



**Merri Health**  
Healthcare that moves with you

# KEEPING US CONNECTED: COVID AND BEYOND

## ANNUAL REPORT 2021





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 supporting wellbeing for over 45 years.

## 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, innovate

### Connect with us



@merrihealth



Merri Health



@MerriHealth



[goo.gl/gWrGqi](https://goo.gl/gWrGqi)

[merrihealth.org.au](https://merrihealth.org.au)





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Merri Health acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as traditional custodians of the land and waters and acknowledges and pays respect to their Elders, past and present.

### 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.



# ABOUT THIS REPORT

The annual report provides a summary of Merri Health's operational and financial performance during the 2020-21 financial year, and our work to create healthy, connected communities through the provision of high quality, health services and programs that respond to community needs.

This report gives you information about our organisation, how it's structured, our Board of Directors, governance; and our performance, actions and achievements in the following areas:



Usually, this report includes our quality account, which provides insights about our services and performance. Due to COVID-19 and in line with reporting requirements from Safer Care Victoria, the quality account is not required this year.

## How do we put this information together?

Teams across the organisation contribute to this report. When deciding what should be included, we are guided by statutory requirements and Merri Health's priority areas based on our strategic directions.

We review this report with our Board, leadership team, staff, clients and community engagement board sub-committee to ensure it is correct, easy to understand and informative.

## Where to find this report



This report can be found at each of our sites and is also available on our website, **[merrihealth.org.au](https://merrihealth.org.au)**



### Report theme:

### **KEEPING US CONNECTED: COVID-19 AND BEYOND**

Merri Health has been at the frontline of community health throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, keeping diverse communities connected to services that support physical, mental and social wellbeing. Keeping communities and staff connected to health services and to each other, through innovative programs and new technology, has been a key priority and challenge in 2020-21.

# BOARD CHAIR REPORT

2021 was the second year of the COVID-19 crisis and Merri Health has again demonstrated our resilience, our flexibility and our value to our community.

This is my last year on the Board, and my last report as Board Chair as the rules do not allow me to re-stand. Over the past nine years Merri Health has grown and become a much bigger, stronger and more visible organisation. Across this time we have had tremendous staff, a strong executive, two visionary CEOs and a capable and hardworking Board.

Most importantly we have delivered more and better services for our community, especially to the most vulnerable. Merri Health will continue to take a stand with the most vulnerable in our community, ensuring equitable access of healthcare to those who would otherwise fall through the gaps in the current health system.

## Strategic Directions

We should all be proud of our achievements, but we are facing more challenges and seeking more opportunities in the future. 2020 saw the release of our updated Strategic Directions, which outline our objective to provide better health and social outcomes for our community. The five year plan will ensure responsive and dynamic services to the many communities we service.

*You can read more on pages 18-19.*

## Our performance

Despite the challenges of COVID-19 Merri Health has increased its revenue, its size and its reach in Victoria. Our revenue has grown 42% to \$67.5million. The Carer Gateway program has been instrumental in this.

While we are still centred in Moreland and are proud of our origin we are now a state-wide organisation. Our Carer Gateway services will enable Merri Health to support carers of all types, throughout Victoria in alliance with our six partner organisations.

Our aged care services increased 15% in revenue, contributing an additional \$1.8 million as more consumers took up our Home Care Package support. And Merri Health's proven performance and deep community knowledge saw us funded \$1.5 million to support the Victorian Government's COVID-19 response in Moreland.

## Investments

Our strong financial performance has allowed us to continue to invest into our facilities. We are getting closer to resolving our need for secure and affordable accommodation for the organisation within Moreland. I think next year's chair will be able to give you some positive updates.

The Board has continued to invest in improving the standard of our governance, reporting and transparency. We not only focus on quality, community engagement and our finances but also on managing potential risks.

## Looking forward

These are difficult times for a people based organisation as we tackle lockdowns and reduce human interactions. We have not let this crisis go to waste; we have improved our responsiveness and updated our workplace including blending working from home with office work.

Many of these changes will involve permanent changes to how we work and how we deliver services.

The future demands that that we provide quality local services, continue our focus on our members and local community, but also that we meet the challenges presented to us by an ever changing policy environment.

“

**Most importantly we have delivered more and better services for our community, especially to the most vulnerable.”**

## Changes

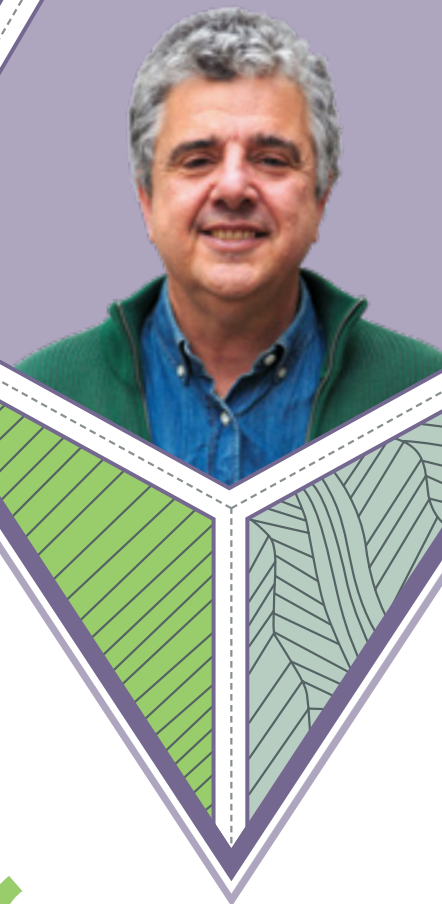
In October we farewelled our former Deputy Chair, Sheena Watt, following her appointment to the Victorian Parliament. Sheena has had a long involvement with Merri Health and we thank her for tremendous contribution. We were pleased to welcome Roxanne Adams to the Board.

On behalf of the Board I would like to thank the staff and the management team of Merri Health for their work. I would also like to thank my fellow Board members for their contribution and dedication to Merri Health.

We look forward to our future with a belief in the organisation, its people and community.



**Carlo Carli**  
Board Chair



# CEO'S REPORT

Merri Health has had a remarkable year marked by tenacity, resilience and unwavering commitment to exceptional client care. In the face of unprecedented challenges and the biggest health crisis in 100 years, we continued to deliver vital health services, to progress our strategic goals, responded to local community needs and stepped into COVID-19 testing and vaccine hub delivery. **What a year!**

It is with great pleasure that we report back to our community on our work in 2020/21. Our theme this year is connection. Connection to health services, to staff, to consumers, to each other, through new technologies and innovative programs. Connection has been both a key challenge and priority in this unheralded period.

## Our value

Our local knowledge, local relationships and local connections have uniquely positioned community health, and in particular Merri Health, at the forefront of the pandemic response, supporting both community engagement and response efforts in testing and vaccine rollout.

We were proud to be recognised by the Victorian Health Minister, The Hon. Martin Foley for our High Risk Accommodation Response work, achieving 72% vaccination rate at Barkly Street housing tower.

## Our adaptability

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted every area of the organisation and meticulous planning and management was deployed to ensure services could continue safely. Employee and client safety was paramount.

A COVID Taskforce was established that oversaw the implementation of the organisation's pandemic plan and specific resources were mobilised to support operations at all levels, ranging from support with telehealth to increases in procurement due to PPE requirements.

## Our people

Heartfelt appreciation goes to all of our dedicated employees and volunteers who upheld our values through their unwavering commitment to our clients and exceptional customer services, generating a 25% increase in positive client feedback.

We adapted quickly, moving to remote working and telehealth. Our success evidenced by the continued engagement with our communities and the delivery of our programs.

Our principles of co-design, respectful and inclusive practice, tailored to the unique needs of our communities served us well. We consulted, we listened, we adapted.

Our employees are our most important asset and we introduced two new wellbeing programs and a staff wellness App. A range of communication tools were deployed and pleasingly our staff engagement increased by 10% to 70%, benchmarking well above sector and Australian workforce norms.

## Our achievements

Over the past 12 months we have grown our services and reach to provide over 70 diverse services to improve community health outcomes.

Our achievements are highlighted throughout this report including:

- ▶ provision of **274,249 services instances**
- ▶ over **4700 vaccines administered** at clinics run by Merri Health
- ▶ the launch of a new **Chronic Pain Management service**
- ▶ the **growth of Aged Care Services including a 34% increase in Home Care packages and expansion of the Stepped Care mental health support program** across northern and western Melbourne
- ▶ expansion of the **School Readiness Program** in regional Victoria
- ▶ two years continued funding for the **Ready, Set, Prep! program**
- ▶ rollout of **Carer Gateway** services across Victoria
- ▶ the launch of the **Merri Mates** disability volunteer service
- ▶ a **26.5% increase in community engagement activities**
- ▶ establishment of a **Research and Evaluation Committee** to embed best practice and provide a solid research arm
- ▶ **successful accreditation** against all applicable standards
- ▶ achieved **Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) Employer of Choice** citation.



**Our immediate priorities are embedding permanent flexible work practices across the organisation, securing a new and enhanced Merri Health Enterprise Agreement, finding affordable and permanent accommodation for our services, solidifying the organisation's foundations and consolidating our growth."**

## Our advocacy

Merri Health has continued to provide a voice for marginalised and vulnerable groups ensuring their needs are heard and future reform is responsive and evolving. We have advocated on a broad range of consultations and sector reforms for mental health, aged care, Victoria's criminal justice system, homelessness, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, economic equity for Victorian women and climate change.

## Our partnerships

Successful and collaborative partnerships are critical to the work we do and support comprehensive service delivery. We partner with stakeholders including State, local and Commonwealth governments and a vast array of value aligned organisations. Carer Gateway and our new Homelessness to a Home program are examples of collaborative and effective partnerships delivering positive client outcomes.

## Our challenges

In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, the year was not without its challenges. The financial sustainability of the NDIS suite of programs continues to be a challenge as does the ongoing reform fatigue experienced by the sector.

Extended lockdowns meant we were not able to deliver some services to regular capacity or meet our ambitious carer targets. Staffing shortages in key areas are being further compounded by the pandemic; and the long term impact of remote working on culture, staff wellbeing and performance are unknown.

## Our Future

We are committed to ensuring the long term sustainability of community health and we look towards the future with optimism and enthusiasm.

Our immediate priorities are embedding permanent flexible work practices across the organisation, securing a new and enhanced Merri Health Enterprise Agreement, finding affordable and permanent accommodation for our services, solidifying the organisation's foundations and consolidating our growth.

I would like to thank and acknowledge our Board of Directors for their valued contribution, in particular Carlo Carli, who after 9 years on the Board and Chair of Merri Health, concludes his term. Carlo has been a passionate advocate and steadfast campaigner for the provision of accessible, safe and quality publicly funded health and community services and the community health sector more broadly.

Carlo leaves a strong legacy of organisational growth and reach as we continue to enrich diverse communities by delivering on our promise to provide an outstanding customer experience. Thank you Carlo.

I hope you enjoy reading the 2020/21 annual report.

Stay safe.

