستجيب ونبتكر



About this report

This annual report provides a summary of our operational and financial performance during the 2023-24 financial year.

It highlights how we work to create healthy, connected communities through high quality health services that respond to community needs. It also contains information about our organisation, how it's structured, our Board of Directors, governance, actions and achievements.

A healthier future

Merri Health is committed to partnering with consumers and organisations to deliver innovative solutions that meet the needs of our communities now and into the future. As a community health organisation, we are passionate about leading positive change that supports people's physical, mental, and social well-being. This year's report highlights the real-life positive outcomes of individuals at every stage of life, with key activities spotlighted throughout.

How do we put this information together?

Teams across the organisation contribute to this report, guided by statutory requirements and Merri Health's priority areas in our strategic directions.

We review the report with our Board, leadership team, staff, clients and community members to ensure that it is correct, easy to understand and informative.

Local Fawkner residents celebrating gender inclusion at Merri Health's International Women's Day event.

Board Chair and CEO Report

It's been a momentous year! We are delighted to share an overview of our operations, highlighting key achievements, challenges, and our future plans.

A healthier future

It's been a remarkable year, and our 2024 Annual Report, themed *A Healthier Future*, highlights our commitment to delivering innovative solutions, and a strong, sustainable organisation providing world-class community health care into the future.

We are passionate about driving positive change to enhance the physical, mental, and social health of our diverse communities. This year, we embarked on an exciting merger journey with Banyule Community Health.

Merri Health and Banyule Community Health are both highly respected, community driven organisations with similar histories, shared values, and great people.

Together, combining our skills, resources and deep experience, we will improve services and health outcomes for communities, increase opportunities for staff, provide a bigger platform for advocacy, and strengthen our ability to respond to the opportunities and challenges of the changing health and social care sector.

Exceptional quality care

Prevention and patient-centred care remain at the heart of what we do. This report provides an opportunity to reflect on the positive health and wellbeing outcomes we've delivered, in line with our vision and purpose. These include:

- **298,694 service instances provided,** up 11% from 2023
- **17,667 carers supported across Victoria,** with 14,485 new carers registered
- **158% rise in children receiving Smile Squad dental care,** 2,581 students supported
- **100% of Chronic Pain Service patients reported improved physical abilities,** up 22.2% from 2023
- **Introduced GP services with Brunswick Community Medical Centre**
- **Launched Well@Home service,** providing rapid allied health access for Home Care Package clients
- **Introduced a Palliative Care Pilot program** to support unpaid carers

Providing GP services has been a key strategic priority to enhance our comprehensive quality of care for our communities. We were delighted to commence GP services through the Brunswick Community Medical Centre, co-located at our Brunswick site.

Preparedness in aged care and mental health remains a top priority as reforms continue to reshape the landscape.

Investing in our facilities to grow treatment options, enhance client and staff experiences at sites and improve safety is an ongoing focus. We completed refurbishments at Glenroy and Preston and rolled-out a new security access system across eight sites.

Looking to the future, we are excited about the opportunities to expand accessible, integrated care as part of Coburg Health Hub - a pioneering health precinct planned to service Melbourne's fast growing northern suburbs. We have continued to collaborate with partners towards a new, purpose-built Merri Health site at the Coburg Health Hub.

Advocacy

Community Health is pivotal to the health and wellbeing of our communities and our health system. As demand for local services grows and health needs become more complex, we have increased our advocacy for greater sector funding and recognition – both directly with Government, and through our Community Health First partnership with all 23 independent Victorian Community Health organisations.

We are pleased to report funding extensions for several important services including our Family Foundations program, Chronic Pain Service and Stepped Care for Older Adults mental health support.

This year, we were delighted to welcome The Hon. Ros Spence, MP Victorian Minister for Carers and Community Sport, to meet with our carer clients and staff; and Gabrielle Williams, MP Minister for Mental Health, who joined us to hear more about our work in Victoria's mental health system, and the positive impact of our Stepped Care for Older Adults program, where 82% of participants reported reduced loneliness.

Community and consumer engagement

Ongoing community and consumer engagement is core to improving our services and ensuring they respond to evolving needs. This year, our focus on engagement saw:

- **A 23% increase in community and consumer engagement activities**
- **The successful launch of our Consumer Advisory Committee**

Recognition

Community members statewide were invited to share their community health experience in the 2023 Victorian Health Engagement Survey - independent research conducted on behalf of the Victorian Department of Health. We're proud to report Merri Health outperformed the state average in 76% of surveyed areas, including:

Anne Jungwirth
Board Chair

Tassia Michaleas
CEO

"Merri Health and Banyule Community Health are both highly respected, community driven organisations with similar histories, shared values, and great people."

- **92% of clients felt their care was tailored to their needs,** 3.7% above average
- **97.7% felt safe accessing our services,** 1.5% above average
- **86% felt listened to and understood by staff,** 2.7% above average

We also successfully met all 194 performance indicators in Aged Care and Mental Health standards audits, conducted by the Aged Care Commission and Quality Innovation Performance (QIP). Assessors commended our commitment to high-quality, person-centred care and proactive quality improvement.

We were thrilled to once again be a Finalist in the 2023 Victorian Public Healthcare Awards, for our Chronic Pain Service. We're also proud to uphold our Rainbow Tick Accreditation, which reaffirms our safe, inclusive, and welcoming services for all.

Partnerships

Collaborative partnerships are essential to extending our services and impact. We are privileged to partner with over 140 organisations, including government bodies, health providers, hospitals, educational institutions, Aboriginal-controlled services, advocacy groups, and community organisations, to improve the health and wellbeing of Victorians.

Governance

Environmental sustainability, Innovative technology, aged care reforms, carer support, and future security have been key Board priorities.

We are pleased to report progress in these areas, including a new finance system, Aged Care Client Management System in development and a new environmental strategy for 2025.

We would like to acknowledge and thank Julie McCormack who concluded her 9-year term on the Board. Her commitment and dedication are greatly appreciated.

We also express our gratitude to the Board Directors whose tenure ceased with the merger with Banyule Community Health: Benjamin Maxfield, Ann Taylor, Joe Caputo, Seide Raffoul, Kenneth Cheng and Michael DeBruyn. They have played a pivotal role in shaping the organisation's future, and their leadership over many years has been crucial to our success.

Our heartfelt thanks go to all current and former Board of Directors, Sub-Committee members, Community Representatives and volunteers for their active engagement and valuable contributions to the organisation's governance.

Our people

We celebrate our resilient and dedicated team. Their leadership and commitment make everything we do for clients and communities possible.

With innovation, thought leadership, and the courage to push boundaries, they drive our growth and help us reach more people. This year, our workforce grew from 391 to 425.

A bright future

Our future is very bright after members of Merri Health and Banyule Community Health unanimously voted to merge in October 2024. A new Board comprising Directors from both organisations and a new Director will oversee the transition to a 'New Organisation'.

Community and clients will be invited to help develop a new name and brand that honours the history of both organisations and represents the shared vision for the future. This will be the last Merri Health titled Annual Report, and we look forward to launching our newly named organisation in 2025 and spearheading new standards in exceptional care, innovation, and consumer experience.

Warmest regards,

Tassia Michaleas
Chief Executive Officer

Anne Jungwirth
Board Chair

Our year at a glance

298,694
service instances provided

158%
increase in children receiving Smile Squad dental care, with
2,581
students supported

100%
of Chronic Pain Service patients reported improvement in their physical abilities, up 22.2% from 2023

Gold
Australasian Reporting Award for our 2023 Annual Report

Finalist
2023 Victorian Public Healthcare Awards

20%
increase in dental patients seen, with
5,862
patients receiving care

Reduced average dental wait times by 8 months

3
new social support activity groups launched to respond to community interests

20%
increase in new Home Care Package client registrations

17,667
carers supported across Victoria, with
14,485
new carers registered for support

71%
increase in carers receiving group In Person Peer Support (IPPS), and
101
unique IPPS carer groups established across Victoria facilitated by counsellors and psychologists

35%
increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carer registrations and young carer registrations

New Palliative Care Pilot program launched to provide specialised support to unpaid carers

Merri Health's Chronic Pain Service was a finalist in the 2023 Victorian Public Healthcare Awards.

Launched NeuroQueer, a first of its kind group in Merri-bek to support neurodivergent queer clients build social and life skills, and self-advocacy

27%

increase in community engagement activities reported by staff

105

of the 133 commitments in our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan completed

All 194

performance indicators met for Aged Care Standards

92.7%

of clients rated the care they received from Merri Health as excellent in the Victorian Healthcare Experience Survey

$250K

grant for building security upgrades through the 2023-24 Metropolitan Health Infrastructure Fund

Well@Home service launched providing fast access to allied health services for Home Care Package clients

Family Foundations funding extended for another 12 months to support new parents (until June 2025)

Successfully piloted Well @ Heart cardiac rehabilitation program to assist people who have had a recent cardiac event or surgery, or multiple heart disease risk factors

New 'Teacher Talk' program delivered to support the communication and social development of children in regional areas and Northern Metropolitan Melbourne

Our reach

Merri Health's footprint has continued to expand. We offer carer services across Victoria and regional programs from our Wangaratta site; while still proudly servicing Merri-bek and surrounds.

The North and West Metropolitan Region

The North and West Metropolitan Region is one of the most diverse areas covering 2,981 square kilometres with 14 Local Government Areas (LGAs): Brimbank, Melton, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Wyndham, Banyule, Darebin, Nillumbik, Melbourne, Merri-bek, Moonee Valley, Yarra, Hume and Whittlesea.

Diversity

It is a highly cultural and socio-economically diverse part of Victoria.

35.2%
of the population were born overseas

with India, Iraq, Italy, Turkey and England being the highest origins. Broadly, Christianity is the most common religion at 40.6% with secular or no religion at 36%.

Health

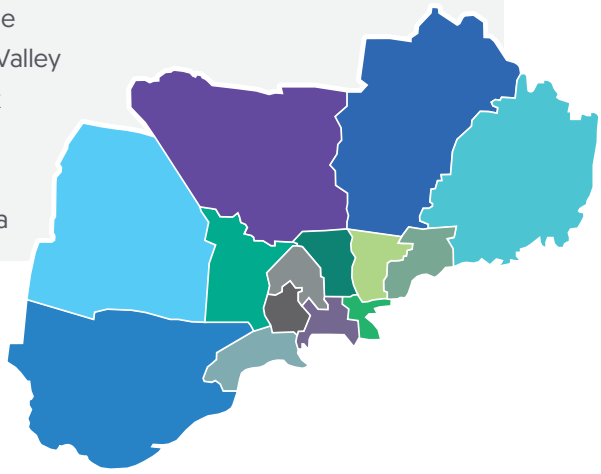
The North and West Metropolitan population faces a number of health issues.

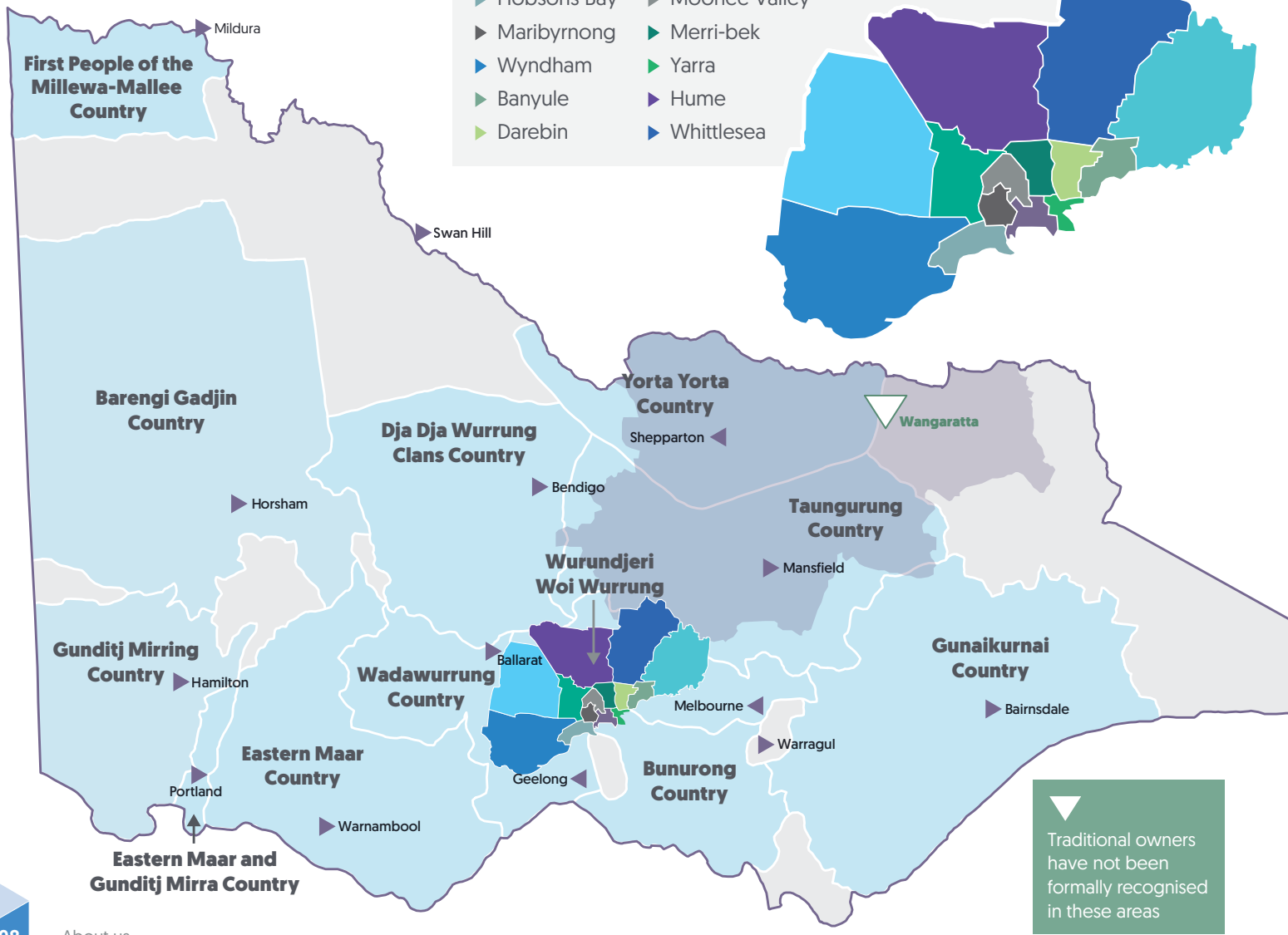
The top health concern being mental health issues (including anxiety) at 8.54%

The highest chronic diseases reported across the North and West of Melbourne are Asthma (7.92%) followed by Arthritis (6.44%) and then Diabetes (4%).

Merri Health's catchment area - The North and West Metropolitan Region:

- Brimbank
- Melton
- Hobsons Bay
- Maribyrnong
- Wyndham
- Banyule
- Darebin
- Nillumbik
- Melbourne
- Moonee Valley
- Merri-bek
- Yarra
- Hume
- Whittlesea





Languages spoken

Within the culturally diverse population,

34%
of the population speak another language at home other than English

This number is as high as 57.3% in Brimbank. Italian is the most popular language spoken at home, followed by Arabic, Urdu and Greek. 11.8% report not being proficient in English.

Age groups

The median age for the population is 36.2 years. People considered working age (15-64 years) make up 69.6% of the population and people aged 70 years+ make up 9.1% of the population.

Disadvantage

The LGAs of Brimbank and Hume are the most disadvantaged areas in the North and West of Melbourne, based on Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). This ranks advantage and disadvantage based on a number of different Australian Bureau of Statistics data sets including, average incomes and rates of employment.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are highly disadvantaged communities in the region. They make up 1.6% of the population in Victoria and typically experience higher levels of chronic illness, suicide rates and psychological distress than non-Indigenous, with young people particularly at risk.

Greater Melbourne

The Greater Melbourne area or wider Metropolitan Melbourne Region covers the North, East, West and South of Melbourne. It includes 31 municipalities and 5.2 million people. This region is undergoing significant growth and change.

Diversity

35.6% of the population were born overseas. The highest number of people born overseas come from India, followed by China, England, Vietnam and New Zealand. 64.4% speak English at home, 4.3% speak Mandarin, 2.3% speak Vietnamese, while Greek and Punjabi sit at 2% each.

Health

People in this area are experiencing a high rate of mental health issues at 8.1%. Other chronic diseases commonly impacting the population include Asthma 7.9% and Arthritis 6.9%.

Age groups

The median age for the population is 36.9 years. People considered working age (15-64 years) make up 67.1% of the population and people aged 70 years+ make up 10.6% of the population.

Disadvantage

An estimated 0.7% of the population are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. They are one of the most vulnerable groups for chronic health conditions and have twice the rate of suicide of non-Indigenous people.

Hume region

Merri Health has substantially increased service provision across the North East of Victoria and the Goulburn Valley, to service the Hume region's 12 LGAs: Mitchell, Murrindindi, Shepparton, Strathbogie, Moira, Mansfield, Wangaratta, Benalla, Indigo, Wodonga, Towong and Alpine. Our Wangaratta site coordinates services in this area.

Diversity

In this region, 11% of the population were born overseas (compared to the State average of 29.9%). English is the most common language spoken, with only 6.1% of people speaking a language other than English at home. Christianity is the most common religion at 44.6% with secular or no religion at 43.3%.

Health

People's highest health concern is Arthritis (11.8%), followed very closely by mental health issues (including anxiety) at 10.1%.

Asthma is also a prominent chronic health condition at 9.6% and heart disease has a higher average rate in Hume (5.3%) than across Greater Melbourne (3.3%).

Age groups

The median age for the population is 46.8 years, which is considerably higher than those in Greater Melbourne (36.9 years). People considered working age (15-64 years) make up 58.5% of the population, while people aged 70 years+ form 17%. This also reflects an increased rate of chronic conditions compared with to Greater Melbourne.

Wider Regional Victoria

Wider Regional Victoria has been defined by The Australian Bureau of Statistics as the "Rest of the State of Victoria". The population is 1,608,296.

Diversity

Only 12.3% of the population was born overseas and 7.1% of this population speak a language other than English at home.

Health

People who live in rural and regional Victoria experience poorer health than metropolitan Victorians. This is due to a greater difficulty accessing health services in remote areas.

People in this area are experiencing a higher rate of mental health issues at 10.9% than the rest of metropolitan Melbourne. The population is affected by chronic diseases, these include Asthma 9.9% and Arthritis 11.2%.

Age groups

The median age for the population is 43.2 years – much older than the rest of the state. People considered working age (15-64 years) make up 60.1% of the population and people aged 70 years+ make up 15% of the population.

References:

- Data by region | Australian Bureau of Statistics (abs.gov.au)
- Language used at home | City of Merri-bek | Community profile (id.com.au)
- Hume Language Profiles - Hume City Council
- Closing the gap reports | Closing the Gap

Our services

Our diverse communities can access over 70 services that enhance their physical, mental, and social health.

Aged services

Our aged care services support choice, connection and independence for anyone over 65 years, or 50 years for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We provide tailored, culturally responsive Home Care Packages, social groups, wellness programs, short-term education, exercise groups and health services like occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and more.

Carer support

Merri Health is the lead organisation for Carer Gateway in Victoria and is one of seven regional partners across the state providing flexible and individualised support for all types of carers.

In addition to our Carer Gateway services, we also support carers through our Merri Carer Services, a suite of support services for people in the North and West Metropolitan areas.

Child and family services

Promoting happy, healthy children and strong families with services like counselling, support for children with a disability, education, family services, and support for those experiencing family violence.

Chronic conditions

Treatment and support to help you live well by managing your chronic condition, such as diabetes and heart and respiratory conditions.

Community wellbeing

We respond to the changing health needs of our community. We help shape healthy schools; address poor school readiness among migrant children through a partnership with local primary schools; support gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer inclusiveness, and much more.

Dental services

Promoting good, oral health through education and general dental support for children and adults. We're also delivering free student dental care through our Smile Squad.

Disability services

Supporting people with a disability with flexible health services and greater choices including speech pathology, occupational therapy, carer support and more. We also provide education and support for children with a disability and their families in Ovens Murray as an NDIS Early Childhood Approach partner.

Health and wellness services

Supporting you to stay healthy and well with short-term education and exercise groups, health services like physiotherapy, occupational therapy, podiatry and more, and a Healthy Eating Activity and Lifestyle group.

Mental health services

Supporting recovery, better health and wellbeing through local group activities, one-on-one support, counselling, support for young people that identify same-sex attracted or gender diverse, residents and proprietors of Supported Residential Services.

Young adult services

Helping put young adults on track for a healthy and fulfilling life with carer support, counselling, education, one-on-one help, and group activities.

Our services are accredited under the following Standards:

- QIC Health and Community Services Standards (7th Edition)
- Australian Aged Care Quality Standards (Quality Standards)
- Department of Human Services Standards (HSS)
- National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards (NSQHS) (ED 2) (Health/Community - Dental Services)
- National Standards for Mental Health Services (NSMHS)
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) Standards
- Rainbow Tick Standards (RT) (ED3)

Our profile

Merri Health is one of Victoria's largest not-for-profit community health providers. We support people at every age and stage of life.

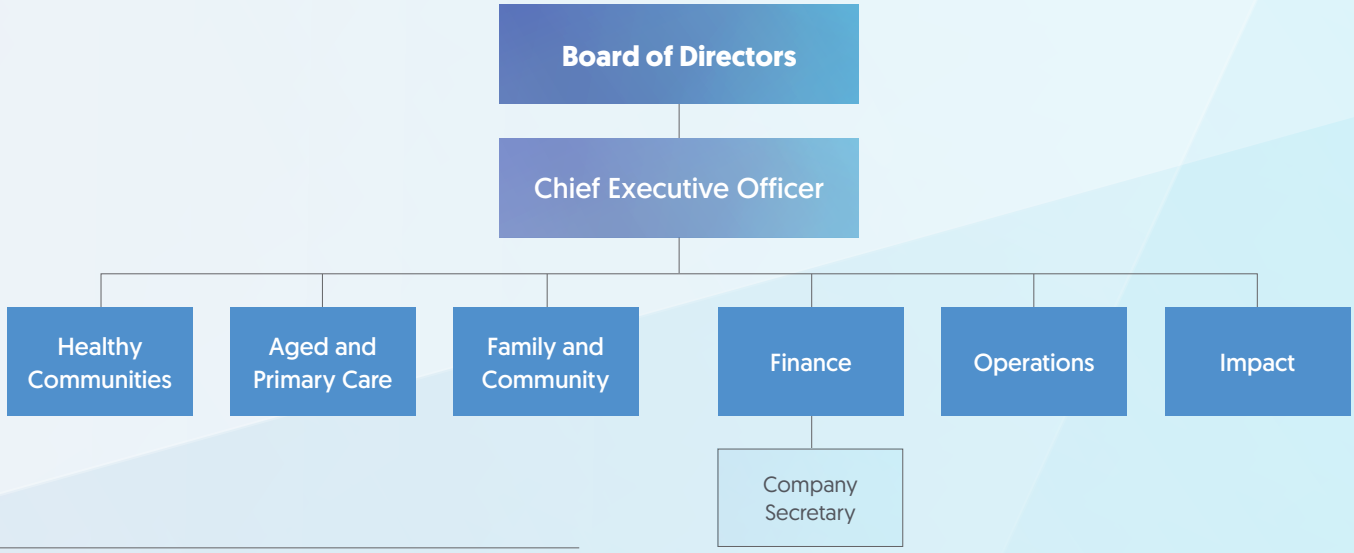
Our 425 dedicated staff work closely with clients to assess their needs, provide support, and connect them with the appropriate services and programs.

We are deeply committed to enhancing health outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, including young and older individuals, people from culturally diverse backgrounds, and those with complex health needs or diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.

In the past year, we have delivered over **298,694 service instances** across our nine locations.

Our organisation

We have three service divisions: Aged and Primary Care, Family and Community and Healthy Communities. Our service operations are supported through three support divisions: Operations, Impact and Finance.



Merri Health's Tassia (middle), Shadi (right) and Board Director Ann (left) welcomed Minister for Mental Health, Gabrielle Williams MP (second from left) and local MP Anthony Cianflone (second from right).

Board of Directors

Our Board of Directors shapes our strategic direction, ensures effective governance, and offers expert advice.

Anne Jungwirth

Chair

Anne Jungwirth is a keen advocate for high quality, accessible community-based health services. She has worked in health education and health services for over 30 years including in policy development, primary care systems improvement and as CEO of a rural community health service.

Benjamin Maxfield

Deputy Chair

Benjamin is the Government Relations Adviser for Victoria's $11 billion Metro Tunnel project. Previously, he served as a senior adviser in the Gillard Government and Shorten Opposition. With a strong interest in defence and foreign policy, Benjamin has recently worked with Social Democratic Parties globally to enhance their electoral performance and human rights record.

Joseph Caputo

Board Member

Joe, an advocate for minority rights in Melbourne's northern suburbs, has championed migrant workers' rights since the 1970s and served on the Victorian Multicultural Commission (2001–2011). He has been both Councillor and Mayor in the former City of Brunswick and the City of Merri-bek. A founding member of the Moreland/Hume/Aileu (Timor Leste) Friendship Committee, Joe is an expert in industrial relations and holds a Master of Business from RMIT.

Sam Garrasi

Board Member

Sam, Chief Financial Officer at the Royal Women's Hospital, has over 20 years' experience in senior roles in the acute public health sector, local government, and telecommunications. With expertise in public health, financial governance, and risk management, Sam serves on Merri Health's Finance and Audit Risk Management and Recommissioning Committees.

Chiara Lawry

Board Member

Chiara, a qualified lawyer and former public policy advisor, is the CEO of Right Lane Consulting. She was a founding volunteer and board member at the Oaktree Foundation, worked with Indigenous organisations in Cape York and the Tiwi Islands, and served as Non-Executive Director and Deputy Chair at Environmental Justice Australia.

Kenneth Cheng

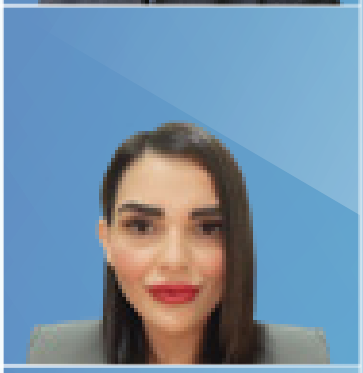
Board Member

Kenneth, Manager of Client Services at the Centre for Victorian Data Linkage, Department of Health (Vic), has nine years' experience in health and human services as a public servant and over 15 years in business development and management in the IT sector.

Seide Raffoul

Board Member

Seide has lived in Merri-bek for most of her life and has been actively involved within the Merri-bek community. With an extensive background in early childhood education and care, Seide currently sits on the Victorian Multicultural Commission as a regional advisor for the North and West Metropolitan Region. Seide is fluent in English and Arabic and through her work at Merri Health, has a vision to improve the lives of young people and the wider community.



Ann Taylor

Board Member

Ann is an active member of the community and has been a resident of Merri-bek for more than 40 years. With an extensive background in public education, Ann has worked as a teacher, policy officer for the Education Department, and assistant principal and deputy president of the Australian Education Union. Now retired, Ann hopes to continue to improve the lives of community members through her work at Merri Health.

Michael de Bruyn

Board Member

Michael has lived in Melbourne's northern suburbs for over 25 years and is now living in Coburg. Michael currently works as a Government Relations consultant with over a decade of previous experience in the government sector including working as a Chief of Staff in the Victorian Government, as well as acting as a senior adviser to former Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews.

Dr. Danielle Panaccio

Board Member

Danielle, a specialist general physician and experienced medical educator, teaches medical students and supervises physician trainees. She is a member of the Australasian Institute for Clinical Governance, a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, holds a law degree, and was admitted to the Supreme Court of Victoria in 2016.

Leadership Team

The Executive Leadership Team drives our operational strategy and workforce to fulfill our purpose, promise and values.

Tassia Michaleas

Chief Executive Officer

BEC, BSW, MBA, AFCHSM, GAICD

Tassia has extensive experience in the not-for-profit and community sector and commenced her career in community health in 1996. Tassia has strong skills in advocacy, streamlining of systems and processes, effective engagement of stakeholders and developing partnerships. Tassia holds a Bachelor of Economics, Bachelor of Social Work and a Master of Business Administration.

She is an Associate Fellow of the Australian College of Health Service Management and a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Nessá Wright

Chief Operating Officer

BCCJ, MER, EMBA

Nessá is a values-driven and collaborative leader who utilises her creative flair to enhance business operations and strengthen governance across varied settings in the not-for-profit sector. With vast experience in change management, governance, brand and communications, project delivery and organisational capacity building; she holds a Bachelor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Masters of Employment Relations and an Executive Masters of Business Administration. Nessá is a certified member of the Australian Human Resources Institute and Australian College of Health Service Management.

Gavin Thompson

Chief Financial Officer

B.Bus (Acc), GAICD, CPA

Gavin has held a range of senior finance positions across not-for-profit, corporate and international sectors. He has worked in financial management in the homelessness and community service sector as well as roles in a variety of industries such as aerospace, investment banking, software development, retail banking, hotels and trustee services.

Gavin has skills in providing strong financial stewardship to organisations while maintaining a co-operative and helpful approach to aid service delivery programs.

"Community Health is pivotal to the health and wellbeing of our communities and our health system. As demand for local services grows and health needs become more complex, we have increased our advocacy for greater sector funding and recognition – both directly with Government, and through our Community Health First partnership."

– Tassia Michaleas, Merri Health CEO

Shadi Hanna

General Manager, Aged and Primary Care

Shadi has extensive experience in leading multidisciplinary teams and a broad range of programs and services in the community health and community care sectors. He has held senior and executive management roles across a range of health, primary care and local government organisations.

Shadi is a registered physiotherapist and has a Graduate Diploma in Health Service Management and a Master of Business Administration and is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Jillian Dent

Acting General Manager, Family and Community

Jillian has led health promotion and population health teams at Merri Health for the last seven years. She has extensive experience designing and delivering programs that meet the needs of diverse communities, and currently chairs Merri Health's Reconciliation Action Plan Committee.