**Tassia Michaleas**  
Chief Executive Officer



# ACHIEVEMENTS AND AWARDS



provision of  
**274,249**  
services instances

services  
accredited under  
**7**  
independent  
standards



established  
**High Risk Accommodation  
Response team**  
to support COVID-19 safety  
in high risk, high-density  
community  
accommodation



**Living Well,  
Ageing Well  
program**  
expanded to  
Hume



**finalists in the  
Leading Age Services  
Australia Excellence  
in Age Services Awards**  
for our Social Support Program



**one**  
year  
anniversary  
of Carer  
Gateway



**Australasian  
Reporting Awards 2019  
silver award**, acknowledging  
good, transparent communication  
in our annual report

established Moreland's only  
**pop-up COVID-19 vaccination hub**  
in partnership with DPV Health,  
over

**4700**  
vaccinations  
administered



**Ready,  
Set, Prep!**  
funded for  
2 more years



**NDIA Light Up  
Award winner**

led  
**Elder Abuse  
Prevention  
Networks** in  
northern and metro  
regions

**Family Foundations  
program**  
secured  
funding for  
**3**  
more years



Merri Health  
recognised by  
Federal Minister  
for Families  
Anne Ruston

launched new  
**Chronic Pain  
Management  
Service**



**School Readiness Funding  
(SRF)** allied health program  
grew in the Goulburn and  
Ovens-Murray regions,  
to support

**115**

**kindergartens**  
in regional  
Victoria



**34%**

growth in  
**Home Care  
Packages**



expanded  
**Stepped Care mental health  
support program for  
older people**



**26.5%**

**increase in community  
engagement activities**



**22,000**

**COVID-19 tests** at  
our testing sites



new  
**Homelessness  
to a Home  
(H2H) program**  
launched



**Kinder Partnerships  
program** launched to  
improve early childhood  
outcomes

**Workplace Gender Equality  
Agency (WGEA) Employer of  
Choice accreditation** –  
one of only seven  
health organisations  
nationally



**Victorian  
Multicultural  
Award for  
'Excellence in  
Education'  
winner**



established a  
**Research and  
Evaluation Committee**  
to embed best practice  
throughout the organisation

**343**

different  
**flexible working  
arrangements**  
used by staff



introduced  
**sector-leading  
parental  
leave**

new **Merri Mates**  
disability volunteer  
service launched



Merri Health's footprint and reach have grown substantially. We are now a Victoria-wide provider of carer services and have expanded programs to new areas in regional Victoria, supported by our Wangaratta site; while still proudly servicing Moreland and surrounds.

The move to telehealth services in response to COVID-19 has also enabled us to service communities outside our regular local government areas (LGAs) and be more flexible with who we support.

## 1 The North and West Metropolitan region

The North and West Metropolitan region is one of the most diverse covering 2,981 square kilometres with 14 local government areas: Brimbank, Melton, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Wyndham, Banyule, Darebin, Nillumbik, Melbourne, Moreland, Moonee Valley, Yarra, Hume and Whittlesea.

### Diversity

It is highly cultural and socio-economically diverse, 36% of the population was born overseas, with India the highest origin. Christianity is the most common religion at 47%, followed by Islam, Anglican and Buddhism.

### Health

The North and West Metropolitan population face a number of health issues. Over 50% of adults in Moreland have one or more chronic diseases and more than half of adults report being overweight. Moreland has a higher proportion of adults with heart disease or osteoporosis than Victoria overall and more than 25% of adults are diagnosed with anxiety or depression.

The number of people with type 2 diabetes in Whittlesea and Moreland is high, increasing the population risk of chronic health conditions, including: cardiovascular disease, blindness, amputation, kidney disease and depression. Type 2 diabetes is closely linked with the prevalence of obesity.

People living in Hume and Whittlesea local government areas (LGAs) have the lowest rate of accessibility to community health care in the region, and poorer access compared to the metropolitan and Victorian average. Loneliness and social isolation are important health issues, especially during COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions.

### Languages spoken

Within the culturally diverse population, 38.5% speak a language other than English.

Mandarin is the most popular language spoken at home other than English, followed by Cantonese, Indonesian, Korean and Vietnamese.

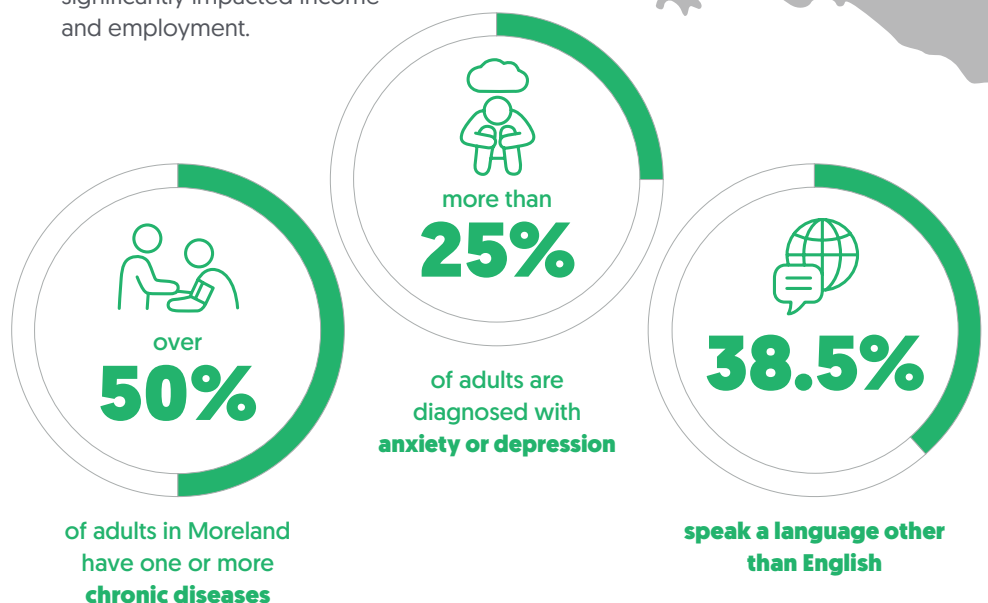
### Age groups

The median age for the population in the North and West Metropolitan region is 27. People aged 20-34 make up 55%. Currently, only 0.7% of the population is aged 85 and over.

### Community need

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are highly disadvantaged communities in the region. They make up 0.4% of the population and typically experience higher levels of chronic illness, suicide rates and psychological distress than non-Indigenous, with young people particularly at risk.

Within Moreland, Fawkner, Hadfield, Glenroy and Coburg North experience higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage, a higher concentration of low-income households and higher rates of unemployment. COVID-19 has significantly impacted income and employment.



## Wider Metropolitan Melbourne region

The wider Metropolitan Melbourne region covers the north, east, west and south of Melbourne. It includes 31 municipalities and 4.9 million people. This region is undergoing significant growth and change.

### Diversity

The highest number of people born overseas come from China, followed by Malaysia, India, Indonesia and England. 40% speak English at home, 19% speak Mandarin, and Hindi, Spanish and Korean sit at 2% each.

### Health

The top five reasons for hospital submissions are diabetes, lung disease, heart disease and dental issues. 61.9% of people aged 18 and over have experienced low levels of psychological distress and 22.7% experienced moderate levels of psychological distress.

### Age groups

This region has the youngest age profile of residents in Victoria with a median age of 28 [compared with 37 for Victoria]. Residents aged 65 years are forecast to increase to 7.6% by 2026.

### Community need

An estimated 0.3% of the population are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. They are one of the most vulnerable groups to COVID-19 and have twice the rate of suicide of non-Indigenous peoples.

## Hume region

Merri Health has substantially increased its service provision across North Eastern Victoria to service the Hume region: Mitchell, Murrindindi, Shepparton, Strathbogie, Moira, Mansfield, Wangaratta, Benalla, Indigo, Wodonga, Towong and Alpine.

Hume has one of Victoria's fastest growing populations; expected to grow from 241,188 in 2020 to 312,306 in 2022. The Hume region covers north eastern Victoria and the Goulburn Valley and includes 12 local government areas.

### Diversity

The population of Hume is also diverse in culture and language. English is the most common language spoken at home. After Australia, Iraq and India are the most common birthplace.

### Health

People living in Hume have more health conditions than the rest of Victoria. Males live one year less than the Victorian average and females 0.3 years less.

### Age groups

Hume's median age is 34 years. Over 30,000 people are between the ages of 20-29 years.

## Wider Regional Victoria

Regional Victoria has a population of approximately 1,537,459 people spread across its 48 LGAs.

### Diversity

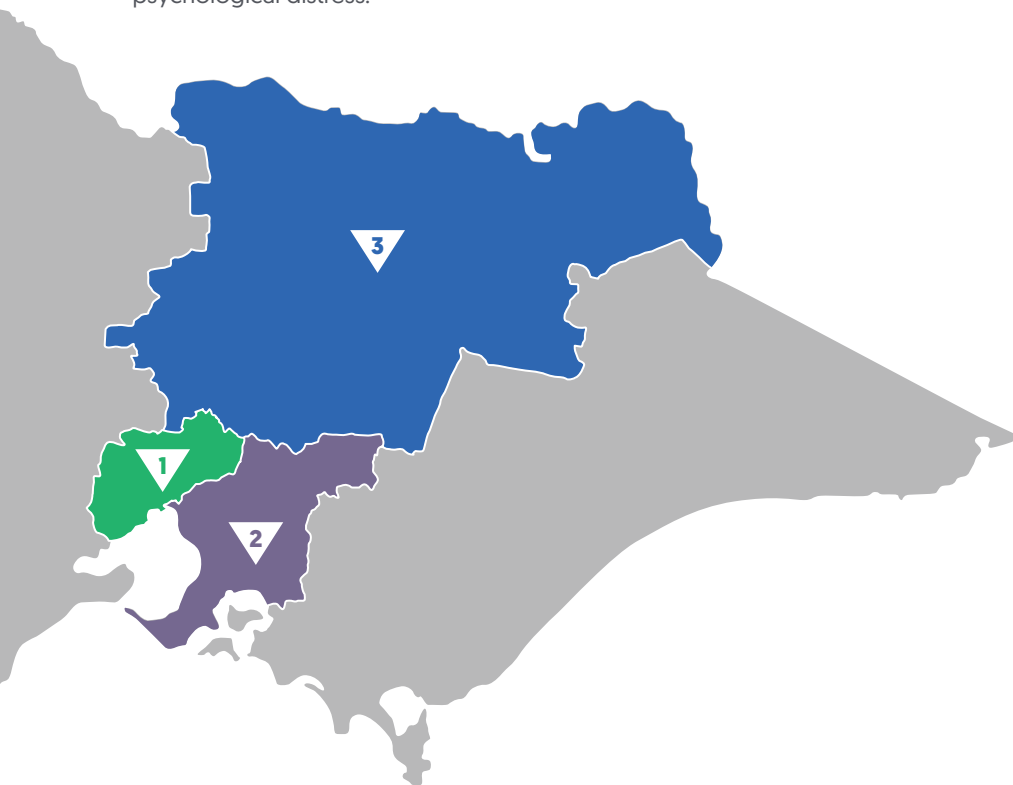
Australian (49.7%) and English (19.7%) ancestries are most common in regional Victoria. Australian Aboriginal makes up 8.5%. Approximately 24,211 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples live in the region.

### Health

People in regional Victoria have greater difficulty accessing health services due to distance and can be at higher risk of mental health disorders due to loneliness, financial issues, natural disasters and low employment opportunities.

### Age groups

The median age in regional Victoria is 21, 15 years younger than the median in metropolitan Melbourne.