Prior to working with Merri Health, Jillian worked for local, State and Federal Government across health, housing, education and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy. Jillian holds a Masters in Social Policy and a Bachelor of Communications (Public Relations).

Maryanne Tadic

General Manager, Healthy Communities

MPH, BHSc, AFCHSM, MAICD

Maryanne has over 15 years of experience working in the community health sector and has a background in Public Health, Health Promotion, and Community Based Research. Maryanne holds a Master of Public Health degree and a Bachelor of Health Sciences. She is also a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and an Associate Fellow of the Australian College of Health Service Management.

Strategy and planning

Our Board of Directors and Executive Leadership Team outlined seven key strategic priorities to support our business objectives in 2023-24.

1: GP services now at Merri Health

Providing GP services has been a key priority to address the changing health needs of our diverse community.

We are delighted to now be providing GP services at Brunswick Community Medical Centre (BCMC), co-located at our Brunswick site, following 18 months of working towards this goal.

GP-led care supports improved patient health outcomes through closer collaboration among General Practitioners, Registrars, allied health, and nursing staff.

> ***"We are delighted to expand Merri Health's services. With GP care now available, we provide more holistic health support, a better patient experience, and smoother care coordination for our communities."***
>
> – Tassia Michaleas, Merri Health CEO

2: Aged Care reforms

Preparing for major reforms in July 2025 aligned to the new Aged Care Act has been a key priority.

These reforms will significantly shift how aged care services are delivered across Australia and we have continued our focus on service quality, transparency and consumer choice.

See more on page 18.

3: Support for carers across Victoria

Merri Health leads a partnership of seven organisations to deliver state-wide Carer Gateway services.

This year, our focus was on strategic positioning, improving service integration, expanding reach, and strengthening partnerships to drive outstanding performance.

See more on page 34.

4: New health hub in the North

Securing a long-term home within the Coburg Health Hub, a ground breaking health and wellbeing community precinct has been a strategic priority to support expanded care and future-proof improved service delivery.

We continued to collaborate with partners to support this pioneering health precinct.

5: Innovative aged care client management system

To improve our aged care client experience and communications, we are replacing two legacy systems with a single, robust platform ahead of upcoming reforms.

The new system is scheduled to go live in Q1 2025.

6: Environmental sustainability

We are committed to reducing our environmental impact and leading climate action.

This year, we developed a baseline plan to guide our efforts, with implementation set to roll out in 2025.

7. New finance system

To ensure we are positioned to respond to ongoing reforms, we prioritised replacing the legacy finance system.

Our new Finance system launched this year and improves processes and reporting to meet the future needs of the organisation.

Doctors and team members celebrate medical services at Merri Health.

Merri Health and Banyule Community Health staff joined brand merger workshops.

Uniting for a healthier future - merger exploration

This year, we embarked on an exciting merger exploration with Banyule Community Health, to enhance services, improve community health outcomes, and strengthen our ability to meet the growing demands of the evolving care sector.

Merri Health and Banyule Community Health are both highly respected, community-driven organisations with similar histories, shared values, and great people.

The merger has the full support of both Boards and will enable us to improve services for our communities, while developing and growing to meet current and future needs.

Together, as strong organisations we can:

- **achieve better services for our clients and communities;**
- **provide a bigger platform for stronger advocacy for our community and health services; and**
- **provide broader career pathways and opportunities for employees**

The Boards and leadership teams worked closely throughout the exploration phases, and the merger was officially confirmed in October 2024, through successful votes by members of both organisations.

We're committed to maintaining our current services, delivered by the same trusted people at existing locations, with expanded potential for future growth.

A new name and brand, shaped with input from staff and the community, will honour our shared histories and united future as a 'New Organisation.'

What did we achieve?

- **merger confirmed following robust exploration, and positive member vote**
- **new Board appointed with four Directors from each organisation and one new Director, to ensure continued efficient operations**
- **positive staff consultation on the merger, and 109 staff and stakeholders involved in name/ brand development workshops**
- **successful independent due diligence confirmed the compatibility of both organisations**

What's next?

- planned integration of both organisations to build on our strengths, and improve community access to services and programs
- support and engage staff through the transition to foster shared culture and operations
- involve community in developing our new name and brand
- launch our new name and brand, targeted for March 2025

> ***"We firmly believe the merger will improve services and health outcomes for communities; and ensure our long-term sustainability, strengthening our ability to meet the opportunities and challenges of the evolving health and social care sector."***
>
> – Tassia Michaleas, Merri Health CEO
>
> – Mick Geary, Banyule Community Health CEO

Aged care

We promote healthy ageing in our communities with services that strengthen wellbeing, choice, independence and social connection for older people.

Supporting people with dementia and their carers

An estimated 84 of every 1,000 Australians aged 65+ lives with dementia, with 70% of those with dementia living in the community.

Our Memory and Dementia Service supports people living with dementia, and their carers, in our local community.

The service aims to build participant knowledge about dementia, support them to adapt to memory changes, and enable them to continue doing the things they want to do. It includes a range of health professionals who work collaboratively to provide one-on-one and group therapies for clients.

This year we collaborated with the University of Canberra to deliver and evaluate an innovative 7-week Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST) and Carer Support program.

Occupational therapists and leisure therapy clinicians facilitated twice-weekly CST sessions with people living with dementia. Carers also participated in an education and peer support group weekly, which was facilitated by a social worker and an occupational therapist.

What did we achieve?

- **20 people participated in the CST and carer support program pilot**
- **positive results showed improved social connections and cognition** for participants who engaged in CST, and
- **reduced carers' anxiety and boosted confidence** with education and peer support

Where can we improve?

- continue to develop the carer support program to include additional education sessions from more members of the multidisciplinary team
- reach more people with dementia and carers early in their journey to optimise our impact

What's next?

- deliver CST and carer support program to more participants to confirm our findings
- publish our findings in collaboration with University of Canberra
- continue to collaborate with industry partners to positively impact more people with dementia

"It helped me with loneliness, getting out of home. It's like going to a club with friends. I look forward every Tuesday to coming."

– Emilio*, Cognitive Stimulation Therapy participant

"Seeing Emilio coming out of the group every week with a big smile. Yeah, it's obvious he loves it and last week I watched him in the group. He really loves it."*

– carer of Emilio

* Some names have been changed for privacy.

Promoting independent and safe living at home

We support older people with complex or changing needs to live independently, safely and longer in their own homes through our Home Care Packages (HCP) program.

This year we developed and implemented marketing and outreach strategies to improve community awareness of HCP benefits and to increase our service registrations. We used community engagement, information sessions, marketing material and social media to target older adults and their families and carers.

We identified and targeted other pockets of the community that were unaware of our service, and focused on growing our partnerships.

Enhancing our intake process and strengthening our partnerships with local councils and community organisations were also priorities this year.

What did we achieve?

- **400**
  people guided through the intake process
- **109**
  new HCP agreements signed
- **80**
  people informed about our service via two information sessions
- **30**
  new partnerships established with local organisations and community groups for older people
- **20%**
  increase in new client registrations
- **participated in Merri-bek Seniors Positive Ageing and Wellbeing Expo and Glenroy Festival**
- **HCP newsletter created**

Where can we improve?

- create more opportunities to engage with communities and promote our service with direct engagement and information events
- achieve greater success with information events through good planning and execution
- implement feedback tools to improve content and delivery of information sessions and ensure they meet the evolving needs of our audience

What's next?

- further enhance and simplify the intake process by leveraging technology
- reach more isolated communities by expanding our outreach efforts
- amplify marketing website enhancements, increasing social media promotion and creating new promotional material
- continue promoting the independence and safety benefits of our program, with a particular focus on addressing the needs of clients with complex care requirements
- strengthen our partnerships with local organisations and community groups to co-host events and extend outreach

"Very happy with Merri Health's services. Never had any problems. Whenever Joy has needed something for her care, it has not been refused."

– Gerry, husband of Joy

A new program keeping people well at home

In October 2023 we established our new Well@Home program to help people with a Home Care Package (HCP) get fast access to aged care allied health services.

HCPs provide subsidised in-home assistance for people aged 65 years+ (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years+) with complex age-related care needs.

Well@Home's dedicated team of allied health specialists assists people with HCPs by providing exercise physiology, dietetics, nursing, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, podiatry and speech pathology services.

We tailor our multidisciplinary support to individual needs, enabling people to live at home safely, healthily and happily.

Our focus has been on recruiting staff and establishing referral partnerships with case managers from a range of local HCP providers.

What did we achieve?

- **86%**
  of annual hours target reached
- **5**
  external HCP providers engaged through in-person presentations: Hume City Council, Mayflower Home Care Services, Harmony Homecare, BallyCara and Mercy Health Home Care
- **team fully staffed with clinicians from each discipline**

Where can we improve?

- increase referrals by building even stronger relationships with HCP providers, including individual team members establishing their own network of regular referrers and their own case loads
- prioritise new consumer referrals based on need rather than the date that the referral was received

What's next?

- further develop allied health models of care to diversify service offerings and improve outcomes for people in receipt of a HCP
- implement tailored professional development training for Well@Home team to further improve service quality and operations
- undertake a 12-month evaluation of the Well@Home program with recommendations for further improvement

Bruce (left) enjoyed a cuppa and socialising with friends.

Fostering connection and learning through groups

To assist older people and people living with disability or dementia to stay happy, healthy and connected to community, we deliver a range of person-centred Social Support Program (SSP) activities.

These groups help people aged 65 years+ (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years+) to use existing skills, learn new things, meet goals and make friends.

A wellness focus recognises clients' capabilities and encourages involvement in familiar recreational activities. We also offer respite to carers one-on-one or in a group setting.

Our focus this year included developing programs to meet demand, collaborating with other services and marketing in the west to increase referrals, and increasing program awareness among assessors and the community.

What did we achieve?

- **30,000** hours of service delivered to clients (67% of annual target)
- **57%** increase in Home Care Package (HCP) clients using programs
- increased outings to 3 per week, up from 1 per week in response to client demand
- **2** new programs established in Glenroy: Arabic Group and group for clients living in Glenroy
- increased referrals by collaborating with other Merri Health programs
- new Movers and Shakers Group launched

Where can we improve?

- respond to new clients and emerging language groups by introducing program variety and appropriate first language-speaking staff

What's next?

- monitor and respond to meet the new Aged Care standards, if required
- plan for the new client information management system
- develop new programs for clients in Craigieburn and Mickleham to meet service gaps
- continue inter-program collaboration to promote SSP and increase referrals

> ***"With losing my wife and being on my own, I was beginning to get a bit bored at home just pulling out weeds. And then I was invited to come down here. The people themselves, they're marvellous. They go out of their way to make sure you're comfortable and make you feel at home."***
>
> – Bruce, Social Support Program client

Children and families

Supporting parents and the health and wellbeing of children with proactive, person-centred programs and care.

Strong foundations enable families to thrive

One in four Australian children grow up experiencing significant early life adversity including family violence, conflict, poor parent mental health and poverty. Supporting parents and strengthening families to raise happy, healthy children in the face of challenging life circumstances is critical.

Family Foundations supports parents who are expecting or caring for a baby aged up to 12 months with evidence-based activities to strengthen the parenting team. This helps families thrive during this critical time in a child's life.

Family Foundations involves weekly sessions with both caregivers, delivered by two social workers or counsellors. It supports developing skills for coping with stress, working collaboratively, communicating clearly, resolving conflict, regulating emotions, and forming healthy attachments.

This year we continued to partner with the Murdoch Children's Research Institute to progress our Phase III evaluation, with very positive results from early data, and remained focused on delivering a quality service. We also successfully secured funding for another 12 months.

What did we achieve?

- **183**
  families participated in Family Foundations this year
- **80%**
  of families completed over half of the program, with many continuing next year
- **65%**
  of families completed all 10 sessions
- **4**
  Integrated Family Services team members trained to provide more after-hours sessions and reduce wait times
- trialled a booster session 3 months after clients complete Family Foundations as part of our Phase III evaluation
- Family Foundations funding extended for another 12 months

Where can we improve?

- improve our completion rate to ensure best outcomes for families
- collaborate more closely with the Integrated Family Services program to engage and support more clients receiving this service

What's next?

- extend the program to parents and carers of children aged up to 5 years, in alignment with the Australian Government's Early Years Strategy and its focus on the first 1000 days of a child's life
- recruit more families via Integrated Family Services
- start Phase IV research project, which will explore Family Foundations' relevance to Integrated Family Services clients and be evaluated by Deakin University
- train staff to facilitate Circle of Security, Tuning Into Kids, and Bringing Up Great Kids in collaboration with other Merri Health programs

"We definitely feel like a stronger parenting team at the other end of the course and have found the tools useful/applied them in various circumstances. As a queer family we also felt very seen and supported which was greatly appreciated."

– Andy and Sam,
Family Foundations clients

Strengthening our kindergarten services

Providing high quality education to children who need it most is of great importance to Merri Health.

To support childrens' education and development we deliver the School Readiness Funding (SRF) program for kindergartens. It meets three developmental priority areas: language and communication, social and emotional wellbeing, and access and inclusion.

SRF addresses educational disadvantage by building the service capacity and capability of early childhood and care service providers.

Our focus this year was on delivering allied health sessions to build the skills and knowledge of our educators, enabling them to include best practice in their programs.

We also sought to increase the skills of families and their engagement opportunities in our kindergarten services.

What did we achieve?

- **2,803**
  skill capacity building sessions delivered to educators and families
- **169**
  funded kindergartens serviced across Merri-bek, Goulburn, and Ovens and Murray regions
- **2.5**
  point average improvement in knowledge, and 2.6 point average improvement in effectiveness of strategies for completed goals reported by early childhood services, demonstrating improved confidence to support children's developmental priorities
- **delivered a new program, Teacher Talk,** across all three regions to promote the communication and social development of children, including second language learners and children with language delays

Where can we improve?

- support teachers to avoid burnout as their health and wellbeing impacts engagement from some services
- continue improving recruitment strategies to overcome challenges with staffing regional service areas

What's next?

- continue to grow our offerings for family skills capacity building

> ***"Staff all felt supported and not judged by clinicians – felt like they could ask you questions and didn't feel as if we were judged. Lots of practical solutions were provided and were easy to implement."***
>
> – client, School Readiness Funding

A smoother start to school after COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted many people in our communities – including preschoolers and their families, whose early childhood education was disrupted. To assist children's learning and development in the wake of these disruptions, we delivered the Family Transition to School program.

Educators and allied health professionals co-delivered a five-week program to support parents and carers of children experiencing developmental and educational vulnerability to maximise their child's transition to school, and ensure ongoing inclusion.

We delivered 25 workshops to families in small groups across the Merri-bek, Ovens Murray and Goulburn regions of Victoria, with strong results.

The program supported families with strategies, skills and activities to assist their children's learning and development. Skills included self-care, social communication and advocacy.

Participants reported great results, including increased understanding of how to support transition, how to advocate for their child and build good relationships with teachers.

Supporting families experiencing vulnerability

We support families with children aged 0-17 and young people experiencing vulnerability with a child-centered, family-sensitive approach through our in-home Integrated Family Services (IFS) program.

Given 80% of participating families have a history of or are experiencing family violence, this is a vital service with a focus on the best interests of children and teens.