#### References:

- ▶ [www.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SGS-Economic-social-and-environmental-profile-Northern-Metro-Region-April-2019.pdf](http://www.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SGS-Economic-social-and-environmental-profile-Northern-Metro-Region-April-2019.pdf)
- ▶ [www.health.vic.gov.au/regions/northwestern/about.htm](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/regions/northwestern/about.htm)
- ▶ [www.quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SED24703](http://www.quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SED24703)
- ▶ [www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/about-melbourne/research-and-statistics/city-population/Pages/community-profiles.aspx](http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/about-melbourne/research-and-statistics/city-population/Pages/community-profiles.aspx)
- ▶ [www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/health-wellbeing-profile-2020.pdf](http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/health-wellbeing-profile-2020.pdf)
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- ▶ [www.app.remplan.com.au/hume-lga/community/population/birthplace?state=rGXMclIrGXMcV064iwELzNlb849xlrfeukLJtluMuyuObSLuMs5R0UMbJ](http://www.app.remplan.com.au/hume-lga/community/population/birthplace?state=rGXMclIrGXMcV064iwELzNlb849xlrfeukLJtluMuyuObSLuMs5R0UMbJ)
- ▶ [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20Population%20-%20Victoria~10002](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20Population%20-%20Victoria~10002)

# OUR SERVICES

Merri Health is an accredited health service provider. We complete regular accreditation reviews by independent bodies to ensure that our policies, procedures and systems meet safety and quality requirements, and our services are safe and responsive.

Our services are accredited under the following Standards:



Early Childhood  
Intervention  
Standards



Mental Health  
Service  
Accreditation



Quality  
Improvement  
Council



Human Services  
Standards



Community  
Care Common  
Standards



National Safety  
and Quality  
in Healthcare  
Standards –  
dental services



Rainbow  
Tick Inclusive  
Practice  
Standards



## Aged services

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

We provide carer support, short-term education and exercise groups, health services like occupational therapy, physiotherapy and more, respite for carers or frail older people who live at home, social groups and wellness at home through our Home Care Packages.



## 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.



## NDIS made easy

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a national government initiative for people living with a permanent and significant disability. Merri Health provides NDIS support for children with a disability and their family through MerriKids, mental health support and allied 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 metropolitan areas.



## Dental services

Promoting good, oral health through education and general dental support for children and adults.



## Disability services

Supporting people with a disability with flexible health services and greater choices. We are a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) approved provider and help with carer support, children with a disability and their family, education, health services like speech pathology, occupational therapy and more; social groups and wellness at home.



## 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, support to stop smoking 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 victims of crime, young people that identify same-sex attracted or gender diverse, residents and proprietors of Supported Residential Services.



## Child and family services

Promoting happy, healthy children and strong families with services like counselling, pediatric allied health, support for children with a disability, education, family services, family violence and support for victims of crime.



## Young adult services

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

# OUR PROFILE

Merri Health is one of Victoria's largest not-for-profit community health providers. We provide over 70 health and wellbeing services to support people at every age and stage of life.

Our 401 staff work collaboratively with our clients to identify their needs and link them with the right services and programs to support their physical, mental and social health and wellbeing.

We have a strong commitment to improving health outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, young and older people, people with disabilities, from culturally diverse backgrounds, with complex health needs, and with various gender identities and sexual orientations.

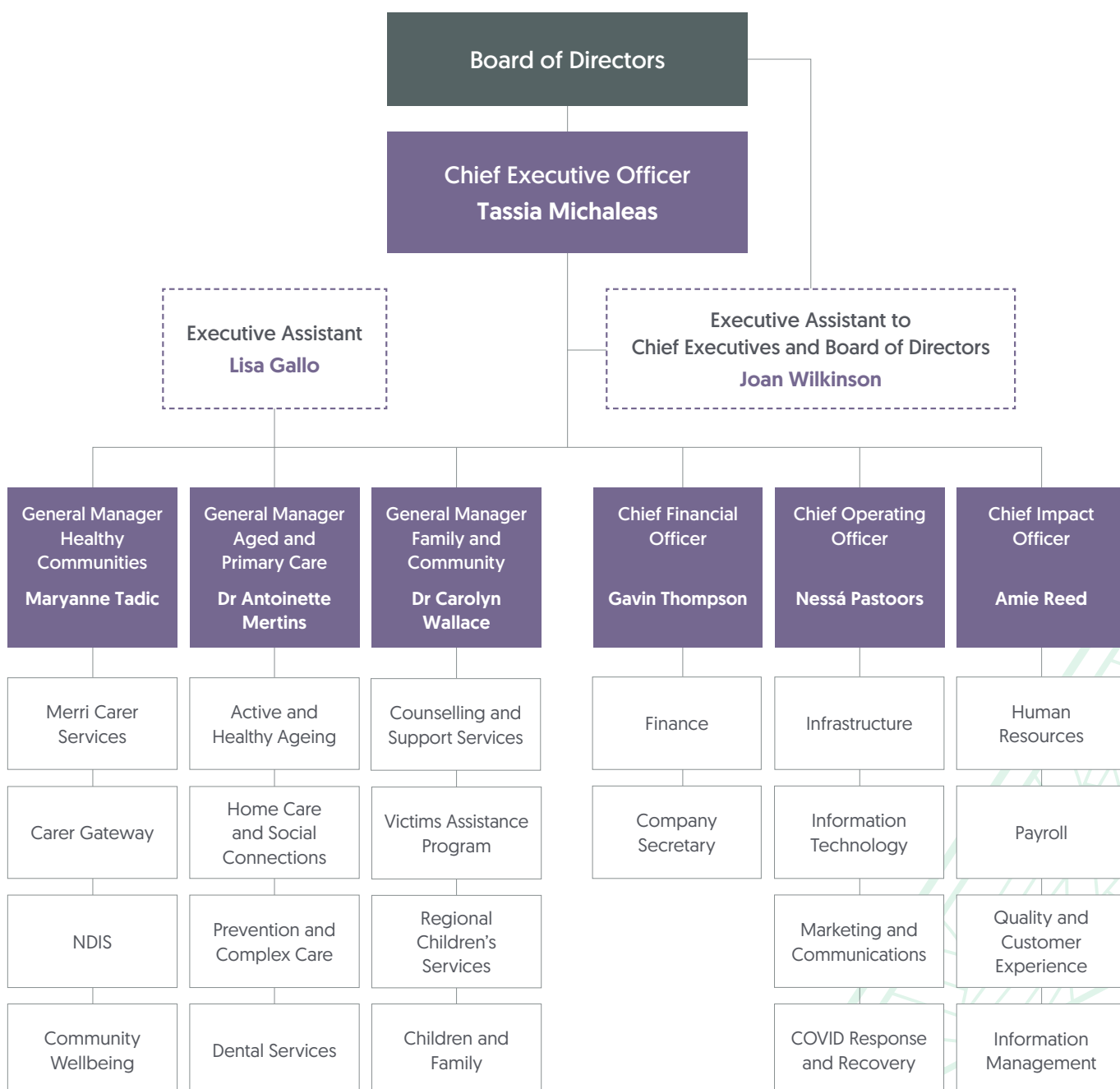
Over the past year, we've provided more than 274,249 service instances from our 11 sites.

## 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, People and Quality, and Finance.

## Organisational chart



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Our Board of Directors manage the business of Merri Health, providing a governing approach and expert advice.

## Carlo Carli

### Chair

Carlo is a Moreland resident and has been involved in public policy for most of his professional career. Carlo has been a public advocate for access and equity, multiculturalism and broader human rights issues and was a Member of Parliament for Brunswick for 16 years. He is fluent in English, Italian and Spanish and has a good command of the French language.



## Julie McCormack

### Deputy Chair

Julie is the manager of the clinical training unit at Dental Health Services Victoria, where she has been since May 2012. Julie has a background in education and public health and is a Director of a small business called Incompany, Women in Trades. Julie holds a Masters in Public Health [Women's Health], Graduate Diploma in Education and Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, Bachelor of Arts and a Graduate Diploma in Frontline Management. She has trained as a mediator.



## Darryl Annett

### Board Member

Darryl has lived in the northern suburbs of Melbourne for over 22 years and has been actively involved in the community through local school groups and sports clubs. Darryl is a lawyer who has 30 years' experience, with a legal career in the public sector and private practice, in criminal defence advocacy and criminal prosecution work. He held a four-year appointment as Deputy Chair of the Business Licensing Authority and is currently the coordinator of the Salvation Army's Urban Justice Centre.



## Joseph Caputo

### Board Member

Joe lives and is active in Melbourne's northern suburbs and has been involved in advocacy for the rights of minorities throughout his adult life. During 1970–80, he was involved in promoting the rights of migrant workers, and was a member of the Victorian Multicultural Commission from 2001–2011. Joe has served as Councillor and Mayor in the former City of Brunswick and as Councillor and Mayor in the City of Moreland. Joe is a founding member of the Moreland/Hume/Aileu [Timor Leste] Friendship Committee, is an expert in industrial relations and holds a Master of Business from RMIT.



## Sam Garrasi

### Board Member

Sam is the Chief Financial Officer at the Royal Women's Hospital and has over 20 years' experience in a range of senior management and executive roles in the acute public health sector, and has worked in local government and telecommunications. With a strong interest in public health, financial governance and risk management, Sam is currently a committee member on Merri's Finance and Audit Risk Management Committee and Recommissioning Committee.



## Roxanne Adams

### Board Member

Roxanne is the Manager of Health Pathways Melbourne and brings more than a decade of clinical experience as a physiotherapist in hospital and community health settings in Queensland, Victoria and the United Kingdom. Roxanne is passionate about system improvement and strives to engage with projects and organisations that promote equity and the consistent delivery of safe and high quality care for all patients. Roxanne holds a Bachelor degree in Applied Science (Physiotherapy) with Honours from the University of Sydney and Masters degrees in Public Health and Health Management from the University of NSW.



## Benjamin Maxfield

### Board Member

Benjamin Maxfield is the Government Relations adviser for Victoria's \$11 billion Metro Tunnel project. Prior to joining the metro tunnel project Benjamin worked as a senior adviser in both the Gillard Government and then the Shorten Opposition. Benjamin has a keen interest in defence and foreign policy. In recent times Benjamin has worked with Social Democratic Parties and organisations around the world to improve their electoral standing and human rights record.



## Seide Raffoul

### Board Member

Seide has lived in Moreland for most of her life and has been actively involved within the Moreland 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 Moreland 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.



# EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM

The Executive Leadership Team lead the staff of Merri Health to achieve common goals that are in line with 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.



## Dr. Antoinette Mertins

### General Manager, Aged and Primary Care

DrPH, PDipHRM, BBSc, GAICD, AFCHSE

Antoinette has experience working in the public and not-for-profit sector across various organisations. Antoinette has strong skills in driving workforce reform, development of innovative community-based models of care and developing partnerships across sectors. Antoinette holds a Doctor of Public Health degree, a Post Graduate Diploma in Health Research Methodology and a Bachelor of Behavioural Sciences (Psychology). She is a recent graduate and member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



## Nessá Pastoors

### 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, successful 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 Australia College of Health Service Management and is an Accredited Lean Yellow Belt through the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association.



## Amie Reed

### Chief Impact Officer

Amie has over 10 years' experience working in the mental health and community health sectors in leadership and operational roles, delivering high quality cultural transformation initiatives and strategic corporate support. Amie has a background in human resources, and strong skills in change management, industrial relations, cultural transformation and leadership initiatives that deliver high employment engagement and workforce capacity.



## 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 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.



## 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.



## Dr. Carolyn Wallace

### General Manager, Family and Community

BA, GDip, MA, PhD, GAICD, FACHSM

Carolyn has held numerous roles managing local services on the social determinants of health, and seeks to influence state and national social policy. She has a passion for regional development and has held senior roles in local government and local development in Victoria and Ireland. Carolyn holds a Bachelor of Arts in psychology, a Graduate Diploma in Education, Master of Public Policy and Management, and Doctor of Philosophy.