We can support healthy parenting and family relationships, child development, and connect people to other local supports and services. We also deliver the Children with Complex Disability Support Needs (CCDSN) program within Integrated Family Services.

This is a specialist disability program that enables us to provide case management to families with children with multiple and complex disability needs.

What did we achieve?

- **336**
  children and youth from 182 families in the Hume Merri-bek area assisted
- **100.4%**
  of annual target achieved, equating to 13,800+ client-related hours
- **43**
  more families assisted than last year
- **82%**
  of families supported in 2023 achieved their goals partially, substantially, or fully
- **valuable consultation and support provided to the team** by our IFS Family Violence practitioner and Complex Disability practitioners
- ***For You* group for CCDSN carers successfully hosted,** offering a relaxing and therapeutic environment to mitigate burnout and social isolation
- **CCDSN program extended for another 12 months**

Where can we improve?

- build the capacity of IFS staff to enhance service response to families with children with additional needs who do not meet the criteria for the CCDSN service

What's next?

- consolidate services to ensure ongoing funding for CCDSN – a vital disability and carer support service within the Integrated Family Services program
- redevelop the CCDSN practitioner role to provide IFS workers with a collaborative approach to case consultation, assessment and community linkages

> ***"Anyone can do the work, but the practitioner was clearly genuine about providing the right help and resources required. Much thought, consideration and consultation was put into the service they provided to my family."***
>
> – client, Integrated Family Services

> ***"I was quite anxious and scared initially going through your service... I felt heard, I felt safe, believed and not questioned about why I did not do this or that, no judgement and provided with help and support I needed."***
>
> – client, Integrated Family Services

Dental

Dental care, treatment and education programs for children, young people and adults in Merri-bek.

Quality and timely dental care

We provide excellent dental care to communities in Merri-bek, with a range of dental programs designed to support residents of all ages. This year, we continued to expand our Smile Squad program for school students, and introduced a new outreach program at Frontyard Youth Services to support young people living homeless.

Providing high quality, safe services to our community is a key priority. This year we exceeded our targets for the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards (NSQHS) and successfully maintained accreditation.

To further improve dental care for clients, we completed a refurbishment of our Brunswick sterilisation room and increased staffing capacity.

What did we achieve?

- **158%**
  increase in children attending Smile Squad from 2023: 2,581 children from 15 schools
- achieved outstanding NSQHS audit results, including:
  - **98%** compliance to aseptic technique (above target 90%)
  - **91%** hand hygiene compliance (above target 85%)
- **20%**
  increase in patients seen from 2023, to 5,862 patients
- **8-month**
  reduction in average wait time, from 30 months to 22 months
- **160**
  children seen at an oral health assessment program at Melbourne Zoo, in partnership with Dental Health Services Victoria (DHSV)
- **119**
  children from 12 playgroups attended Little Smiles program, a partnership with Merri-bek Council
- **launched new dental service for people living homeless** and delivered 86 oral health assessments
- **developed strong relationships with the Young People's Health Service from the Royal Children's Hospital**
- **presented Frontyard Youth program to a wider audience,** including DHSV committees and a public oral heath conference
- **outperformed State average in 5 out of 6 categories of delivering quality clinical services**

Where can we improve?

- explore further improvements to provide timely care to patients, as meeting demand for services is an ongoing challenge

What's next?

- expand the number of schools engaged with Smile Squad
- continue to advocate for more funding to increase the number of dental chairs at our clinics
- improve service efficiency and meet compliance with new infection control standards
- commence evaluation of the Frontyard Youth program
- explore new partnerships with tertiary institutions for student placements and research opportunities

> ***"The dental professional I saw made my experience fear free and has my built confidence around attending without a sense of dread. Very professional."***
>
> – client, Dental

Free homeless youth dental checks

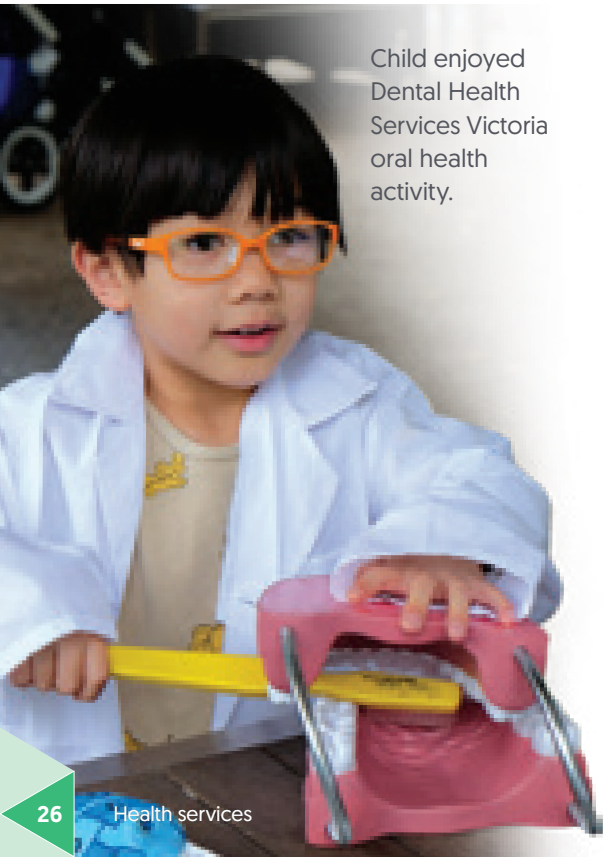
Over 7,600 young people aged 12-24 are estimated to be homeless in Victoria, facing significant challenges accessing dental care, and higher risk for poor oral health.

To address this, we offered free dental care to homeless youth in partnership with Melbourne City Mission's Frontyard Youth Services.

This outreach program provided essential check-ups and treatment at Frontyard's Melbourne CBD drop-in centre. In our first three visits, 86 youths received care.

We are proud to partner with Frontyard, which offers safe emergency accommodation, health, education, and more to homeless youth, many of whom face mental health challenges and find it difficult to seek help.

> ***"By offering dental services on-site, we're enhancing integrated care with Frontyard and supporting better health outcomes. The program will also provide valuable data on oral health and the broader social impacts of vulnerability."***
>
> – Dr Jonathan Teoh, Dental Manager



Child enjoyed Dental Health Services Victoria oral health activity.

Roarsome free dental checks for kids

It was zoo-rific to join over 150 kids for free dental check-ups provided by our friendly Smile Squad team, alongside engaging oral health-themed activities with Dental Health Services Victoria at Melbourne Zoo in April 2024.

During the school holidays, kids had the unique opportunity to learn about the importance of good oral health while enjoying the wonders of the Zoo.

Merri Health is offering free dental care to primary and secondary school children in Merri-bek as part of Smile Squad, a Victorian Government initiative led by Dental Health Services Victoria and the Department of Health.

Since the program launched in July 2022, Merri Health's Smile Squad has delivered dental check-ups and treatments to over 2,900 children from 17 schools in Merri-bek and beyond.

During COVID-19, many children and families were unable to access dental appointments, resulting in children now presenting with more dental issues.

Smile Squad is helping to address this gap, taking dental care direct to schools. It's a fantastic partnership between Dental Health Services Victoria and community health that benefits communities and schools across the state.

Mental health

To meet increasing demand for mental health support in our communities, we continued to provide tailored, person-centred and stigma-free support services.

Counselling for life issues and family violence

To assist people experiencing depression, anxiety, relationships, loss, grief and other life challenges, we provide short to medium-term counselling and support services. Our service is confidential and respectful of peoples' needs, circumstances and culture.

We also run group sessions based on community needs and provide interpreter support as required.

This year we focused on providing an accessible general counselling and social work service to local communities, as well as a specialist counselling service to survivors of family violence.

We continued to consult with other service providers and collaborate with them to deliver the best outcomes for our clients.

What did we achieve?

- **284**
  new client referrals received
  - **94** by Targeted Psychosocial Support (TPS) Counselling
  - **87** by Community Health Counselling
  - **71** by Duty, our drop-in support service
  - **32** by Family Violence Counselling
- hosted a Bachelor of Counselling student from the Australian College of Applied Professions (two days a week for six months)

Where can we improve?

- find ways to manage demand and waitlists for Community Health Counselling and Family Violence Counselling such as reviewing workloads and discharge planning and offering student placements with a learning focus on active holding and counselling

What's next?

- develop further collaborations with other internal and external service providers
- deliver ongoing improvement in service delivery

"Just wanted to say thank you so very much for the insightful sessions that you provide.

Starting with a new therapist is really daunting, but you have made the transition very easy for me.

I can feel the human in you, as opposed to a mere clinical practitioner and that is so important in order to feel safe in therapy."

– client

Supported Residential Services clients and staff joined Masquerade event to help combat social isolation.

Boosting wellbeing in supported residences

Our Supported Residential Services (SRS) Support Program works with people experiencing vulnerability in pension-level SRS in the Northern Metropolitan Region.

These privately run residences provide accommodation and support for people with low incomes who require assistance with day-to-day activities. This includes those living with disability, mental illness and complex health needs.

We work directly with SRS residents through our outreach program to improve their access to health services, social participation and the wider community. We also work with SRS owners and staff to improve their capacity to support residents' needs, and to expand their connection with the local service network.

The need for 100 points of personal identification (ID) excludes many people from mainstream community services that most of us take for granted.

Assisting residents with identity applications for birth certificates, naturalisation certificates and proof of age cards was a key focus this year and has enabled residents to access services such as Centrelink, NDIS, a bank account, mobile phone, and/or gym membership.

What did we achieve?

- **50**
  residents assisted with ID applications to enable them to access services such as NDIS and Centrelink
- **45**
  residents provided with winter clothing, some including runners or modified shoes
- **150**
  Collingwood Leisure Centre memberships organised for residents to promote healthy living
- **100**
  Olympic Leisure Centre Banyule memberships organised for residents, and 5 residents supported to apply for subsidies from the YMCA Open Doors program
- **70**
  SRS staff and proprietors received mental health first aid training to improve assessment and care planning for residents, and to better handle crisis
- **12**
  residents supported with trial gym multi-passes
- **3**
  new SRSs included in our program
- **2**
  residents were able to open a new bank account, and one was able to maintain a bank account due to our ID initiative

Where can we improve?

- increase access to home visit doctors and reduce the impact of NDIS Support Coordinator turnover by continuing to foster relationships with external service providers

What's next?

- monitor resident participation at leisure centres and organise more passes if needed
- expand ID and leisure centre initiatives to include residents in new SRSs
- organise relevant training opportunities for SRS owners and staff, including conflict resolution and suicide intervention training

Providing queer support and spaces

Q Health is a free counselling and support service for LGBTIQA+ people to talk about their alcohol and other drug (AOD) use in a confidential, non-judgemental and queer-affirming space.

Staffed by LGBTIQA+ identifying professionals, it's part of our ongoing commitment to supporting the health and wellbeing of LGBTIQA+ people in our communities.

This year we launched our Psychosocial Support program, which focuses on the intersection of mental health, AOD use and neurodivergence within LGBTIQA+ communities. As part of this program we established NeuroQueer, a support group centred on building clients' social and life skills.

We also consulted internally and externally on LGBTIQA+ related matters and provided accessible AOD counselling and support services to members of LGBTIQA+ communities in our catchment.

What did we achieve?

- **200**
  episodes of care provided
- **24**
  new referrals received for the AOD program, with 23 accepted
- **15**
  referrals received for the new Psychosocial Support program
- **3**
  student placements hosted to support development of future AOD workforces: 2 counselling students and 1 community services student
- **practiced active holding,** where our peer navigator provided practical short-term support to waitlisted clients

Where can we improve?

- find innovative ways to improve engagement with hard to engage clients
- source additional funding to address service gaps

What's next?

- continue improving the quality of our service delivery, with a focus on the intake process
- continue delivering NeuroQueer
- commence an evaluation of NeuroQueer to highlight its impacts and outcomes

> ***"I'm of Aboriginal background and a member of LGBTIQA community. I felt very welcomed on arrival from your staff. Thank you for caring and helping."***
>
> – client

NeuroQueer participants enjoyed a florist workshop.

Chronic conditions

Supporting people to live well and manage chronic conditions including back pain, diabetes, heart and respiratory conditions.

Improving outcomes for people with chronic pain

An estimated 3.4 million adults live with chronic pain in Australia. In addition to pain symptoms, they experience an increased risk of anxiety, depression and low self-esteem, and are more likely to be socially isolated.

Our free, evidence-based Chronic Pain Service (CPS) provides timely, innovative, integrated and responsive care in North Metropolitan Melbourne to help people who experience persistent pain improve their physical and mental wellbeing.

Funded by the North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network (NWMPHN), the CPS aims to improve the long-term health and wellbeing of our communities and reduce hospital waiting lists. We use a variety of tailored, evidence-based approaches to help clients self-manage and recover from pain.

Outstanding client outcomes saw the CPS nominated as a Finalist in the 2023 Public Health Awards, and additional funding provided to increase access to the program.

What did we achieve?

- **100%**
  patients reported improvement in their physical abilities, up 22.2% from 2023
- **100%**
  patients made at least some overall improvement, up 17% from last year
- **91.7%**
  patients reported clinically significant improvement in pain catastrophising
- **80%**
  reported a clinically significant improvement in depression
- **67%**
  made an improvement in how pain interferes with daily life
- **60%**
  clinically significant improvement in anxiety
- **18.7-hour**
  average treatment time per episode
- **29-day**
  median wait time – significantly lower than the national average
- **additional funding from NWMPHN to support more staffing** and completion of a lifecycle evaluation in 2025

Where can we improve?

- regrade clinical psychologist role to grade 3 to improve recruitment and increase clinical support
- integrate new grade 2 physiotherapy and occupational therapy roles to improve waiting times for physiotherapy assessments, group assessments, and interventions

What's next?

- recruit more allied health and clinical psychology staff with funding increase from NWMPHN
- evaluate CPS lifecycle to date
- implement measurement tools to evaluate client goal attainment
- increase partnerships with primary healthcare providers and organisations working with priority populations

> ***"The pain comes and goes but now I have less emotions or struggles with it. I found my strategies of coping by acknowledging it and not allowing my negative thoughts to control my mind and body and to stop or prevent me from what I am doing. Finding my own pace and being compassionate with myself enables me to get through the pain or flare ups."***
>
> – client, Chronic Pain Service

Piloting a cardiac rehabilitation care program

This year we piloted Well @ Heart, a cardiac rehabilitation program that assists people aged 18+ who have had a recent cardiac event or surgery, or who have multiple risk factors for heart disease.

Well @ Heart is an 8-week group program run in collaboration with Coburg Leisure Centre. It consists of tailored exercise routines and weekly education sessions on topics like eating well, managing stress and emotions, and keeping your heart healthy.

We scoped and benchmarked program design and collaborated with Merri Health's Consumer Advisory Committee to develop a brochure. We established a strong referral base via networking and outreach activities with local public and private hospitals, GPs, private endocrinologists and our communities.

What did we achieve?

- **50+**
  referrals in the first 3 months of the program launch (4 March -30 June)
- **39**
  people individually supported
- **22**
  group exercise sessions delivered at Coburg Leisure Centre
- **100%**
  of participants showed improved endurance and attained normal blood pressure levels after completing program
- **80%**
  reported making positive dietary improvements/changes
- **74%**
  of referrals came from the Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH) and St Vincent's

Where can we improve?