# OUR WORKFORCE

## Our growth

During the 2020-21 financial year our workforce grew 2.2% to 401 staff, up from 392.

Of our workforce, 83.5% identify as female, 15% identify as male, and 1.2% identify as gender diverse. There has been a slight increase in male and gender diverse staff.

## Inclusive workplace

Providing a safe, respectful and inclusive environment for all is a key priority at Merri Health. The diversity of our staff, clients and community is the driving force behind this.

We provide education and training to address systemic discrimination. This includes:

- ▶ inclusive practice training focusing on cultural and linguistic diverse communities
- ▶ LGBTIQ+ inclusive practice training
- ▶ cultural appreciation training focusing on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples
- ▶ responding to vulnerability training.

## Flexible workforce

Flexible work arrangements support gender equality and inclusive workforce participation. There are 343 different flexible working arrangements used by staff across the organisation.

## Education and training

We provide mandatory and optional training to support ongoing learning for our staff.

Examples of mandatory training include:

- ▶ child safety
- ▶ hand hygiene
- ▶ information and cyber-security

Some optional training includes:

- ▶ responding to family violence in the workplace
- ▶ gender equality
- ▶ aged care quality standards one to eight.

## Workforce highlights



- ▶ awarded **Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) Employer of Choice citation** for the third year in a row



- ▶ redesigned our **compliance on boarding practices** to enable new employees to complete their credentialing and orientation process online



- ▶ launched a **new wellness app** offering free online health and wellness activities to support staff wellbeing



- ▶ we undertook a **full co-design review** of the clinical supervision framework



- ▶ implemented a new **annual performance review systems** designed to maximise individual accountability, enable open and transparent communication, clarify performance, and realign direction



- ▶ launched our new **Strategic Directions 2020-25**



- ▶ introduced **sector-leading parental leave**



- ▶ increased staff engagement by **10% to 70%** - significantly higher than the sector average 46% and Australian average 51%.



## Our volunteers

Our volunteers are a highly valued extension of our workforce.

Active volunteers declined from 99 to 47 during the year, as COVID restrictions prevented regular events and face-to-face activities from going ahead.

We are strongly committed to engaging volunteers and will relaunch our volunteer program and seek to re-engage participants in 2022 when there are more opportunities for involvement.



## Workplace Gender Equality All Staff Survey

Each year, we survey our staff to get feedback on how we are tracking. Our 2020 gender equality report highlighted:



agreed that  
**gender and sexual  
harassment are  
not tolerated**  
at Merri



agreed that their  
**manager supports  
gender equality**



an increase in men  
taking parental  
leave compared  
to 2019.

“

**Creating a workplace in which all people are equally represented, valued and rewarded requires leadership, accountability and a focus on gender equality as a strategic priority. I am proud of our commitment to gender pay equity, zero tolerance of gender-based harassment and discrimination, sexual harassment and bullying.”**

— Tassia Michaleas  
Chief Executive Officer

Merri Health Aged Care  
services team members



# STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS 20-25

In 2020, we launched Merri Health's Strategic Directions 2020-25. This new five year vision outlines our longer term strategy.

After continued growth in revenue and geography in recent years, our new directions focus on strengthening Merri Health's core capabilities to enable further sustainable expansion, and ensure the organisation is agile, responsive to the rapidly changing health and social needs of our community and placed to capitalise on future opportunities.

Our strategy for sustainable service growth includes developing a significant private arm; a focus on engaged, expert and well supported staff, effective resourcing and infrastructure, high quality facilities, strong digital health, sector leadership and innovation, quality and safety, and responsiveness to community. Our Board meets for a consolidated and complete review of our strategic directions annually.

## Service growth principles

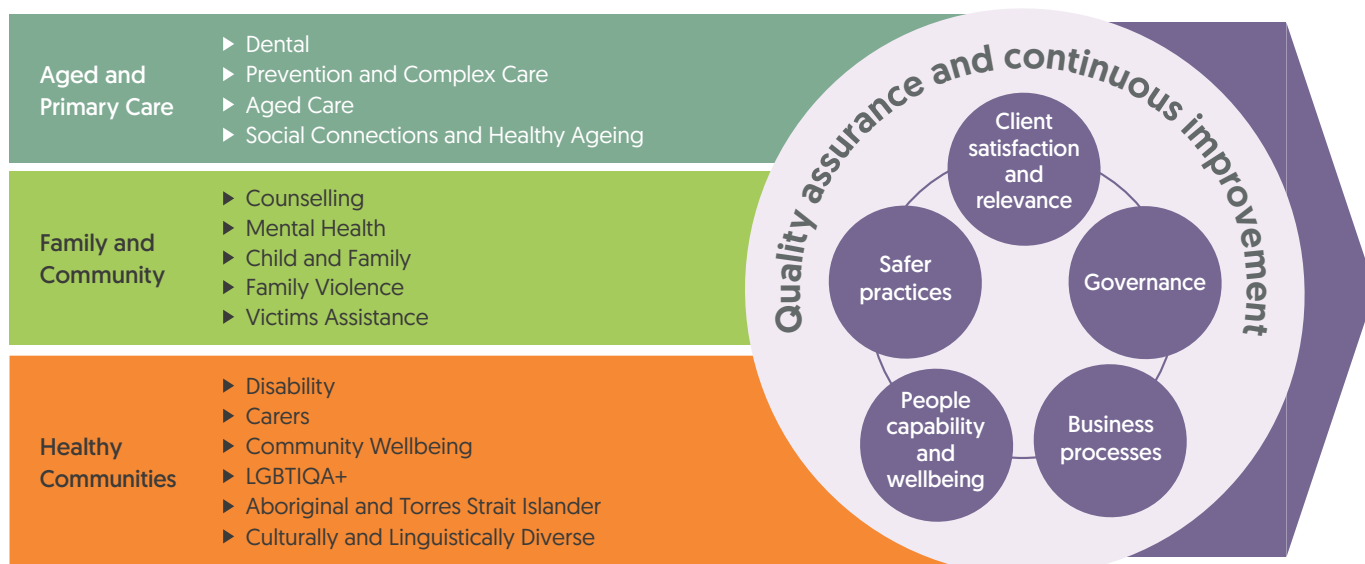
<b>Find the unmet need</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Nurture - service scope</li> <li>▶ Scale - numbers</li> <li>▶ Acuity - vulnerable and disadvantaged</li> </ul>	<b>Replicate</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Outcomes: do what we know works</li> <li>▶ Leverage expertise</li> </ul>
<b>Investment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Create a surplus</li> <li>▶ Reinvest in services and programs</li> <li>▶ Develop and innovate</li> </ul>	<b>Build from anchor sites</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Build on existing reputé</li> <li>▶ Leverage 'gateway status'</li> <li>▶ Ensure governance presence</li> </ul>

## Merri private strategy

Products	Existing	Fee contributions based on ability to pay <b>1</b>	New support models: Home Care Workforce Allied Health <b>2</b>
	New	Brokerage for direct support workforce <b>4</b>	After hours fee for service <b>3</b>
		Existing	New
		Customers	

## Our service priorities

We will build on our foundation and expertise to continue delivering quality and safe services to our diverse communities. Investment is focussed on developing depth in our priority service areas, rather than creating new service streams.



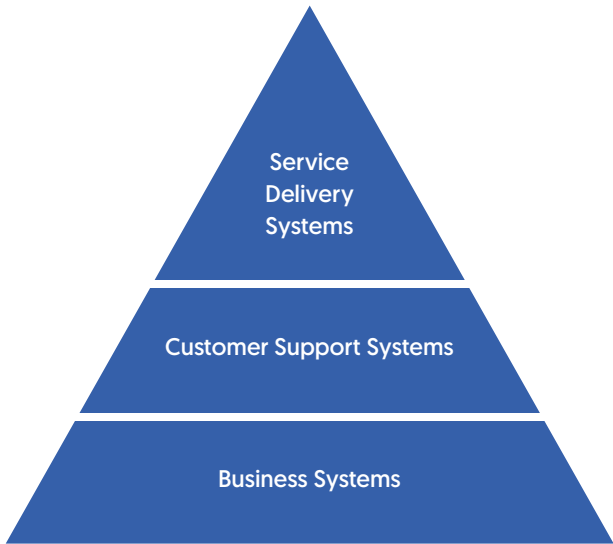
Six pillars guide investment in our priority service development:



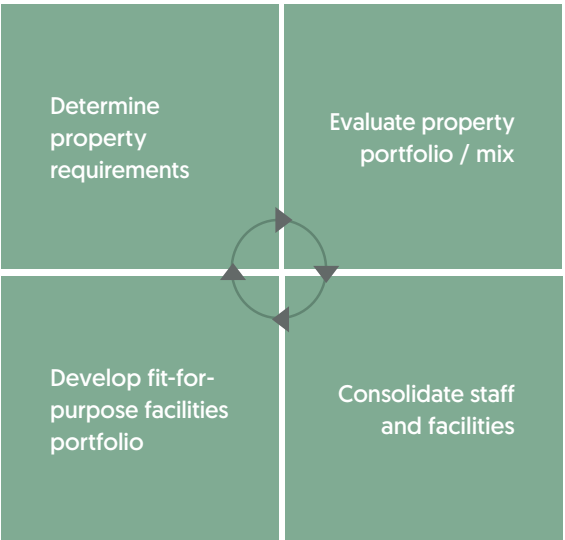
Strategic enablers:

Effective resourcing and investment in our people, facilities, digital health; and actively engaging with our consumers will ensure we are positioned to deliver our promise.

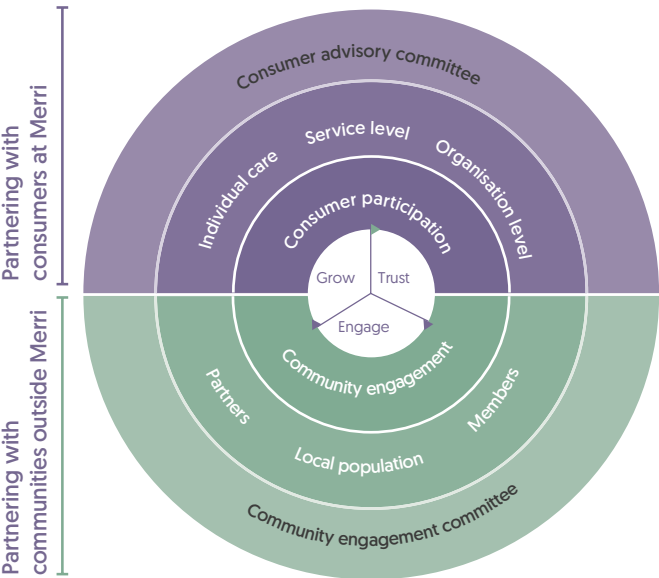
Digital strategy



Facilities strategy



Consumer and community engagement



People strategy



# ORGANISATIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Our Strategic Directions are operationalised and further developed through our annual business, division and team plans. Our operations are further guided by our Diversity Plan, Gender Equity Plan, Reconciliation Action Plan, Marketing and Communications Plan and Community Relationships Framework.

A snapshot of our organisational performance based on our Strategic Directions is outlined from page 22 onwards.

## Diversity Plan

Our strong commitment to supporting vulnerable and hard-to-reach client groups is outlined in our 2020-25 Strategic Directions and Diversity Plan.

Our Diversity Plan details our goals and practices focused on five groups:

- ▶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- ▶ culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- ▶ people with dementia
- ▶ people experiencing financial disadvantage
- ▶ same-sex attracted and gender diverse communities

The plan is reviewed quarterly with updates on our progress provided to our funders.

## Reconciliation Action Plan

Merri Health is working towards closing the health gap through initiatives that promote respect, equity and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) sets out targets and achievements to support this.

See our performance and new 'innovate' RAP on page 42.

## Family Violence and Gender Equity Plan

Merri Health recognises that gender inequality is a key driver of violence against women.

Workplaces are important in addressing the underlying attitudes, behaviours and systems that foster inequity.

We take a whole of organisation approach to the primary prevention of violence against women by building organisational capacity to ensure we have an equal, inclusive and discrimination-free workplace. Our family violence and gender equity committee supports the implementation of our annual work plan.

Learn more about our outcomes on pages 48 and 49.



## Marketing and communications plan

Marketing and communications are critical to informing, engaging and supporting our staff, clients, stakeholders, partners and broader community. Our annual marketing and communications plan sets out our priority campaigns, target audiences and success metrics. In 2020-21 we increased our social media and staff communications to keep our people and community connected.

Find out more on page 24.

## Community Relationships Framework

Consumer and community engagement is a core Merri Health value. Our Community Relationships framework details our commitment to engage, listen and respond to consumers, carers and community members to improve our operations, programs, services and health outcomes.

Our performance is detailed throughout this report and page 52.

## Organisational restructure

While Merri Health has continued to grow in size and complexity, the support functions that underpin our corporate, compliance, safety, technology and human resource functions had not been substantially adapted to meet the changing needs of the organisation. To ensure effective management of our growing support requirements, external reviews of our IT and HR portfolios were undertaken in consultation with key staff.

As a result, our structure has changed. A new operations division and Chief Operating Officer role were established in June. The division encompasses IT, infrastructure (facilities/fleet), marketing and communications, and COVID response and recovery.

A people and quality division was also created, focused on human resources, quality and risk, customer experience, information management, mental health and wellbeing and payroll. The division is led by the Chief Impact Officer who joins Merri's Executive Leadership team to reflect the importance of our employees to our operations.

Reviews of the remaining support functions will take place over the next 12 months to ensure we have the right resources and structure to meet our targets.

## New Merri Enterprise Agreement

Merri Health commenced enterprise bargaining in February 2021 with employees currently under three separate agreements and awards, with the aim of creating a single enterprise agreement and extending the scope to employees not previously covered by an agreement.

Our commitment to proactive bargaining practices acknowledges our highly valued employees. A single agreement is intended to simplify future negotiations, to provide our employees timely wage outcomes and an agreement aligned to our values and strategic intent.

The new Merri Health Agreement is intended to cover: Managers, Administration Officers, Allied Health Assistants, Dental Assistants, Dental Therapists, Dental Hygienists and Oral Health Therapists; Social, Youth, Welfare and Community Development Workers; and Teachers.



## Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity remains a key priority for Merri Health. The Federal Government's Australian Cyber Security Centre (ACSC) 2020 Health Sector snapshot shows that outside of Government and individuals, the health sector reported the highest number of incidents to the ACSC in 2020.

In 2021 the Merri Board commissioned an external cybersecurity audit which has provided valuable direction and identified a range of actions and priorities for the year ahead. These have been incorporated into our ongoing program of work, ensuring that we continue to adapt and strengthen our security measures to protect our data, customers, staff and our organisation.

## New Hybrid Working Agreement

Merri Health is committed to developing work practices and human resource policies that support work-life balance.

As part of our commitment to flexible working, the organisation is introducing a new Hybrid Working Agreement in September 2021 to enable employees to seek ad-hoc or regular arrangements to carry out part of their duties remotely whilst maintaining maximum on site presence.

Merri Health's new Hybrid Working Model (HWM) replaces the temporary arrangements implemented at the outset of COVID in March 2020.

## Occupational Health and Safety

Our Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Committee adapted its terms of reference to meet every 6 weeks (unless an extraordinary meeting was called).

Meeting more regularly enabled an agile, responsive and proactive partnership to manage OHS compliance and lead innovative health, safety and wellbeing initiatives.

### Challenges

- ▶ a shortage of experienced staff to fill vacant positions across the health and social services sector, and support functions has been an ongoing challenge
- ▶ ability to recruit and onboard remotely while giving a sense of team, culture and connection

### What's next?

- ▶ reviews of the remaining support functions including Finance, Quality Customer Experience, Marketing and Communications over the next 12 months.



# ADAPTING TO COVID-19 NORMAL

The pandemic impacted every area of the organisation. As an essential health service we have continued to adapt our operations over the last year to ensure we safely deliver health services to our diverse community, while supporting our staff through significant changes.

Our COVID-19 taskforce, quickly established in March 2020, has overseen the implementation of our pandemic plan to ensure business continuity and manage risk.

## Risk management

The COVID-19 taskforce met weekly, using our detailed risk analysis framework and mitigation strategies to guide our operations, and staged return to on-site work in line with Government regulations. This included team bubble-planning, new risk assessments for individuals and groups, daily screening for clients and staff at Merri sites, a COVID-safe plan, PPE and outbreak management protocols.

These actions ensured Merri operated without outbreaks or major incidences. Managing staff wellbeing has been a significant focus.

## Hybrid workforce

Merri Health has become a hybrid workforce. We are committed to supporting flexibility in the workplace to ensure maximum onsite presence and connection, whilst recognising that there are circumstances where allowing a hybrid model of work may assist employees to balance work and other responsibilities.

Originally we targeted a gradual return back at Merri sites by June 2021. However, this was not possible due to extended lockdowns. We look forward to welcoming all staff back on site, and will introduce a new permanent Hybrid Working Agreement in September to support this.

## Service delivery

A small number of programs were paused due to restrictions and we have had to adjust targets for some programs. However Merri Health continued to deliver most of our services via telehealth and essential face-to-face appointments. Telehealth has presented challenges for some clients, particularly older people unfamiliar with technology. However it has also enabled us to reach new clients and better service those with poor mobility.

Despite difficult COVID conditions, we have grown services, notably carer supports, Home Care Packages, early childhood intervention services; and delivered new programs including testing clinics and vaccination support thanks to Victorian Government funding.

*See how our services have adapted, our performance, challenges and achievements from page 28.*



# BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES UNDERPINNING OUR PERFORMANCE

Our business support services (human resources, marketing and communications, quality and customer support, finance, IT and infrastructure) have been pivotal to business continuity.

They have worked tirelessly 'behind the scenes' to provide the necessary tools, safe spaces and supports to keep our staff, consumers, community and operations connected.

## Safe facilities

Our facilities team manage Merri Health's 8000m<sup>2</sup> of space across 11 locations.

The team remained on site throughout COVID-19, working closely with program managers, staff and external contractors to ensure our clinics, offices and vehicle fleet were maintained safely, supporting services and assisting with Merri's response and recovery plans.

### What did we achieve?

- ▶ developed Merri Health's initial COVID response – density signage, social distancing, COVID-safe spaces, staff seating, PPE kits and sanitisation guides
- ▶ no COVID-outbreaks or major incidences at Merri sites
- ▶ established and led COVID-19 testing clinics in Fawkner, Brunswick and Glenroy; and the Coburg vaccination hub in partnership with DPV Health *[read more page 28]*
- ▶ relocated NDIS services from Bell Street, Preston to Chifley Drive
- ▶ undertook a strategic review of Merri Health's facilities.

### What's next?

- ▶ supporting staff and services as they transition back to the workplace working with 'COVID next' and Merri's hybrid working model.



## IT and meeting the mobility challenge

IT systems, data privacy and security across a decentralised workforce, rapidly sourcing hardware to equip a large remote workforce and supporting technologies not regularly used prior to COVID were a significant focus and challenge for the IT team.

Telehealth became critical to maintaining service delivery, prompting us to expand use of existing platforms and seek out better solutions.

We paused our target to progress a new customer information management system to manage these requirements. Technology constraints that blocked our efforts are being cleared and we're moving ahead with this work.

### What did we achieve?

- ▶ introduced and supported telehealth across service divisions
- ▶ planned, supplied and supported IT for the rapid staff transition to remote working
- ▶ completed a full external review of our IT function.

### What's next?

- ▶ a significant program of computer upgrades that will see most staff working on laptops by the end of 2021, providing more mobility and flexibility
- ▶ consistent and current computer software to improve security, useability and productivity
- ▶ recruiting additional IT specialists to better support our staff and systems.

## Marketing and communications

Marketing and communications became more critical to keep our diverse community and staff connected to each other, important service news, site changes and health initiatives.

The team grew from two in April 2020, to five, as we increased our activity and Merri Health's profile with state-wide Carer Gateway marketing, and COVID testing and vaccination campaigns.

We adapted our activities, increasing digital and social media to reach home-based audiences, utilising platforms including Viber and WhatsApp to engage culturally diverse community leaders outside mainstream channels.

Changing priorities delayed planned projects including our podcast, uniform launch and PR plan.

### Achievements

- ▶ implemented all staff daily health screening attestation App
- ▶ launched "about Merri" animated video in four languages to help diverse communities connect with our services
- ▶ grew our external Merri News newsletter engagement by 27%
- ▶ increased Facebook posts 13% and engagement by 117% compared to last year
- ▶ increased Twitter posts 42% and followers 1.5%

### What's next?

- ▶ recruiting two additional staff and launching a \$1 million+ Carer Gateway campaign
- ▶ increasing our PR activity to raise awareness of key health issues and Merri support
- ▶ review of our marketing and communications function in 2022.

## Quality and customer service

The quality and customer service team include our reception staff, and quality and customer experience people. Together they ensure Merri Health spaces are safe, welcoming and encourage consumer feedback.

Our reception teams continued to be a constant, greeting clients and their carers throughout the pandemic.

And, for the first time, the team facilitated our annual week long accreditation assessments virtually.

### Achievements

- ▶ Merri achieved outstanding recognition by the QIP assessment team in 2020 and 21
- ▶ a 25% increase in compliments received compared to the previous year.

### What's next?

- ▶ further enhancing our clinical governance, risk mitigation and compliance with our vast accreditation standards.

## Human resources

As a service organisation in rapid transition, human resources has been central to our high-quality operations. Supporting the health and wellbeing of employees, coordinating rising recruitment, rapid policy changes and a hybrid workforce have been significant.

A 41% increase in individual staff wellness plans, the shortage of experienced staff to fill vacant positions and difficulty on boarding staff remotely while giving a sense of team, culture and connection are ongoing challenges.

Merri Health Human resources team members

### What did we achieve?

- ▶ introduced two new staff wellness programs *(see page 26)*
- ▶ completed external review of the HR service model to support staffing decisions which align to our new strategic and operational goals
- ▶ developed and implemented management toolkits on how to manage and lead remotely, and in hybrid circumstances
- ▶ bargained with three unions for a new Merri Health Agreement
- ▶ ensured all staff who worked remotely had a safe home office

- ▶ implemented new on-boarding processes enabling new staff to conduct COVID-safe compliance checks.

### What's next?

- ▶ implementing a new Employee Assistance Program in September 2021.
- ▶ launching an online orientation for new starters in response to remote working
- ▶ recruiting two additional HR specialists and addressing the 11 review recommendations.







# SUPPORTING OUR STAFF AND WORKPLACE WELLBEING

As a service organisation, our employees are our most important asset. To support staff, keep them connected and informed, we deployed a number of tools and increased communications as remote working continued.

These included: weekly CEO COVID-19 email updates, a COVID-19 resources hub for staff, Chat with the Chief online check-ins, staff 'working from home' blogs, operational and management meetings.