- develop staffing profile to support program sustainability
- consider flexibility of program timing to improve completion rates
- support education delivery by engaging with internal and external clinicians, including pharmacists
- reduce manual data entry by automating data extraction

What's next?

- embed Well @ Heart as an ongoing program
- engage with Active Merri-bek Leisure Centres on resourcing
- increase referrals by building program awareness
- develop depth in our service provision with allied health assistant support

"This program was very good, so inspiring and motivating... I was someone who never did exercise, and Andrea and Dianne were so good they have inspired me. Now I have joined the Broadmeadows gym and go to classes and have met many people. This was only due to the initial push I had from this program."

– client, Well @ Heart

Supporting heart and respiratory self-management

To support people with chronic heart failure and chronic respiratory disease to better manage their condition in the community, and to reduce avoidable hospital admissions, we partner with the Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH) to deliver the Hospital Admission Risk Program (HARP) Complex Care Service.

Using a multidisciplinary approach, HARP educates and supports clients with heart and respiratory conditions. We coordinate care through comprehensive assessments, care planning, treatment and exercise rehabilitation programs at home and in community centres.

This year we continued to focus on collaborating with partner organisations to provide evidence-based, accessible care to people in our communities. This included leading the Length of Stay Working Group and Data Working Group to review our model of care and streamline our processes.

What did we achieve?

- **5,249**
  service occasions to support and deliver care to clients with respiratory disease
- **3,714**
  service occasions to support and deliver care to clients with chronic heart failure
- **42**
  exercise sessions provided by our pulmonary rehabilitation program
- **28**
  clients reported feeling more confident to exercise on their own after completing the pulmonary rehabilitation program
- **20**
  education sessions provided by our pulmonary rehabilitation program
- **12**
  clients completed 8-week heart failure exercise rehabilitation program and showed significant improvement in short physical performance battery
- **HARP respiratory physiotherapist awarded Merri Changing Lives award for work with clients attending the HARP Airway Clearance Clinic** - the only clinic of its kind provided in the community

Where can we improve?

- support clients through changes at partner agencies by continuing to make care coordination a key component of our multidisciplinary team

What's next?

- measure the clinical outcomes of clients to further demonstrate the clinical significance of our work and its impact on community health

> ***"HARP's respiratory physio left no stone unturned in giving me both the knowledge and skill needed for airway clearance and I found them to be the most helpful person I've dealt with in my 30 year journey with bronchiectasis."***
>
> – client, Hospital Admission Risk Program

Reducing knee replacements with MOTION

MOTION (MonitOring The Influence Of care for patients with kNee osteoarthritis) is a two-year collaborative research trial we are taking part in. Led by La Trobe University and St Vincent's Hospital, it aims to reduce the need for knee joint replacement surgeries and the hospital burden through exercise and education.

Merri Health is collaborating with St Vincent's Hospital on RISK (Reducing Inappropriate Surgery of the Knee) component of the trial. This includes delivering a community-based OsteoArthritis Hip and Knee Service (OAHKS) assessment service, non-operative management programs, and referrals to other Merri Health services.

It is a 2-year study. The data collection phase will be completed in early 2025.

What did we achieve?

- **42**
  clients recruited to MOTION
- **100+**
  OAHKS assessments and review assessments completed by Merri Health clinicians
- **25+**
  received dietetic intervention
- **20+**
  clients initiated the GLA:D program
- **clinical assessment and intervention in line with the MOTION pathways provided**
- **all MOTION clients received physiotherapy intervention**
- **clinical outcome measures collected with final results and publication due in 2025**

Where can we improve?

- explore delivery of additional exercise sessions beyond the formal GLA:D (Good Life with osteoArthritis Denmark) program to support learnings and integration of learnings into lifestyle, in response to client feedback
- review client communication methods, in response to client feedback that Merri Health's phone system proved challenging and untimely

What's next?

- complete OAKHS review at 12 months to review outcomes and the need for escalation to St Vincent's for orthopaedics review
- focus on ongoing collaboration with St Vincent's and La Trobe to ensure project success
- continue to collect outcome measures for the study

Carer support

We support unpaid carers who care for family members, friends or neighbours across Victoria with a range of services provided through federal and state funding.

Providing vital support to carers across Victoria

Merri Health is the lead service provider of Carer Gateway in Victoria. Now in its fourth year of operation, demand for Carer Gateway is higher than ever, with 750,000 carers across Victoria.

We partner with Alfred Health, Grampians Health, Barwon Health, Bendigo Health Care Group, Family Care, and Uniting Victoria and Tasmania Ltd to deliver free, practical and emotional supports to unpaid carers across Victoria.

Together, we provide services tailored to carers' individual needs, including planned and emergency respite, coaching, counselling, in-person peer support (IPPS) and support packages.

This year we focused on upgrading our contact centre, launching new peer support groups, improving feedback processes, and developing an extranet to better connect our partners.

What did we achieve?

- **76,852** **intake calls received,** up 36% from last year
- **61,317** **tailored support packages distributed,** up 149%
- **28,284** **carer support planning sessions were conducted,** up 18%
- **22,137** **emergency respite services provided,** up 94%
- **17,667** **carers received a service**
- **14,485** **new clients registered**
- **101** **unique IPPS groups established across Victoria**
- **71%** **increase in carers attending IPPS groups**
- **35%** **increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carer registrations**
- **35%** **increase in young carer registrations**
- **15%** **increase in LGBTIQA+ registrations**
- **12%** **increase in mental health carers**
- **recruited a First Nations Engagement Advisor**
- **established a First Nations engagement strategy**
- **sourced new providers to support First Nations communities**
- **launched Palliative Care Pilot program**
- **developed a family carer-led partnership focused on special schools**

Where can we improve?

- review technology to support carers with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds and improve engagement with CALD communities
- address nursing staff shortages in regional Victoria – identified during Palliative Care Pilot – with new brokerage service providers
- implement new tools and scoring system to assist triage of carer requirements for the Palliative Care Pilot
- further increase awareness of Carer Gateway
- refine communications strategy to gather individual feedback along Carer Gateway journey

What's next?

- launch live chat and SMS services to enhance service accessibility
- plan additional enhancements to the contact centre to support CALD carers
- implement survey functionality across carer journey to encourage feedback and enhance service improvement
- strengthen collaborations to streamline processes, foster innovation, and increase cohesiveness
- integrate more advanced collaborative technologies
- explore new strategic projects

Caring for carers in the North and West

There is great need for carer support in our communities, with nearly 200,000 people providing unpaid and often unrecognised care to family members, friends or neighbours in Melbourne's North and West alone.

Merri Health's Carer Services is helping to meet this need with respite, coaching, counselling, referrals, and social opportunities for unpaid carers in 14 local government areas. Our programs include Carer Gateway, the Support for Carers Program, Northern Respite Service, carer counselling and coaching, and community engagement.

This year, we focused on increasing carer support, building relationships with external stakeholders and providing education and outreach activities.

What did we achieve?

- **4,300+**
  initial carer assessments, up 30%
- **2,000+**
  carer review assessments
- **50%**
  of carers received a funded service through the program
- **8-day**
  average wait time for initial assessment – a significant reduction from the previous average of 38 days
- **expanded to the Melton region**
- **piloted group counselling**

- **Support for Carers Program**
  - **14,150** hours of support delivered, exceeding our target
  - **1,322** unique carers reached
  - **22** activities hosted for carers
- **Northern Respite Service**
  - hosted regular meetings with partners to improve relationships, and to co-design tailored approaches for carer support
- **Community engagement**
  - **173** events and activities hosted for carers
  - **32** About Us presentations delivered to stakeholders
  - **10** In-Person Peer Support (IPPS) groups for diverse community members hosted

Where can we improve?

- provide more respite services with the Support for Carers Program
- support more carers with Carer Gateway
- link more carers to peer support groups
- increase centre-based referrals to Northern Respite Service
- find ways to support carers who need more intervention from our programs than we currently have the scope to provide

What's next?

- increase capacity of outreach programs by developing new partnerships with local organisations, enhancing our digital presence, and implementing targeted community engagement strategies
- improve the quality and efficiency of our service delivery by providing staff training on best practices, and streamlining our service processes

> ***"I loved my time with my coach. They were encouraging and a great listener. The sessions helped me to realise that I can ask for help and to take time for me. The coach guided me towards creating boundaries and being ok with saying no sometimes. We also talked about going to bed earlier so that I can have a productive start to the day. I would have loved to have more sessions with my coach, and I really appreciate the service!"***
>
> – carer

Partnering with consumers and communities

We work alongside consumers and community members to ensure our services support their health and wellbeing in a person-centred and responsive way.

Community and consumer engagement is embedded across all levels of Merri Health.

Our Community Relationships Framework details our commitment to engaging consumers, carers, and community members to help improve our programs, services, and health outcomes.

We proudly partner with consumers and community members on committees, in working groups, research, programs and events to better understand their needs, and design, deliver and promote our services.

This year, we focused on facilitating greater consumer participation in program development through launching our Merri-wide Consumer Advisory Committee and continuing to deliver innovative health prevention programs that engage target communities.

Growing consumer engagement

To track our engagement levels and identify areas for improvement, we report our community engagement and consumer participation activities quarterly using a participation spectrum, adapted from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

inform ▶ consult ▶ involve ▶ co-design ▶ empower

What did we achieve?

- **67%**
  of activities directly engaged consumers or community members – 6% more than last year
- **27%**
  increase in community engagement activities reported across the organisation
- **4**
  capacity building sessions on reporting facilitated for staff
- **engaged at higher levels along the participation spectrum** compared to last year
- **collaborated with Merri Health's Research and Evaluation Committee** to find out what engagement activities involved an evaluation component to better understand the types of evaluation happening across our organisation

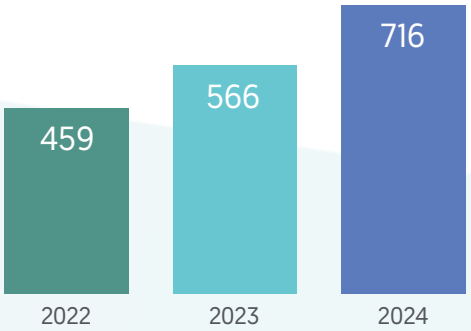
Where can we improve?

- increase readership of quarterly report to improve participation and results
- ensure staff have a shared understanding of the level of engagement required to maintain accurate reporting in their program area

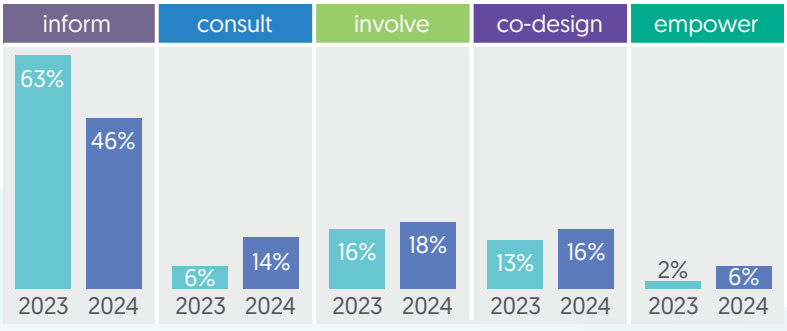
What's next?

- deliver training sessions on reporting with targeted teams
- trial new methods to increase readership of quarterly reports

Total engagement activities reported



Level of engagement from total activities



Consumer voice at the heart of our work

This year the Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC) was made permanent following a successful pilot in 2023. Evaluation showed the CAC enhanced our consumer participation and community engagement and was a valuable addition to our service and program delivery.

The CAC's membership is diverse. It has 10 members ranging in age from 42 to 73, among them are members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and LGBTIQA+ communities, people with disability, and people with multicultural backgrounds.

What did we achieve?

- **6**
  projects reviewed in just 5 months
  - Living Well Ageing Well program planning for the year
  - Cardiac Rehab Clinic flyer and recruitment
  - Online Age Inclusivity and Accessibility Audit Tool
  - Dental Customer Experience Survey
  - Aged and Primary Care Client Satisfaction Survey
  - Consumer Handbook co-design
- **5**
  members participated in projects external to the committee
  - **1**
    acted as a trial client for the New Diabetes Clinic
  - **2**
    participated in Merri's mental health accreditation interviews
  - **2**
    presented at the Waiting Lists Forum hosted by Merri and the Melbourne Ageing Research Collaboration
- **recruited a Consumer Participation Support Officer** to support the committee
- **excellent retention of committee members**

Where can we improve?

- find ways to better support the diverse needs of committee members to increase inclusivity and accessibility, and improve the quality of their participation and personal experience

What's next?

- increase members to the Consumer Register
- increase staff awareness of how CAC can contribute to their activity area

> ***"This committee is like no other I have been on, and I have been on many! It is something to be very proud of."***
>
> – CAC member

Members of the Consumer Advisory Committee.

Promoting active living in our communities

We are committed to helping people in our communities participate in sports and active recreational activities. To achieve this, we partner with a range of stakeholders including Merri-bek City Council and Monash Health on our Active Living program.

We apply Monash Health's Healthy Sports Clubs framework, and community-driven solutions that build on our successful Community Champions and The Great Idea Program (TGIP) models.

This year we focused on building strong relationships with stakeholders, sports clubs, and our communities. Our aims were to increase participation in physical activities, increase community capacity to be more active, and increase the safety and inclusiveness of sports clubs across Merri-bek.

What did we achieve?

- **1,200**
  people received active living information from our 16 women from diverse backgrounds who are the Active Living Community Champions
- **27**
  Merri-bek primary schools surveyed about what sports they have available before and after school
- **17**
  sports clubs engaged in partnership with Active Living
- **9**
  clubs registered with the Healthy Sports Clubs initiative
- **6**
  clubs provided with small grants to support them become more inclusive to culturally diverse women and girls
- **3**
  clubs developed game plans for inclusion and sun protection
- **joined the Merri-bek Women and Girls Sport Participation Network**

Where can we improve?

- offer a range of engagement opportunities to sports clubs to create efficiency and flexibility in the way we build relationships
- increase our promotion of TGIP to achieve more successful engagement with our target communities
- provide opportunities for Active Living Community Champions to participate in structured physical activities to support them to gain experience and increase their confidence to promote Active Living to their networks

What's next?

- evaluate the impact of TGIP and Community Champions initiatives
- link Active Living Community Champions to local clubs in Merri-bek to strengthen their sports connections
- extend further support to last year's TGIP recipients
- partner with Tennis Victoria to support our local tennis clubs to complete the Thriving Tennis Communities' Health Indicator of Tennis (HiT) club assessment tool
- offer a range of engagement opportunities to Merri-bek sports clubs including small grants, support for 'come and try' days, and assistance with policies and surveys
- use data from our primary school survey to begin promoting physical activities for children and young people

Increasing gender equity in sports and recreation

To increase access and inclusion and help prevent violence against women in sport, we partnered with Merri-bek City Council, YMCA, Tennis Victoria, and Women's Health in the North.

Through a program called We're Game, we audit sports clubs and leisure centres and, working with their staff, volunteers and community members, develop gender equity action plans.