We:



- increased **intranet staff news stories** by 150% to keep staff engaged



- increased **internal quarterly newsletter engagement** by 50%



- promoted staff **'working from home' blog**.



## Chat with the Chief

We introduced a quarterly virtual coffee chat series with Merri Health CEO Tassia Michaleas. Staff can ask any questions at the open session. The series launched with "My first year as CEO...hijacked by the pandemic!"

Others focussed on workplace gender equality and our annual culture survey results.

## Supporting staff wellbeing

Wellness@Merri is a focus across the organisation with ongoing support and assistance for employees through our proactive mental health and wellness framework. As lock-downs and isolation stretched, we increased our staff support.

We delivered two separate wellness programs to support mental health, resilience, health and wellbeing. These included sessions on healthy cooking, exercise, laughter, and a number of other related topics through webinars, play back and resources.

The success of these identified a need for continued support.

## Active & Thriving

We partnered with Active & Thriving to provide a 24/7 wellness App. Employees can interact via the App, set personal challenges to improve their diet, sleep, physical activity and mental fitness and access a library of health and wellbeing resources.

## Take 5 for YOU

To reduce burn-out, we launched 'Take 5 for YOU' and 'Take 5 and Stay Warm' campaigns encouraging employees to take five consecutive days of leave to recharge.

10% of staff took this up, receiving a hamper.



## Employee Assistance Program

Confidential counselling support is available to all staff through our Employer Assistance Program (EAP).

People accessing assistance jumped 71% in FY 2020/21 and identified that the existing EAP no longer met staff needs.

Global research indicates organisations need to prepare for a dramatic increase in workplace mental health issues and we are responding to this.

### What's next?

- ▶ reviewing wellbeing data and providing additional staff supports as required

- ▶ launching a new EAP with 50% more free counselling sessions and other benefits
- ▶ scheduling Chat with the Chief at different times to increase clinical staff attendance.

## Employee engagement survey

Our employee engagement survey conducted biannually measures the health of our organisation, employee satisfaction and culture impacts.

The results help us identify trends and opportunities to boost and improve workplace culture.

Despite the year's unprecedented challenges, a high 87% of staff responded and employee satisfaction remains high.

### Highlights



- ▶ **79%** agreed that Merri is a "truly great place to work", an 11% increase from 2019



- ▶ **70%** are engaged with the organisation and are **optimistic about Merri's future**, up 10%



- ▶ **88%** have a strong sense of being in control, **being valued and being supported at work**

### Where we can improve



- ▶ **33%** staff feel their **manager helps with their personal and professional development**



- ▶ **23%** feel the Merri Health addresses **training and skills issues**



- ▶ **42%** feel the organisation promotes **multidisciplinary collaboration**.





# COVID-19 SAFETY, TESTING AND VACCINATION SUPPORT

Merri Health has been at the forefront of the COVID-19 response in Moreland, using our local knowledge, relationships and connections to deliver COVID-19 safety education, engagement and support to vulnerable communities.

The Victorian Government funded Merri Health for several key initiatives across our local catchment, and we were delighted to receive public recognition from the Victorian Health Minister, The Hon. Martin Foley, for our work and outcomes in June.

## Testing

We partnered with Moreland City Council to establish four testing sites in Fawkner, Brunswick and Glenroy in June 2020, following a spike in positive COVID-19 clusters.

Rapid set-up was required to meet testing demand. As lead agency, Merri provided site governance and coordination; partnering with the Royal Melbourne Hospital, Australian Defence Force, On-Site Doctors, Your Nursing Agency and Australian Clinical Laboratories.

### What did we achieve?

Although a new type of service delivery, we:

- ▶ **established Fawkner clinic in two days and Brunswick and Glenroy clinics within a week**
- ▶ **a total, 22,000 tests were conducted** at testing sites run by Merri Health
- ▶ **distributed 700+ mask packs** to people to promote COVID safe practices
- ▶ **participated in working groups with partners** to proactively plan for potential outbreaks, support cross-collaboration for service planning and promotion
- ▶ **partnered with community members** to create and promote a video series in nine sharing their testing experience in nine languages
- ▶ **promoted over 160 posts across social media**, and shared testing support messages via WhatsApp and Viber with approximately 600 community members
- ▶ **auditors praised Merri Health and its partners for 'gold standard' infection control practices** and testing at every area of the clinics.



“

We are so appreciative of all the support Merri Health has given us which included door-knocking and other opportunities for face-to-face conversations. If the in-reach clinics were not set up on-site not sure we would have had our vaccinations and we are so glad we have. Thank you so much for helping keep us safe.”

– Barkly Street Resident



## High-Risk Accommodation Response (HRAR)

Following outbreaks that led to the lockdown of several housing towers in Melbourne's North last July, Merri Health joined the Victorian Government's high-risk accommodation response (HRAR) to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in public housing and other high-risk accommodation with shared facilities.

### What did we achieve?

- ▶ **supported residents, public housing landlords and managers at 161 properties**, including: rooming houses, low rise public housing, high rise public housing, community housing and supported residential services (SRS)
- ▶ **adapted approaches to community needs**, including: Q&A sessions, outreach doorknocking and vaccine information packs to reduce hesitancy
- ▶ **implemented a HRAR communications plan to reach vulnerable, diverse residents** including: 27 flyers/posters, targeted texts, vaccinated badges and social media. Over 7,700 reached on Facebook, and 13,000 impressions on LinkedIn
- ▶ **facilitated mobile vaccination clinics at high rise Barkly Tower in Brunswick** and supported accommodation sites in partnership with DPV Health
- ▶ **72% of Barkly Towers residents vaccinated** in partnership with DPV and Merri Outreach Services
- ▶ **HRAR funding extended twice to December 2021** following strong results.



## Moreland's only pop-up vaccine hub

Merri Health partnered with DPV Health to run Moreland's only pop-up vaccination hub in Coburg from May-September, making vaccinations more accessible to community.

### What did we achieve?

- ▶ over 4700 doses administered (May- September 2021)
- ▶ over 52 social media posts, 15+ WhatsApp messages, 25 e-newsletters and 2 radio announcements promoting vaccine messaging and availability

- ▶ vaccine communications campaign to reach vulnerable and hard-to-reach communities including: older residents, non-English speaking residents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, carers and people with a disability

- ▶ Vaccine ambassador funding extended to December 2021.

### What's next?

- ▶ continue to support priority groups with COVID-19 vaccination, testing, health and wellbeing needs, information and referrals.



Don Tilbury CEO DPV Health, Tassia Michaleas CEO Merri Health and Annalivia Carli Hannan Mayor of Moreland, open the Coburg vaccination hub.



# HEALTHY AGEING

Services and supports that promotes choice, connection and independence for older adults.

## Responding to the Royal Commission into Aged Care

Merri Health welcomed the findings and 148 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety in 2021. We look forward to the transformational change necessary to ensure we

have an aged care system that is compassionate, caring and responsive to the needs of older adults.

We are responding to the recommendations and look forward to partnering with the Australian Government, our clients, and others to achieve the key priorities over five years in: home care, residential aged care services and sustainability, aged care quality and safety, workforce and governance.

## How we are responding?

- ▶ we are developing a reform preparedness plan to guide our directions over the next 12 months
- ▶ we participated in a study to develop the assessment, classification and funding system for the new 'support at home' program
- ▶ we have implemented payment changes to Home Care Packages (HCP) in line with Commonwealth Government directions
- ▶ attending regular aged care reform webinars, seminars and conferences to stay informed of sector changes
- ▶ participating in department of Health aged care reform initiatives.

## What's next?

- ▶ enhanced worker screening checks to ensure high standard care
- ▶ a single assessment workforce from October 2022
- ▶ a new ratings system for aged care service providers to ensure we are providing outcomes based quality services in a safe and timely manner
- ▶ potential changes to our reporting requirements against the aged care quality indicators
- ▶ transitioning to the new Support at Home Program to strengthen home based care.



## Living Well, Ageing Well

Our healthy ageing services support physical, mental and social health for older people to help them live well independently for longer.

COVID-19 increased social isolation and loneliness for many older people, who also faced greater physical health risks from the virus. In response, we adapted programs to telehealth and introduced other supports to keep people connected.

Living Well, Ageing Well provides one-on-one support, activities, social groups and volunteering opportunities to keep people aged 50 and over, healthy and connected with community.

Our service pivoted from face-to-face group support to telehealth to keep community members socially connected and supported during lockdowns.

## What did we achieve?

- ▶ delivered 11 "Living Wise" health and wellbeing seminars to the community; engaging 30 people on average at each one

- ▶ increased the team from two staff to six by May 2021
- ▶ developed a fee for service suite of 'Living Wise' seminars available for community groups and other organisations on demand.

## What's next?

- ▶ expanding the program reach in Hume
- ▶ developing partnerships with Probus, Sussex Neighbourhood House, Coburg Library and others to provide future seminars.

## More mental health care for older adults

Stepped Care for Older Adults provides free mental health support to adults aged 65+ with mild to moderate mental illness, or those at risk of developing a mental illness due to social isolation, loneliness, or life stressors.

Following a successful pilot in 2019/20, we were delighted to expand the program to support people across northern and western Melbourne, with funding from the North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network (PHN).

Services commenced in December 2020 via telehealth. Staff changes saw the introduction of a temporary waitlist until June this year.

The switch to telehealth identified that older adults were less likely to be connected to technology and other service supports were needed, including partnering with tech skills services and options to loan devices to support telehealth.

### What did we achieve?

- ▶ expanded mental health therapies and wellbeing support across Northern and Western LGA's including: Hume, Moreland, Darebin, Yarra, Macedon Ranges shire [Gisborne area], Melton, Brimbank, Melbourne, Maribyrnong, Hobsons Bay, Wyndham, Moonee Valley, and Moorabool Shire [Bacchus Marsh area]
- ▶ program funded for an additional 18 months following strong pilot outcomes
- ▶ face-to-face in-home assessments continued where necessary using COVID-safe protocols

### What's next?

- ▶ growing the team to enhance service offerings, including more psychiatric nursing staff and a psychologist
- ▶ commencing clinical and psychosocial group therapy programs
- ▶ partnering with community-based programs and services to further expand support to people in the west.



## Home care to stay independent

Home Care Packages (HCP) provides coordinated services for older people in the community. We work in partnership with our clients to support them with changing and complex care needs to continue living independently at home.

The number of clients we support through our home care packages has grown by 34%, from 228 to 306 in the past financial year, and continues to be a growth focus for Merri in the future.

### What did we achieve?

- ▶ supported 306 people to live independently at home in their community through HCP (Home Care Packages)
- ▶ increased our team by 1.2 eft.

### What's next?

- ▶ additional staff training on developing effective goal directed care plan and resilience in crisis to better support the HCP team and our home care clients
- ▶ expanding our HCP to more LGAs across northern and western metro regions to support more older people.

## Social support keeping elders connected

Our Social Support Program helps older people, people with dementia and people with disabilities to stay healthy, active and connected with their community for as long as possible through enjoyable and meaningful activities.

Usually, these activities are run in groups to increase social connection and include: physical activity, memory skills, healthy nutrition, emotional wellbeing, multicultural, women's and men's groups, and special memory programs.

To combat isolation and loneliness for vulnerable older community members, we adapted our services to include individual support, online groups and wellbeing activity packs.

Our Social Support Program team was a finalist in this year's Leading Age Services Australia (LASA) Excellence in Age Services Awards. The awards celebrate the passion, contribution and achievements of organisations, teams and individuals in the service of older Australians.