We use Sport and Recreation Victoria's Guidelines for Preventing Violence Against Women: Taking Action Through Community Sport to identify strengths, opportunities and actions for improvement. These can include more equitable governance, better facilities, education, and improved opportunities for participation.

What did we achieve?

- **7**
  sports clubs and leisure centres completed a gender equality audit and action plan
- **partnered with RMIT University to evaluate We're Game, finding that participants:**
  - found We're Game's resources, training, and support useful
  - reported increased knowledge and understanding of gender equity and importance of purposeful action to improve gender equity
  - found our planning processes helped to identify actions to support preventing gender-based violence
  - prefer experiential learning opportunities
  - felt that We're Game enhanced their motivation and drove positive change

Where can we improve?

- shorten delivery or check-in with participants more frequently to maintain engagement and create efficiency in delivery timeline
- tailor our approach to each centre and club as they have different contexts and goals, and vary in capacity and readiness to implement We're Game
- use a strength-based approach to rollout activities aligned with existing programs and expertise to increase our success
- seek innovative ways to increase We're Game's impact when clubs and centres lack resources, influence over organisational priorities, or the capacity to make changes
- find new ways to effectively assess project impact
- build on universal design principles to foster safer and more inclusive sport and recreation experiences for women
- adopt a cohort-based approach to increase our reach with limited resources

What's next?

- support Active Merri-bek to implement its 1-year action plan, with a focus on recruiting and supporting diverse women and responding to community need
- co-design new primary prevention actions tailored to each setting
- evaluate and review action plans and establish structures for future action

Improving school engagement across Merri-bek

To support students from Grade 5 to Year 12 who are at risk of disengaging from education, we deliver the School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) program.

Through SFYS we consult with wellbeing and leadership teams in participating schools across Merri-bek, and coordinate evidence-based early intervention programs to reduce barriers to school engagement.

This year we aimed to improve student attendance rates and school engagement. We also supported the development of students' social and emotional skills, and increased staff capacity to support student wellbeing.

What did we achieve?

- **357** **students supported with targeted interventions**
- **82** **school staff directly supported with capacity building workshops**
- **939** **copies of our updated community referral poster distributed**
- **353** **people received the SFYS e-newsletter,** which we revamped this year
- **17** **interventions in schools coordinated by SFYS**
- **16** **schools across Merri-bek partnered with SFYS**

Where can we improve?

- improve collaboration with regional SFYS teams to deliver cost effective, tailored interventions and have greater impact on school engagement
- continue to build relationships with schools and service providers to improve outcomes in the future

What's next?

- continue support of students and staff with high-quality interventions
- increase networking opportunities for school staff to share knowledge and information

> ***"So much thanks! Our child has had long COVID and her connection to school was low. This program has brought her joy back for school. She jumps in the car after a session in this program and chats ALL the way home, so alive. Thank you!"***
>
> – parent

Building friendships and staying active: Lovie's story

Our Social Support program has been thriving in 2024! Just ask Lovie, a regular participant who decided to get moving after retiring last year. She knew she needed to stay active and engaged, explaining, "I said, I have to do something after working for so long, your mind is always working, and then you suddenly stop."

That's when Lovie joined our Movers and Shakers group, after seeing it on Facebook. "This is great because I don't need very intense exercise. It's really enjoyable," she says. Just a week later, she invited some friends to join too.

Now, Lovie not only participates in various programs but has also made a circle of new friends. "We're all talking and sharing our experiences with each other - it's so much fun!"

Through the program, Lovie has found a new lease on life, "This is like a family to us. It gives me the motivation to get up early in the morning to get here."

Thinking of joining? Lovie has some advice: "Think positively, because that is for your own good, for your health. That's number one. As we age, we need to look after our health."

Lovie, Social Support Program client.

Lois, Home Care Packages client.

Home, health, and happiness: Lois's story

Whether you need a little support or a lot, our Home Care Packages team loves helping community members to continue to enjoy life at home.

One of our cherished clients, Lois, recently celebrated her 90th birthday. She lives with her daughter Cheryl and enjoys a good cuppa and a scone or two!

Three years ago, during the lockdown, Lois experienced a stroke and had to be hospitalised. Without visitors and limited recovery in hospital, Cheryl decided to bring her mother back home and contacted Merri Health for support.

"Merri Health took care of everything," Cheryl recalls. "They explained all the available services, and Mum received the help she needed, from physiotherapy to speech therapy and more, to support her recovery."

Cheryl adds, "She has a better quality of life at home, surrounded by her loved ones, her animals, and all the familiar things she cherishes."

Since returning home, Lois has thrived in her rehabilitation, with the support of her two cats and Merri Health's coordinated health and home services.

> ***"This is Mum's home. She has her chickens in the backyard, a beautiful garden—everything she loves. Thanks to Merri Health, we're able to keep Mum here, with all the support she needs."***
>
> – Cheryl, Lois's daughter

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

We continue to prioritise closing the health gap with culturally safe and inclusive services, and initiatives that promote reconciliation, respect, equity and recognition.

Prioritising reconciliation

We are committed to working alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to close the health gap. To guide our work in this important area, we are implementing Merri Health's Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

With 133 commitments across the reconciliation pillars, our focus this year has been on cultural learning for staff, advocacy, partnerships, participating in community events and activities, and creating a more culturally safe organisation for staff and clients.

We have completed 105 of the commitments and are making good progress against the remaining 28.

What did we achieve?

- **5,000** people attended Share the Spirit Festival and Treaty Day Out, where we engaged with Elders, carers and families
- **299** staff, students and Board Directors completed learning module on cultural awareness
- **44** staff completed Aboriginal Cultural Insights training, delivered by Girraway Ganyi
- **32** staff took part in newly launched cultural safety training from Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)
- **30** RAP Committee members, employees, partners and community members supported to attend The Long Lunch for National Reconciliation Week
- **65** staff participated in Wayapa Wuurrk sessions
- **400** carers and Merri Health staff participated in Wayapa Wuurrk session at our Carer Gateway 'High Tea at the MCG' Carer's Week event
- built understanding of the Voice to Parliament referendum and Uluru Statement from the Heart
- encouraged staff to participate in local NAIDOC Week celebrations
- celebrated the 11th Annual Koorie Carers Lunch with members of the Wandarra Elders Group
- joined the newly launched Northern Metro First People's Network
- supported staff to substitute the 26 January public holiday for another day
- **15K** people reached on social media

Where can we improve?

- explore ways to maintain focus on and support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart
- develop new engagement plan to improve relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities

What's next?

- following approval from Reconciliation Australia, continue working on our current RAP into 2025 in line with the merger with Banyule Community Health
- developing a new reconciliation strategy for the merged 'New Organisation'

Promoting reconciliation in high schools

To increase knowledge and understanding of reconciliation for young people in Merri-bek, we worked with two high schools, John Fawkner College and Brunswick Secondary College.

As well as undertaking learning about reconciliation, the Uluru Statement from the Heart and The Voice to Parliament, a small grant was provided to each school to support a student-led reconciliation activity aligned with our overall goals for this initiative.

Taking part increased student's confidence to lead community projects and the participating schools' overall commitment to reconciliation.

What did we achieve?

- **60**
  students and 3 staff members from 2 schools took part
- **100%**
  of students reported increased knowledge and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- **67%**
  reported increased confidence to talk about matters relating to reconciliation
- **students at John Fawkner College organised the purchase and installation of 2 flag poles** to fly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags on the school grounds
- **students at Brunswick Secondary College worked with a local First Nations artist to design and produce outdoor artworks** on cement sheeting that will be hung around the school

Where can we improve?

- improving how we collaborate with Aboriginal-led organisations to make it easier to partner with us despite time and resource challenges
- allowing time for our staff to build and maintain relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and stakeholders will facilitate more impact in this area

What's next?

- continue to work with primary and secondary schools in Merri-bek on projects to promote inclusion

> ***"I think it is really important to learn about First Nations cultures and perspectives."***
>
> – student

Share the Spirit festival-goers painted on the Carer Gateway 10m canvas in support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Family Violence and Gender Equality

Promoting gender equity, preventing family and gender-based violence and supporting those who experience family violence in our communities.

Addressing family violence and gender equity

On average, one woman is killed due to family violence every week in Australia. Intimate partner violence is the greatest health risk for women aged 25-44.

Gender inequality is a key driver of gender-based violence and a significant health and wellbeing issue. It is a priority area for our work, both internally and in the communities we serve.

A Family Violence and Gender Equality Committee drives our Family Violence and Gender Equality strategic priorities. These include leadership gender pay equity, support for caring, flexible working, gender-based and sexual harassment, and advocacy.

What did we achieve?

- **led the Elder Abuse Prevention Network (EAPN) comprised of 65 organisations to prevent elder abuse in our community**
- **developed tools and procedures to support roll-out of Multi Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM)** framework across Merri Health
- **189**
  staff completed MARAM and Information Sharing at Merri module
- **75**
  Merri Health leaders completed gender equality learning module
- **11K**
  people engaged on Facebook via our dedicated family violence and gender equality communications plan
- **partnered with women's health, leisure centres, local government and sports clubs on We're Game**
- **shared highlights from our health promotion initiatives to increase equity, inclusion and participation of girls and women in sport** with Minister for Community Sport, The Hon Ros Spence MP
- **supported staff to participate in the Annual Walk Against Family Violence**
- **delivered internal and external campaigns to support International Women's Day, Elder Abuse Awareness Month, Week without Violence and 16 Days of Activism**
- **prepared submission for Victoria's third and final action plan to address family violence**

Where can we improve?

- work on reducing our gender pay gap
- highlight breadth of programs and services we offer to prevent, reduce and respond to gender-based violence and conflict in our communities

What's next?

- participate in public advocacy efforts highlighting continued need for action against gender-based violence and gender equity
- support staff to feel confident with MARAM responsibilities

Merri Health's Kathryn (left), Sarah (second from right) and Jillian (right) welcomed the Minister for Sport, The Hon. Ros Spence MP (second from left).

Merri Health's Meg joined host Jacinta Parsons at a free event focused on empowering decision-making and preventing elder abuse.

Elder Abuse Prevention Network
North & West Metro

Creating communities that value every age

We lead the Elder Abuse Prevention Networks (EAPN) across Victoria's northern and western metropolitan regions. Members from local government and community organisations meet regularly to collaborate, improve attitudes towards older people, and increase capacity to identify elder abuse.

This year we focused on strengthening member engagement, delivering activities to enhance awareness of elder abuse, and reducing ageist attitudes and language. We supported older people to stay in control of their finances and decision making, highlighted gender inequality and ageism as drivers of elder abuse and launched a digital accessibility audit tool.

What did we achieve?

- **Silver Threads and Golden Needles Launch Event delivered with Wyndham City Council in June to 60 attendees**
  - **100%** of participants reported they intend to use new phrases to respond to and challenge ageist and sexist language
  - **97%** intend to reflect on their attitudes towards ageing and older people
  - **97%** reported increased confidence in recognising ageist language directed at older women
- **Your Money, Your Choice event attended by 120 people at Merri-bek Town Hall in June 2024, with 20 services hosting stalls**
  - **72%** of attendees planned to talk to their family members about their choices after the session
- **3,149 opens of We Are All Ageing EAPN member bulletin across 5 editions delivered to 143 recipients**
- **Wordbergs and the Workplace online seminar delivered to our staff** to raise awareness of ageist language in the workplace
- **Digital Age Inclusivity and Accessibility Audit Tool** developed to improve website accessibility for older people and presented at the National Elder Abuse Conference
- **created and launched a new EAPN brand with and for members** to increase engagement and impact

Where can we improve?

- continue to highlight critical gaps in response services for people experiencing elder abuse

What's next?

- empower EAPN members to lead sessions on elder abuse prevention and response within their organisations
- promote Digital Age Inclusivity and Accessibility Audit Tool
- encourage EAPN members to adopt the new brand kit to elevate the visibility and impact of our collective efforts

> ***"Just reading your EAPN newsletter and wanted to let you know how wonderful I think the work you have done with this is. The mix of age positive content, flow and utility for audience is excellent in my humble opinion. I feel like you have struck just the right chord of gently challenging without alienating."***
>
> – Elder Abuse Prevention Network Member

Celebrating International Women's Day and inclusive sports

Merri Health looks to promote gender equality every day in our work and this year, on International Women's Day, we worked with 150 community members and seven local sports clubs in Fawkner to celebrate the participation of women, girls and gender-diverse individuals of all ages and backgrounds in sport.

Families enjoyed activities led by local sports clubs and had the chance to learn about and sign up for various programs. Our special guest was Change our Game Ambassador Molina Asthana, who shared her personal experience of championing diversity in sport. Community members also received Gender Equity Awards for their contributions to Fawkner Sports Clubs.

Despite the known benefits of sports, participation rates among women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals remain lower than for men, due to barriers like fear of judgment, unwelcoming environments, and lack of confidence.

Merri Health, in collaboration with Merri-bek City Council, is working to make clubs and leisure centres more inclusive through the Healthy Sports Clubs initiative, which has received positive feedback.

Increasing inclusivity and safety in schools

We're promoting inclusion and improving the mental wellbeing of school communities by building understanding and acceptance of diversity in Merri-bek.

We delivered 90 tailored sessions to students and staff through the Healthy Schools Initiative, based on the Respectful Relationships curriculum, with activities focused on gender equality and healthy masculinities to empower students to make positive changes.

What did we achieve?

- **90**
  students from two primary schools took part
- **13**
  sessions on emotions, identity, stereotypes, equity vs equality, gender inequality, and being an active bystander
- **95%**
  of students reported better ability to identify discrimination
- **91%**
  reported increased appreciation of different communities
- **15%**
  increase in boys' ability to ignore gender stereotypes
- **10%**
  increase in girls' ability to ignore gender stereotypes
- **6%**
  increase in boys believing everyone should behave respectfully
- **5%**
  increase in boys believing they could help someone being bullied

Where can we improve?

- streamline program preparation and delivery, tailoring it to meet individual school needs for sustainable growth
- use complementary strategies and a whole-school approach to ensure learnings are retained after the program

What's next?

- deliver the Healthy Schools Initiative in two more schools in the second half of 2024
- recruit four new schools for the 2025 school year
- implement updates from our classroom sessions assessment
- engage stakeholders to review the overall model, with a focus on a whole-school approach

Unexpectedly becoming a carer: Brian's story

Carer Gateway
An Australian Government Initiative

Brian's journey as a carer has been a rollercoaster – full of challenges, determination, and heartwarming triumphs. Living in Ballarat with his wife of nearly 50 years, Mischelle, he never imagined that one day he'd find himself stepping into the role of her carer. But when Mischelle was unexpectedly hospitalised after a serious medical crisis, Brian's world turned upside down.

Carer Gateway's services have helped him find his way through.

When Mischelle spent 93 days in various hospitals, growing increasingly unwell, Brian's gut told him something was wrong. He pushed for a second opinion and discovered that the medication she was taking for Parkinson's was causing delirium.

A simple adjustment led to Mischelle's health improving and a return back home, it was then that Brian was left to navigate the complexities of being a full-time carer.

Brian was overwhelmed. "I was mentally drained, going home from the hospital in tears," he recalls. That's when he discovered Carer Gateway. "When I rang Carer Gateway, the worker I was assigned to, Lisa, was very supportive."

From online resources to mental health counselling and respite care, Carer Gateway gave Brian the tools he needed to regain his footing.

"I had a break for three weeks – a trip to the Northern Territory. Lisa was able to pick me up from my shoestrings and help me get back to some normality. Recently, Mischelle and I both attended a walking group, which was a great marker of how far we've come."

> ***"I very much appreciated the support I received from Carer Gateway and have already referred a friend whose husband is in the early stages of dementia. She is very grateful for the referral and the assistance she is receiving."***
>
> – Brian

Read more on page 34.

LGBTIQA+ communities safe and inclusive services

To support our LGBTIQA+ consumers and communities, we focus on providing safe and inclusive services, and proactively partner with others with shared values.

Ensuring we're Rainbow friendly and inclusive

We are a Rainbow Tick accredited organisation that strives to ensure our services and programs are welcoming, safe and inclusive for our clients, communities and staff.

A LGBTIQA+ committee oversees our accreditation, internal training and other initiatives in this important area.

This year we focused on maintaining our Rainbow Tick accreditation, supporting our staff with training, referral options and service advice, delivering communications and events to promote our services to LGBTIQA+ clients and communities, and ensuring our practices and policies are inclusive.

What did we achieve?

- **63 community members attended our International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) celebration and panel event at Brunswick Town Hall in May,** delivered in partnership with Merri-bek City Council
- **Rainbow Tick accreditation maintained**
- **4 inclusion-focused training events delivered to 30+ staff**
- **2 secondary schools supported with actions to become safer and more inclusive for LGBTIQA+ students**
- **Midsumma Carnival stall hosted to promote our allyship to 120K carnival attendees**
- **Getting Pronouns Right campaign launched to support staff to ask about and use correct pronouns in the workplace**
- **Rainbow Crew group facilitated in support of LGBTIQA+ carers**
- **Yellow Tick Accreditation explored,** with a series of presentations on the standards to support intersex staff and communities
- **My Rainbow LGBTIQA+ youth peer support group launched in partnership with Merri-bek City Council**

Where can we improve?

- continue to prioritise optimising risk and security planning for LGBTIQA+ community events due to pervasive discriminatory views and risk of violence
- extend safeguarding the welfare of our LGBTIQA+ communities, guests and staff by evolving existing initiatives such as our employee assistance program, debriefs and safety angels

What's next?

- improve our services, programs and initiatives to ensure we remain a welcoming and safe space for LGBTIQA+ clients, community and staff
- focus on Midsumma Festival and IDAHOBIT 2025
- further explore the process for gaining Yellow Tick accreditation to support Intersex staff, communities and clients

Staff supported rainbow health at Midsumma 2024.

"Congratulations on a job well done and please keep on engaging, supporting and giving our community a voice."

– LBGTIQA+ community member

Getting pronouns right in our workplace

The appropriate use of names and pronouns is important for everyone, especially trans and gender diverse people, who are often mispronounced and misgendered. We want Merri Health to be a workplace where it is normal for people to share their pronouns and ask others what their pronouns are.

Our aim is for everyone to feel confident and comfortable using singular they/them pronouns and gender-neutral language.

As part of our commitment to being a safe and inclusive workplace, this year we launched the Getting Pronouns Right education campaign.

To contextualise the campaign for our staff we launched in May 2024, the week of IDAHOBIT.

What did we achieve?

- **launched a series of initiatives to support staff with Getting Pronouns Right during the week of IDAHOBIT, including information guides, videos and factsheets**
- **ensured hard copy brochures were available across all Merri Health sites**
- **made pronoun badges widely available in tea rooms across Merri Health during IDAHOBIT morning tea celebrations**
- **encouraged staff to display their pronouns on their email signature or to personalise a background to display their pronouns and title in online meetings**
- **revised our in-person Merri Health training to include discussions on pronouns use**

Where can we improve?

- find ways to further promote resources created through other events to ensure that new and existing staff are upskilled and confident to use correct pronouns in the workplace

What's next?

- maintain our Rainbow Tick accreditation
- continue to review our internal practices as an organisation to to ensure staff learning, best practice, and that we continue to be a welcoming and inclusive service and workplace

Merri Health

Staff showed their support for LGBTIQA+ youth on Wear It Purple Day.

Quality and safety

We safeguard our consumers, clients and communities by continuously monitoring, improving and innovating our systems and processes.

Listening and responding to consumer needs

Listening and responding to consumers is a core commitment to meet the needs of the communities we serve. This year, we maintained our commitment to best practice, quality systems and processes, and continuous improvement in our consumer participation and engagement.

We invite feedback directly via phone, email, our website, in-person or feedback kiosks at our sites. This year we also participated in the Victorian Healthcare Experience Survey (VHES) independent research.

What did we achieve?

- **368**
  instances of consumer feedback received directly by Merri Health
  - **66%** compliments
  - **34%** complaints

- **182**
  Merri Health consumers took part in the VHES

- **significantly higher than state average rating received in 3 aspects of care, including:**
  - **17.6%** higher re: needing help communicating or understanding English
  - **9%** higher re: having the opportunity to discuss care if they experienced unexpected harm or distress

- **consistently higher than state average received in VHES' new Voice of the Child section**

- **exceeded and outperformed state average in 39 areas, including our top 10:**
  - **97.7%** felt safe while visiting or being visited by Merri Health, 1.5% above state average
  - **94.1%** said they were treated with respect and dignity, 0.1% above state average
  - **92.7%** rated the care they received from Merri Health as excellent
  - **92%** felt staff based their care on what was important to them, 3.7% above state average
  - **91.8%** said they felt cared for, 2.5% above state average
  - **88.9%** said staff explained things in a way they could understand, 5.6% above state average
  - **87.7%** said we provided all the information they needed before an appointment, 3.7% above state average
  - **86.2%** said they were involved as much as they wanted to be in their care, 6.8% above state average
  - **86%** felt they were listened to and understood by staff, 2.7% above state average
  - **85.8%** said staff updated them as much as they wanted about their care, 5.6% above state average

Where can we improve?

- continue improving how we engage consumers to increase participation and provide even better care
- explore innovative ways to meet client needs for appointments, and appointment availability

What's next?

- continue prioritising consumer journey to deliver safe, effective, person-centred, and goal directed care
- focus on technology to ensure a seamless consumer experience

Top marks in external audits

To maintain transparency and oversight in our commitment to continuous improvement, we are externally audited on a regular basis.

We undergo reviews by Quality Innovation Performance (QIP) every 18 months and every 3 years, and by the Aged Care Commission every 3 years. This year we were audited by two different agencies within the same week for the first time.

What did we achieve?

- **assessed under the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards (NSQHS) (ED 2) (Health/Community) by QIP in October 2023**
- **audited by QIP and the Aged Care Commission against the National Standards for Mental Health Services (NSMHS) and Aged Care Standards (ACS) in April 2024; successfully met all standards**
- **194**
  performance indicators provided by these combined standards met, and positive feedback including:
  - highly engaged and passionate workforce
  - staff are motivated to make a difference to people's lives and show genuine care and commitment to their work
  - consumers supported with respect, dignity, and compassion
  - strong consumer centred care model and goal directed care outcomes evident
  - strong governance, reporting, open disclosure culture with a proactive continuous quality improvement focus
  - organisational systems and processes provide the support to achieve high quality outcomes
  - risk mitigation and incident prevention culture visible throughout organisation
  - community engagement, inclusion and codesign at the forefront of Merri Health values
- **strong training, performance, and delivery focused workforce**
- **no issues to discuss or report**

Where can we improve?

- find innovative ways to balance the need to fulfill funder requirements, meet assessment standards and meet or exceed consumer needs

What's next?

- continue ensuring our systems and processes meet consumer needs efficiently and responsively

Culturally safe and inclusive services

Interpreter support helps clients communicate their needs in the language they are most comfortable with. It enables our communities to have meaningful involvement in care planning and make informed choices about their health care.

The demand for face-to-face interpreter services has increased, while phone and video services has continued to decrease in line with lower COVID-19 cases in the community.

What does the data tell us?

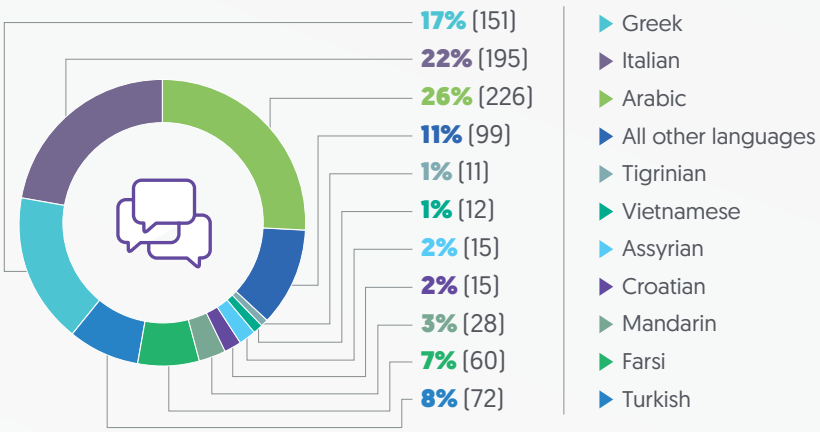
In FY2023/24:

- **884**
  interpreter bookings completed, 14% decrease from previous year
- **6%**
  increase in face-to-face interpreter services

Interpreter bookings completed

	Completed bookings			
Period	**Face-to-face**	**Telephone**	**Video**	**Total**
2022/2023	583	437	2	**1022**
2023/2024	622	258	4	**884**
Variance 21/22 + 23/24	+39	-179	+2	**-138**

Top 10 languages



Business support services

Ensuring we are agile, adaptable, and support sustainable growth and exceptional service delivery is business as usual at Merri Health.

Continuing to improve our IT systems

Continuous improvement is key to making sure Merri Health's IT systems, infrastructure and security meet staff and community needs.

We protect Merri Health by reducing risk, building a strong culture of information security understanding, awareness and action; and providing effective information security incident prevention, detection, and response.

This year we focused on delivering and improving business as usual IT support, protecting against cyber threats, and continuing our push to replace legacy technology.

We also focused on delivering value by enhancing collaboration, empowering our people to get the most out of available technology and data, and making it easier to find, interact with and use IT services.

What did we achieve?

- **laid the foundations for a new IT Strategy** to guide our work
- **moved to a new finance system**
- **made significant progress on moving Aged Care activities to a new client information management system**
- **supported implementation of a new HR information system**
- **further improved our cybersecurity maturity,** recently validated by external auditors
- **commenced building a modern business data analytics and insights solution**
- **continued to ensure our systems remain supported and protected through upgrades and updates**
- **improved our technical change management, incident response and vulnerability management practices**

Where can we improve?

- build awareness and vigilance of all Merri Health staff, partners and suppliers to continue protecting privacy and maintaining information security
- support the introduction and use of new tools to save time and reduce friction
- balancing day-to-day demands on IT to drive improvement and change

What's next?

- maintain focus on information security maturity with ongoing review and maintenance, along with significant new controls, and tools for building security awareness
- see benefits of several major long running replatforming projects
- deliver much anticipated collaboration tools
- shift our attention to making the merger with Banyule Community Health a success

Human Resources

Human Resources is vital to ensuring the smooth running of Merri Health and creating a positive and healthy workplace culture.

This year we focused on streamlining our practices, centralising learning and development, supporting our leaders' growth and capability, and embedded significant employment law changes.

We commenced bargaining for the Merri1 Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA), which covers approximately 75% of our workforce.

We also improved recruitment and data security, streamlined our approach to compliance, delivered a proactive and data-driven HR function, and improved our project management capability.

What did we achieve?

- **55**
  staff completed people leadership training
- **39**
  student placements hosted across Merri Health
- **26**
  senior leaders attended 2-day leadership retreat focused on change and trust
- **25**
  Management Leadership Team (MLT) members completed change and project management training
- **8**
  conference scholarships funded
- **launched our employee wellbeing program**
- **improved our data protection and privacy obligations** by removing identifiable information and all manager signatures from files
- **supported the transfer of Brunswick Community Medical Centre to Merri Health**
- **successfully moved dentists and medical scientists from a multiple enterprise agreement to a single,** providing our staff more opportunity and control over their employment terms and conditions
- **gained executive approval to apply to sponsor working visas** to increase how we attract and retain employees and to help overcome significant workforce shortages

Where can we improve?

- continue to overcome data limitations of legacy systems to improve operational processes and outcomes
- increase our focus on preventative employee health and wellbeing initiatives
- increase student placements for hard to recruit for skill areas, such as podiatry

What's next?

- deliver 3-phase roll out of new HRIS
- continue working towards having all staff covered by a single EBA
- prepare for merger with Banyule Community Health
- grow learning opportunities
- increase student participation

New HR system

Finding new ways to meet our current and future needs is a continuous process. This year, we investigated and decided on a new Human Resources Information System (HRIS).

The new system will bring eight dispersed functions into a single location: employee self-service, payroll, rostering, time and attendance, recruitment, onboarding, performance, and reward and recognition.

This will achieve several wins, including more automation, less data entry, reduced administrative burden and errors, and an improved end user experience for our people and teams. The new HRIS will be delivered in the next financial year.

A new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement

Making the terms and conditions of working with Merri Health consistent, fair and transparent is important for our people, our teams and our organisation.

This year we negotiated, finalised and onboarded a new EBA, Merri 2, to eligible staff. Voted on by employees and signed off by the Fair Work Commission, it came into effect in March 2024. It replaces the existing General Dentists Agreement and Medical Scientists Agreement.

What did we achieve?

- **14**
  weeks equal paid parental leave for primary and secondary carer
- **12**
  months superannuation to be paid on all types of parental leave (paid, government and unpaid)
- **4 weeks + 4 days**
  increased annual leave entitlement
- **5**
  days compassionate leave - increased from 2
- **7**
  years employment required for long service leave allowance – decreased from 10 years

Driving impact through engaging marketing

Creative, effective marketing has powered our growth and strengthened connections with diverse stakeholders, providing timely access to essential information, programs, services, and events.

This year, a major focus was the merger exploration, delivering communications and leading brand development workshops. Supporting the launch of medical services aligned with business objectives was also a key priority.

Meanwhile, ongoing statewide communications for Carer Gateway remain central, connecting carers across Victoria to free, accessible support.

We also prioritised Aged Care services and focused on Home Care Packages, social support groups, and allied health services, to increase awareness and drive client choice in anticipation of sector changes.

Improving our website experience for users was also a key priority, and increasing our reach and engagement with key audiences and partners via social media and digital marketing.

Our advocacy included coordinated visits to Parliament with Community Health First to increase recognition and funding for community health services, and dedicated campaigns to support the health of vulnerable communities.

Internally, we aimed to strengthen marketing capacity and brand visibility by providing staff with resources, templates and training.

What did we achieve?

- **Merri Health's brand reach and positive engagement highlights:**
  - **2.9 million** people on Facebook
  - **606.7K** impressions on LinkedIn (September–June)
  - **71,000** website users
- **139%**
  increase in website speed for users, now 1.2 seconds from 6.5 seconds

Our 2023 Annual Report won Gold at the 2024 Australasian Reporting Awards for transparent and authentic reporting.