### What did we achieve?

To keep people engaged and connected throughout COVID, we:



- ▶ created and delivered **wellbeing packs** as a service offering for older people

- ▶ distributed **12,000 wellbeing packs in 15 months**

- ▶ transitioned **70%** of our service delivery from group programs to **individual support**.



- ▶ offered over **20 weekly telehealth groups**

- ▶ over **250 clients received an average 2 phone calls weekly** and 100 clients participated in weekly telehealth groups

- ▶ resumed our centre-based programs in February.

## Preventing elder abuse

Merri Health leads the Elder Abuse Prevention Networks (EAPNs) in northern and western metropolitan regions. Ten member organisations are actively engaged and share expertise to prevent and respond to elder abuse through education, awareness campaigns and resources.

The inability to hold and attend face-to-face events due to COVID reduced community and partner engagement this year. Our "Let's talk about ageing" art exhibition could not travel as planned.

### What did we achieve?



- ▶ we delivered **webinars on neglect in partnership with Western Health**
- ▶ introduced a **regular network newsletter**



- ▶ **social media 'myth-busters' campaign** for Elder Abuse Awareness Week reached 2,500 people



- ▶ set up a **prevention of elder abuse webpage** with resources for the community



- ▶ ran **"Let's talk about ageing" art exhibitions**, inviting older community members to create artwork showing "what ageing means to me" in partnership with Moreland City Council
- ▶ released a **four-part webinar series "Celebrating the wisdom and resilience of older women"**, in partnership with Melbourne Health, EveryAGE Counts, Meaningful Ageing Australia and Merri Health Carer Services.

### What's next?

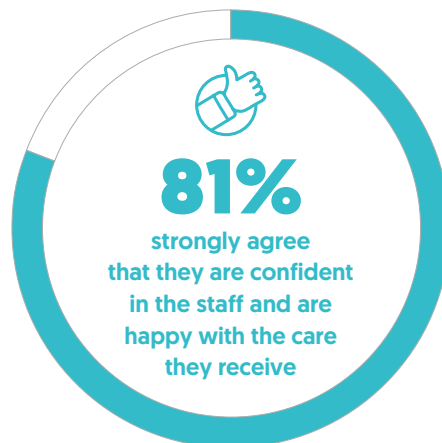
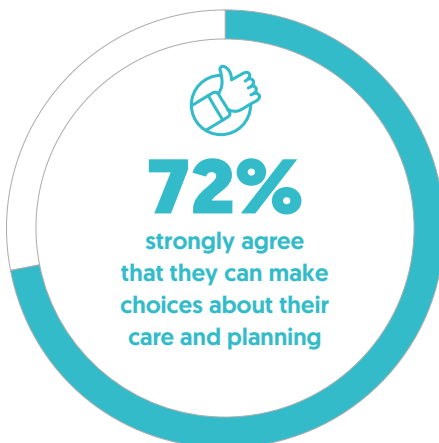
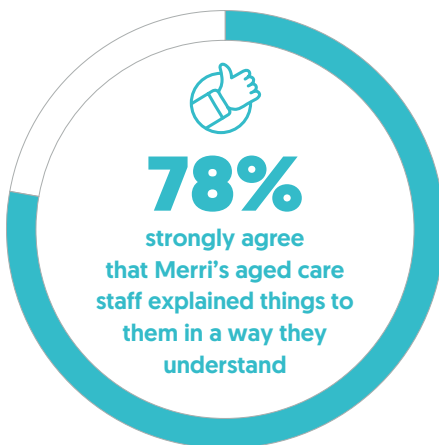
- ▶ continue to lead the network and create and implement initiatives to combat elder abuse.



## Aged care client satisfaction survey

To track our performance, we surveyed our aged care clients about their experiences with our staff and accessing our services. An impressive 440 clients responded and the feedback is being used to continuously improve our service delivery and client care.

### Highlights



# SUPPORT FOR CHRONIC CONDITIONS

Throughout COVID, we continued to provide treatment and support to help people live well with chronic conditions including diabetes, heart and respiratory conditions.

## Support to manage chronic pain

In November 2020, we launched a new Chronic Pain Service funded by the North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network (NWMPHN) and developed in collaboration with The Royal Melbourne Hospital and The Northern Hospital.

The service provides a timely, evidence based pain management service in a community health setting.

The free service includes individual and group therapy with allied health and medical staff and seeks to improve client's understanding and ability to manage chronic pain.

### What did we achieve?

- ▶ supported 82 clients in the first eight months, meeting our client target for year one
- ▶ delivered individual and group appointments via face to face, telephone and telehealth
- ▶ developed and delivered the ReConnect Pain Management Program, a 4-7 week multidisciplinary group program involving education, mindfulness and exercise
- ▶ formed a project reference group with representatives from The Royal Melbourne Hospital, The Northern Hospital, the NWMPHN and a consumer to guide implementation of the service
- ▶ qualitative feedback revealed clients feeling more optimistic, confident, hopeful and in charge of their lives/pain.

### What's next:

- ▶ explore options to engage vulnerable groups and areas further from our sites
- ▶ network with GP practices to increase referrals and support primary care management of chronic pain clients
- ▶ continue engaging with consumers to improve the service
- ▶ continue to upskill staff in chronic pain management.



## 'Be Well Live Well' coaching

In August 2020, we piloted a new health coaching program in response to COVID-19 restricting group programs. Be Well Live Well provides education and exercise for people who have, or are at risk of, chronic cardiac or respiratory disease or diabetes.

The pilot project aimed to assist clients to set and achieve personal health goals and lifestyle changes with supported health coaching.

### What did we achieve?

- ▶ six participants received an initial assessment; goals were identified and follow up occurred at one, two, four and six months.
- ▶ all participants remained engaged and completed the 5 coaching sessions
- ▶ all participants increased their physical activity. Other results included weight loss and decreased alcohol intake.

### What's next?

- ▶ investigate embedding telehealth versions into our group programs
- ▶ reviewing and expanding Be Well Live Well into health coaching.



# MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Poor mental health, isolation and loneliness escalated during the COVID pandemic, increasing demand for Merri Health's counselling and other mental health services.

The initial impacts of the pandemic increased levels of psychological distress particularly for adults aged 18–45. By April 2021, the average level of psychological distress had returned to pre-pandemic levels, however continued to be higher for young people.\*

Merri has an extensive range of community based primary and secondary mental health services; and is committed to promoting the mental health of individuals and communities. Our Strategic Directions 2020-2025 highlight this commitment.

## Counselling support

Merri Health's generalist counselling team provides high quality counselling support to the community. The team provides generalist support, family violence specific counselling, and provision of the Targeted Psychological Support (TPS) program.

Over the past year, demand for counselling services grew from new

and existing clients. The introduction of telehealth in response to COVID increased access for clients.

### What did we achieve?



- Provided **4793** hours of counselling services



- **pivoted to telehealth**, increasing access for clients, as some of the typical barriers to access were removed.

### What's next?

- aligning with health guidelines, services will return with more face-to-face individual support, group work, and walk-in/single session services, while continuing to keep telehealth as a viable option.



\* [www.aihw.gov.au/reports/burden-of-disease/the-first-year-of-covid-19-in-australia/summary](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/burden-of-disease/the-first-year-of-covid-19-in-australia/summary)



## From homelessness to a home

In early 2021, the Victorian Government launched a new initiative to respond to the impacts of homelessness and rough sleeping in Victoria.

Homelessness to a Home (H2H) aims to provide housing and high levels of specialised support to people experiencing homelessness who were housed in hotels during COVID-19.

### What did we achieve?

- ▶ staffed the mental health clinician role which was focused on providing intensive, specialised and holistic care to vulnerable consumers
- ▶ partnering with Neami National, Housing Choices Australia, Uniting VicTas & Bolton Clarke to deliver H2H in Melbourne's North East.

### What's next?

- ▶ once housed, the program works to support consumers to sustain housing, improve mental and physical health and develop connections with the community.

## Healthy Mind Hub – 'connect' wellbeing manual

The Healthy Mind Hub provides group-based support for people with mental health issues/ psychosocial disability, to help them build social connections, be involved in community and live as independently as possible.

When face-to-face groups were paused in late March 2020 due to COVID, the Healthy Mind Hub team quickly pivoted their service, and developed a wellbeing manual for clients, to ensure they had access to important information and support to help maintain their wellbeing.



- ▶ **supported 206 consumers via phone or video-conferencing** using the manual as a guide and information source.

### What's next?

- ▶ working towards returning to face-to-face group programs, as well as allowing for virtual options to meet client needs.



- ▶ **developed a wellbeing manual** for all consumers with information on: nutrition, exercise, sleep, social connections, creativity, mindfulness and self-care, to support consumers through lockdowns



## Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System delivered its final report on 3 February 2021. The report presented 65 recommendations and The Victorian Government has committed to implement them all.

Merri Health welcomes the recommendations to build a better, safer, more responsive, tiered mental health care system.

### The key report themes include:

- ▶ the mental health system requires a complete rebuild
- ▶ service delivery and support need to be delivered locally in community-based settings
- ▶ importance of building an interconnected system that considers a social model of health
- ▶ the importance of lived experience becoming a focal part of service system leadership, planning and service delivery
- ▶ workforce development.

Our Strategic Directions, as well as past and current delivery of high quality mental health responses, mean Merri Health is well suited as a service provider within the proposed new Victorian system.

It provides an opportunity for Merri Health to both expand, and consolidate, our mental health services.

### What's next?

#### We will continue to:

- ▶ deliver high quality mental health supports across the range of mental health severity including for people with ongoing psychosocial disability
- ▶ expand engagement in social connection and inclusion, across the Merri services
- ▶ foster relationships and partnerships with other key mental health and wellbeing services and stakeholders
- ▶ strengthen our current relationship with the North West Area Mental Health Service.



## Merri Health is committed to supporting Victoria's 736,000+ unpaid carers; people who care for someone who needs extra help due to disability, age, mental illness, or long-term physical illness.

Many carers were disproportionately affected by mental ill-health during lockdowns, with the 2020 National Carer Survey showing that half of carers in Australia were experiencing high or very high psychological distress last year, and a third reporting high levels of social isolation\*. We increased our carer support through Federal and State Government programs.

### Carer Gateway

Carer Gateway, funded by the Australian Government and launched in April 2020, is the most significant reform to Australian carer services in a decade. Merri Health leads a consortium of seven health organisations to deliver these services and support carers across Victoria.

Rolling-out our largest and most complex operation during COVID-19, was a major challenge. We were proud to be acknowledged by the Australian Government Minister for Families and Social Services, the Hon Anne Ruston, for our work leading Carer Gateway in Victoria and our achievements to date.

#### What did we achieve?

- ▶ supported over 11,885 carers in Victoria
- ▶ established teams and rolled-out Carer Gateway, our largest and most complex operation remotely during COVID-19
- ▶ delivered mental health services in partnership with Tandem
- ▶ provided innovative, tailored packages including laptops and software to help carers develop their skills, alongside counselling, coaching, peer-support and respite
- ▶ implemented our Carer Gateway marketing plan, driving a 248% increase in phone calls to the 1800 number and a 7% increase in monthly visits to the Carer Gateway website. By June 2021, more than 300,000 Victorians had visited the site
- ▶ hosted six webinars, attended by carers, health and social services organisations, to encourage referrals and carer registrations

- ▶ developed the Carer Gateway Advisory Group and Young Carer Gateway Advisory Group to guide our programs (see page 53)
- ▶ coordinated LGBTQIA+ training for consortia members.