- **2–3 year**
  Aged Care Strategic Marketing Plan delivered
- **1,950**
  community members and stakeholders informed via quarterly newsletter
- **10M+**
  people reached through the multi-channel Supporting Carers Every Week campaign
- **Gold Australasian Reporting Award for the 2023 Annual Report**
- **Bronze Signal Podcast Award for The Care Mosaic podcast**
- **109**
  staff consulted in merger exploration brand workshops and ongoing implementation of the strategic communications plan – supported successful vote outcome
- **new brand suite delivered for the Elder Abuse Prevention Networks (EAPN)** North and West Metro to boost member participation and awareness of initiatives
- **successful brand refresh and communications plan supported the smooth transition of Brunswick Community Medical Centre to Merri Health**
- **launched our Well@Home service,** providing health services to Home Care Package clients
- **26,171**
  people reached through advocacy campaigns supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, LGBTIQA+ health, family violence, and gender equity on Facebook
- **Senior Communications Advisor added to team** to meet organisational needs

Where can we improve?

- upgrading our website with a news carousel to help visitors find timely and relevant information
- improving data tracking and analytics to drive informed campaign evaluations and decision-making
- establishing a robust campaign and project system

What's next?

- consumer participation in name/brand development and launching our new name and brand and rolling-it out across our organisation
- ongoing merger communications to support the successful integration
- new website and intranet for merged organisation
- implementing the aged care strategic marketing plan to connect consumers to our Home Care Packages, social groups, and allied health services
- ongoing Carer Gateway state-wide communications to connect more carers with free support
- further website upgrades, including a more dynamic homepage and easier navigation
- Family Foundations advocacy and promotion to support program refunding

We proudly launched GP services at Merri Health this year.

Optimising infrastructure security and use

Infrastructure and facilities management at Merri Health involves nine sites and 46 fleet vehicles. Our priority is ensuring that our spaces are set up to safely support and meet our client and staff daily needs. It's a dynamic and evolving space that often demands quick thinking and responsiveness.

This year we have completed building refurbishments, rolled out security upgrades, and continued to understand and optimise the way we use resources across our organisation.

What did we achieve?

- **completed Glenroy site refurbishment and expansion with funding from the Department of Health, including Home and Community Care Program funding that enabled us to:**
  - increase our podiatry rooms from one to two
  - increase capacity with co-sharing desks for all
  - create a larger and more fit-for-purpose physiotherapy consulting room
  - create an additional consulting room to expand clinical and general services
  - create a new meeting room with AV and video conferencing capability
- **completed security upgrades with help from a Victorian Health Building Authority Metropolitan Health Infrastructure Fund grant that enabled us to:**
  - rollout a new security access system across our Melbourne sites, achieving more secure infrastructure
  - install a new automatic gate at Bell Street to increase security and reduce manual handling risks of opening a large chain link fence
- **consolidated our site at Chifley Drive, Preston to amalgamate teams on a single floor, allowing for better cohesion and creating cost efficiency**

Where can we improve?

- continuing to invest in maintaining our facilities and ensuring they are consistently used will further increase cost efficiency and operational sustainability

What's next?

- test and rollout a room booking module via our OfficeSpace platform to enable better reporting and optimise usage
- complete security enhancements across the organisation
- contribute to the development of Merri Health's Environmental Sustainability Framework

Finding the way got easier at Glenroy this year!

Finishing touches are being made at our Glenroy site, with a range of changes already completed this year. The site houses our Social Support Programs, counselling services, child health services and allied health and specialist services targeted to our aged care clients.

One of the newest innovations has been the installation of 'wayfinding flooring'. The custom-coloured flooring guides dementia patients to services allowing them to know the 'way' using easy-to-find bright colours to aid navigation and a better understanding of the surrounding environment.

Additional improvements include an expansion to allied health spaces, new meeting rooms and AV, improved security and more space for staff to work.

Further improvements are on the cards too, with more flooring to be installed and a plan to develop a more welcoming outdoor space that can be used for client activities.

"Judging depth and distance can be tricky for some of our clients so in response, we have put in blue toilet seats at our Glenroy and Moreland Road sites. The bright colour stands out from the regular white, making it easy for those with vision or cognitive issues to spot."

– Megan La Rose, Infrastructure Manager

"The response from clients and staff has been very positive! They're loving this little change that's making a big difference."

– Amber Preston, Facilities Officer

Our People and Workplace Wellbeing

We are committed to upholding an inclusive and respectful workplace, supporting employee health and wellbeing, and facilitating growth and development.

Our Workforce

During the 2023/2024 financial year, our workforce increased by 9%, from 391 to 425 employees.

Of our workforce:

80%
identify as female

18%
identify as male

2%
identify as gender diverse

Inclusive Workplace

We are a proud Rainbow Tick-accredited organisation, strongly committed to providing safe, respectful, and inclusive services and environments that welcome all people and celebrate the rich diversity of our staff, clients, and community.

In addition, we offer education and training to address health inequalities and discrimination, including:

- **Inclusive practice training focused on culturally and linguistically diverse communities**
- **LGBTIQA+ inclusive practice training**
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural appreciation training**
- **Upstander training**
- **Responding to vulnerability training**

Training and Leadership Development

We offer both mandatory and optional training for all staff to support professional development and promote a safe and inclusive work culture.

Our Learning Management System offers 127 training modules, with an additional 194 available for purchase.

This year, 55 staff members completed people leadership training, 26 senior leaders completed a 2-day training on change and trust, and 25 leaders completed training focused on change and project management.

We also provided 14 additional inclusive training sessions covering topics such as supporting a neurodiverse team, plain language writing, First Nations Cultural Safety, and recognising and responding to family violence.

Wellbeing@Merri

Our Wellbeing@Merri Framework is built on four core pillars – mind, body, joy, and growth – that form the foundation of health, wellbeing, and safety at Merri Health.

This holistic, proactive program enhances what we already offer, delivering a personalised approach that supports both existing and new diagnoses.

This year, we saw an increase in the number of employees supported and wellness plans provided. The top five wellness plans addressed musculoskeletal issues, physical health, illness/disease, mental health, and condition management.

What did we achieve?

- **149**
  employees supported
- **175**
  different wellness plans provided, a 66.6% increase from the previous year

Employee Assistance Program

Ensuring that our staff feel supported, guided, connected, and recognised is vital. Our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) takes a holistic approach to wellbeing, offering 24/7 access to counselling and resources to support all aspects of life.

This year, we partnered with Telus Health to expand the range of services and tools available to our staff.

What did we achieve?

- **31**
  staff members supported
- **7.6%**
  of the organisation utilised the EAP
- **79**
  hours of support provided

Champions Changing Lives

We're passionate about celebrating our employees' achievements and the positive difference they make to people's lives.

Working in healthcare can be challenging. By celebrating successes, we build positive workplace culture, improve job satisfaction, and retain skilled employees, which supports exceptional patient care.

Reward and recognition includes:

- **MERRI Champion Award –** peer voted award.
- **Milestone recognition –** for 10, 15, 20, and 25 years of service.
- **Merri Health Day –** an extra annual leave day for all staff.
- **Changing Lives Award –** voted by clients to celebrate Merri Health employees/volunteers who have made a significant contribution to their lives through service delivery.

Our Changing Lives winners this year were:

Phillipa Bourke (Care Coordinator), Joanne Hardy (Diabetes Educator), and Julie Lew (Dietician)

> ***"The whole team has been amazing. I want to acknowledge Joanne Hardy, she is one of the kindest, most caring people I have ever met. She never judges but is always so encouraging and takes away the self-blame. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."***
>
> – Kerry, PCIC client

Erin Poznachowski (Exercise Physiologist)

> ***"Erin has been very helpful with my needs."***
>
> – client

David Thompson (Physiotherapist)

With David's support, knowledge, and techniques, as well as a new medication, David's client saw an 80% reduction in phlegm and much clearer airways.

> ***"David is the most helpful person I've dealt with in my 30-year journey with bronchiectasis."***
>
> – client

Board of Directors Proceedings

Board attendance at meetings 2023/2024

Directors	Potential	Apologies	Actual
Julie McCormack (Chair to August 2023)	2	-	2
Anne Jungwirth (Chair from November 2023)	13	-	13
Ben Maxfield (Deputy Chair)	13	2	11
Joe Caputo	13	-	12
Ann Taylor	13	-	12
Sam Garrasi	13	2	11
Seide Raffoul	13	-	11
Michael De Bruyn	13	2	11
Kenneth Cheng	13	-	13
Danielle Panaccio	11	-	11
Chiara Lawry	10	1	8

Company secretary and executive support

Gavin Thompson
Company Secretary

Joan Wilkinson
Executive Assistant to the Board of Directors

Directors attendance at sub-committees 2023/2024

Financial, Audit and Risk Management (FARM)

Directors	Potential	Apologies	Actual
Sam Garrasi (Chair)	6	-	6
Kenneth Cheng	6	-	6
Benjamin Maxfield	3	-	3
Julie McCormack (Board Chair)	1	-	1
Michael DeBryun	3	1	2
Danielle Panaccio	As guest	-	3
Anne Jungwirth (Chair)	As guest	-	3

Community Engagement Committee (CEC)

Directors	Potential	Apologies	Actual
Ann Taylor (Chair)	5	-	5
Joe Caputo	5	1	4
Seide Raffoul	5	0	0

Quality Safety and Clinical Governance Committee (QSCGC)

Directors	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Michael de Bruyn	2	1	1
Anne Jungwirth (Chair to August 2023)	4	-	4
Benjamin Maxfield	2	1	1
Julie McCormack	1	-	1
Danielle Panaccio (Chair from November 2023)	3	-	3
Kenneth Cheng (Guest)	As guest	-	1
Ann Taylor (Guest)	As guest	-	1
Sam Garrasi (Guest)	As guest	-	2

Commissioning

Directors	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Ben Maxfield (Chair)	3	-	3
Julie McCormack	1	-	1
Sam Garrasi	3	1	2
Ann Taylor	3	-	3
Anne Jungwirth	3	3	3
Danielle Panaccio	1	-	1

About sub-committees

Finance, Audit and Risk Management

This sub-committee oversees financial performance, compliance, risk management and internal/external audits for Merri Health.

The sub-committee meets six times a year (or more frequently if required) and is made up of at least two Board members, at least one community member with financial expertise and members of the Merri Health executive leadership team.

Quality, Safety and Clinical Governance

This sub-committee meets quarterly (or more frequently if required) to oversee key strategies and higher-level reports on clinical governance functions.

The sub-committee is made up of at least two Board members, up to three community representatives with clinical expertise and members of the Merri Health executive leadership team.

Community Engagement

This sub-committee meets quarterly (or more frequently if required), with the purpose to consult with community representatives on activities and services of Merri Health. The sub-committee makes recommendations to the Board about how to engage with the community and obtain meaningful feedback and potential improvements.

The sub-committee is made up of at least two Board members, a minimum of four community representatives and members of the Merri Health executive leadership team.

Board committee meetings

Community representation on Board sub-committees 2023/2024

Finance, Audit and Risk Management

Community Representatives	Potential	Apologies	Actual
Geraldine Allen	6	1	5
Paul Girdler	6	1	5
Nigel Hedges	6	5	1

Quality, Safety and Clinical Governance

Community Representatives	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Ewa Mazuruk	4	1	4
Dr Nicola Cunningham	3	-	0
Mabrooka Singh	3	-	3
Helen Politis	1	-	1

Community Engagement

Community Representatives	Potential	Apologies	Actual
Mairi Rowan	5	-	5
Alison Black	3	2	0
Susy Pinchen	5	2	3
Tenielle Furze	5	1	2
Melek Cetiner	4	1	3
Marleen Plate	4	1	3
Adua Merola-Russo	3	2	1
Chaira Lawry	3	2	1

Financial report

The following forms the Concise Financial Report for Merri Health and is extracted from the Audited Financial Report. It is not intended to display Merri Health's full financial reports and financial performance for the year.

A full copy of the Audited Financial Report is available at merrihealth.org.au

Statement of Comprehensive income

for the year ended 30 June 2024

	2024 $'000	2023 $'000
Revenue	70,871	56,601
Income	17,324	18,615
Gain on property sale	-	1,065
Total revenue and income	**88,195**	**76,281**
Expenses		
Employee benefits expense	38,154	36,014
Depreciation and amortisation	2,393	2,646
Finance costs	87	233
Supplies	288	276
Computer expenses	2,981	1,890
Consulting and legal costs	710	1,244
Client costs	14,340	10,153
Communication	170	404
Motor vehicle expenses	101	264
Occupancy costs	1,004	1,091
Payments to other agencies	21,405	16,266
Repairs and maintenance	328	286
Employment expenses	588	697
Other expenses	3,777	2,371
Total expenses	**86,326**	**73,835**
Total operating surplus	**1,869**	**2,446**
Revaluation of assets	105	1,669
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR	**1,974**	**4,115**

Statement of Financial Position

as at 30 June 2024

	2024 $'000	2023 $'000
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	28,053	30,376
Trade and other receivables	1,127	355
Other current assets	6,030	5,484
Total current assets	**35,210**	**36,215**
Non-current assets		
Lease Assets	1,929	2,322
Financial Assets	7,571	6,511
Property, plant and equipment	8,102	7,913
Total non-current assets	**17,602**	**16,746**
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	6,650	5,485
Other liabilities	14,940	18,670
Lease liabilities	1,058	1,203
Provisions	5,608	4,809
Total current liabilities	**28,256**	**30,167**
Non-current liabilities		
Provisions	1,074	1,017
Lease Liabilities	1,049	1,318
Total non-current liabilities	**2,123**	**2,335**
Net assets	**22,433**	**20,459**
Equity		
Reserves	3,200	3,095
Retained earnings	19,233	17,364
Total equity	**22,433**	**20,459**

Contact Us

Merri Health acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples as the traditional owners of the land and waterways at our Melbourne sites.

Our sites

Brunswick
11 Glenlyon Road
Brunswick VIC 3056

Brunswick West
382–386 Moreland Road
Brunswick West VIC 3055

Coburg
93 Bell Street
Coburg VIC 3058

Merri Central
Ground floor, Unit 4
19 Pentridge Boulevard
Coburg VIC 3058

Fawkner
79 Jukes Road
Fawkner VIC 3060

Glenroy
5D Cromwell Street
Glenroy VIC 3046

Preston
Level 1, 110 Chifley Drive
Preston VIC 3072

Vic Place
21 Victoria Street
Coburg VIC 3058

Wangaratta
Level 3, 62–68 Ovens Street
Wangaratta VIC 3677

All services

1300 637 744
info@merrihealth.org.au

Carer support
1800 422 737

My Aged Care*
1800 200 422

* My Aged Care is the first point of contact for aged care services

Your feedback is important to us

It's good to give feedback as it helps us improve how we do things. We manage all feedback as quickly as possible and it is confidential.

You can provide feedback by:

(03) 9389 2234
quality@merrihealth.org.au
merrihealth.org.au

Giovanni, Home Care Package client with his Care Advisor Geelani.

Merri Health

Healthcare that moves with you

Annual Report 2024

Connect with us

@merrihealth

Merri Health

@MerriHealth

@merrihealth2136

merrihealth.org.au