#### Where can we improve?

- ▶ setting-up and delivering new services while navigating COVID affected our ability to meet our ambitious first-year target to register 32,000 carers
- ▶ face-to-face services, promotion, outreach and engagement activities were significantly reduced or cancelled. Additionally, the demand for respite decreased as carers were reluctant to access residential respite
- ▶ in our second year, there are several initiatives to improve our performance and reach. We are working hard to strengthen our intake and referral processes, marketing and reporting systems with our consortia partners.

#### What's next?

- Our aim is to engage 30,000 more carers; particularly hardly reached carers, including young people, non-English speaking backgrounds and the LGBTQIA+ communities.
- ▶ recruiting 10 additional staff for our Intake team to reduce wait times for carers
  - ▶ system enhancements to our customer relationship management system
  - ▶ introducing an online e-referral system to make it easier to refer new carers
  - ▶ moving coaching from pilot stage to offer one to one tailored advice for carers
  - ▶ developing an ongoing partnership with Tandem to deliver support to mental health carers
  - ▶ scaling-up our carer engagement and marketing teams; and creating a Marketing Community of Practice with consortia partners to share learnings
  - ▶ launching a \$1 million+ marketing campaign to raise awareness and increase carers accessing support.



Merri Health staff members Maryanne Tadic and Vicki Down meet with Department of Social Services' Mitchell Cole.

\* [www.carersvictoria.org.au/media/2610/2020-national-carer-survey-report.pdf](http://www.carersvictoria.org.au/media/2610/2020-national-carer-survey-report.pdf)

## Connecting young carers

It is estimated that one in 10 people aged under 25 is a carer, though many don't realise they are in a caring role.

Extra caring responsibilities at a young age can impact education outcomes, employment, mental health and other areas of life.

Young carers can often feel isolated and peer support can be powerful. Our dedicated young carer engagement team have been supporting young carers to improve outcomes.

### What did we achieve?

- ▶ 450 new young carers registered with Carer Gateway in Victoria
- ▶ launched an online Young Carer Peer Support program in partnership with Little Dreamers and Uniting Vic Tas; 10 young carers participated
- ▶ established a state-wide Young Carer Champions Community of Practice to share insights and best practice
- ▶ developing a Young Carer Advisory Group to help guide projects and decision-making for Carer Gateway across Victoria.

### What's next?

- ▶ rolling out Young Carer Peer Support program state-wide
- ▶ launching the Young Carer Advisory Group with 16 young carers
- ▶ planning young carer Carers Week 2021 event in partnership with Little Dreamers
- ▶ developing young carer-led social media content campaign with seven carers.



## Caring for carers in Melbourne's North

Merri Health has significantly increased the number of carers we support directly in northern metropolitan Melbourne, through the Victorian Government Support for Carers Program and other programs funded by the Australian Government.

### Changing carer needs

The eligibility criteria for carers has expanded, and we are supporting more people caring for someone with mental health issues or chronic illness, and carers recently bereaved.

There has also been an increased in carers with children on the autism spectrum with behavioural support needs. Carer services typically complement Aged Care or NDIS support. Gaps in these systems have led to more demand for carer supports.

### What did we achieve?

- ▶ supported nearly 5000 carers, through supports and services, such as goal-planning, respite, coaching, counselling, peer-support, dementia advice, events, workshops and engagement activities
- ▶ grew the team to 37 staff
- ▶ delivered events, including young carer camps, horse-riding, art sessions, lunch groups, walk and talk groups
- ▶ supported carers with financial and practical difficulties by delivering more flexible services including: food vouchers, cooked meals, petrol and taxis, protective equipment, financial aid referrals
- ▶ engaged with vulnerable and diverse groups through collaborative projects with the Northern Elder Abuse Prevention Network, Aboriginal groups, and other Merri programs such as LEAP, the Chinese Parents Support Group, carers of young children with Autism, and more.

### What's Next?

- ▶ expanding our services into the Western Metropolitan region
- ▶ delivering innovative and collaborative projects in conjunction with the Aboriginal Community Elder Services, LGBTIQ+ groups, local carer support groups and many more
- ▶ improving the quality of carer services through regular evaluation with the help of our newly appointed 'evaluation champion'.



**It has been life-changing, being able to meet others who understand you. I have learnt so much and had fun at every program."**

**– Carer group participant**



# CONNECTING CHILDREN AND FAMILY

Support and services to promote happy, healthy children and strong families.

## Parent-baby bonding for healthy development

Bonding and attachment are vital to a baby's development. They set the foundation for a child's wellbeing.\* Merri Health's Family Foundations is a 10 session program that supports new parents to build stronger relationships with their baby and each other.

Telehealth expanded the program's reach in 2020/21, enabling us to support families outside Merri Health's traditional geographic footprint.

### What did we achieve?

- ▶ averaged three new family referrals per week
- ▶ funding extended for three more years
- ▶ expanded to support parents interstate and internationally via telehealth
- ▶ recruited five additional staff and increased services capacity
- ▶ finalist in the 2021 Victorian Early Years Awards "Supporting parents to build their capacity and confidence" category

- ▶ clients outcomes remained high, despite virtual delivery for the first time.

### What's next?

- ▶ adapting the program to include a hybrid model combination of telehealth, face-to-face outreach, and group work
- ▶ engaging more culturally and linguistically diverse families and same-sex couples
- ▶ expanded the online program more broadly into regional Victoria.

## Kinder partnerships

In April 2021, we launched the new fee-for-service Kinder Partnerships program in line with our Strategic Directions.

This program provides capacity building to early childhood educators in kindergartens to help them improve children's learning before they start school.

Kinder Partnerships focuses on enhancing children's communication skills, social and emotional wellbeing and access/inclusion. Unfortunately COVID restrictions limited our service delivery.

### What did we achieve?

- ▶ delivered the program to 10 kindergartens and childcare centres in Moreland
- ▶ offered virtual workshops, case consultations and resources on speech and language development and strategies, social skills and social stories, and emotion coaching
- ▶ provided virtual parent sessions on school readiness
- ▶ received positive feedback from educators who felt empowered to implement new strategies in their classrooms.

### What's next?

- ▶ expanding the service to early childhood education services outside Moreland.



\* [www.raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/connecting-communicating/bonding/bonding-newborns](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/connecting-communicating/bonding/bonding-newborns)

## Ready, Set, Prep!

Ready, Set, Prep! prepares children and their families for a great start to primary school.

We work with community members, primary schools and early years providers in northern Moreland to support early learning, family engagement and school readiness.

Over four years, the initiative has grown from four partners to over forty; and now includes a strong focus on community governance and decision-making.

COVID-19 restrictions decreased engagement with schools and kindergartens, and prevented visits to many new partners in Glenroy and Hadfield. Despite this, Ready, Set, Prep! continued to improve early education outcomes.

## What did we achieve?

- ▶ expanded the program to Glenroy and Hadfield
- ▶ launched community champions model; 10 local residents undertook training to share Ready, Set, Prep! information to support other families meet their needs
- ▶ grew the partnership from 21 in 2019 to 46 in 2021
- ▶ secured funding for an additional two years
- ▶ won a 2020 Victorian Multicultural Award for Excellence in Education.

## What's next?

- ▶ developing a communications plan to share 10 co-designed key messages across community to support early childhood development
- ▶ piloting a 'preparing for school workshop' that can be rolled-out across Moreland.

## Growing school readiness in regional Victoria

We continued to grow our early childhood services in regional Victoria to improve wellbeing outcomes for children in more disadvantaged areas.

Merri Health's School Readiness Funding Allied Health Program helps kindergarten educators and families build their skills and capacity to support children's learning and development.

Our allied health team work with educators and families, focussing on language development, and social and emotional development.

In FY 2020/21 we expanded our services from 71 kindergartens across five LGAs in Goulburn (Mitchell, Murrindindi, Shepparton, Strathbogie, and Moira); adding seven LGAs in the Ovens Murray Region; and a further 44 kindergartens.

## What did we achieve?



- ▶ **increased the number of kindergartens we support** from 44 to 115, improving school readiness outcomes for more children in regional Victoria



- ▶ **expanded the program** from Goulburn to cover the seven local Government areas in the Ovens Murray region: Mansfield, Wangaratta, Benalla, Indigo, Wodonga, Towong, and Alpine



- ▶ **the team has grown**, and will continue to grow to eight new allied health staff.

## What's next?

- ▶ our target is to deliver approximately 1900 sessions across 115 kindergartens in 12 Victorian regions by early 2022.





# DISABILITY SUPPORT

Merri Health offers a range of flexible services and supports for people with a disability, to promote wellness, independence and to help them stay connected to their community.

## National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

Under the NDIS, people with a disability receive a plan of funded supports which they can use to purchase services. This gives them choice and control over who provides the services.

It has been a positive year with many participants choosing Merri Health.

## MerriKids

For children up to 10 years old, MerriKids provides speech therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy services. These are delivered at home, kinder or childcare.

## Allied health for wellness and independence

The NDIS allied health team offers occupational therapy, speech pathology and physiotherapy services to adults with a disability in their home, workplace or other community setting.

### What did we achieve?

- ▶ launched Merri Mates pilot program; matching volunteers with people with a disability for social connection and help with community outings
- ▶ strong client demand and consistent uptake in telehealth services despite COVID-19
- ▶ 225 service agreements exceeding \$1,000,000 over the last financial year
- ▶ implemented an online tracking tool to provide clarity and more detailed information on billable hours to assist staff to monitor performance.

## Challenges and changes

The NDIS pricing structure remains a challenge and in early 2021 our NDIS services underwent an external review.

As a result we made the difficult decision to cease our support coordination service and worked closely with other local NDIS providers to smoothly transition Merri Health clients.

### What's next?

- ▶ growing our allied health services in response to strong demand
- ▶ refining our MerriKids program to children from birth to school age to improve early childhood outcomes
- ▶ Implementing review recommendations to improve IT systems and financial processes to enhance service delivery and better meet the needs of clients
- ▶ monitoring Merri Mates and continuing to embed into Merri Health's volunteering activities.



## Early childhood support in regional Victoria

Our Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) program, in partnership with the NDIA, supports children aged 0-6 years who have a developmental delay or disability, and their families.

In 2020/21 we grew our ECEI partner team to support more children in North East regional Victoria, including Mansfield, Benalla, Indigo, Wodonga, Towong, and Alpine regions.

The team helps families to identify the developmental support needs of their child.

We assist them in engaging with mainstream and community services, provide short term early intervention, and support children to access the NDIS to receive the funded supports that they require.

### What did we achieve?



- ▶ currently supporting over **700** children with disabilities and their families



- ▶ grew the **early childhood intervention team to 12 staff**, comprising intake officers, allied health clinicians and early childhood teachers



- ▶ **consulted with the NDIA to shape how it is delivered, and to improve participants experiences and outcomes.**





# DENTAL SERVICES

Our dental services provide dental care, treatment and information for adults and children.

While we continued to provide emergency appointments through COVID-19, service restrictions had a significant impact on client visits and waitlists. The number of people treated dropped 13% from the previous financial year.

Inadequate dental funding to meet our community needs remains a key challenge and we continue to advocate for funding increases.

## What did we achieve?



- ▶ **introduced telehealth** alongside face-to-face information sessions, providing choice to clients



- ▶ **created a video to promote good oral health for playgroup and early childhood families** registered with the Little Smiles and Smiles 4 Miles programs



- ▶ **over 10 families participated in our free dental program for children under 12**



- ▶ our dental team received a **98% score on the infection control audit**



- ▶ **supported two employees to undertake the certificate IV in oral health promotion to become oral health educators.**

## Where can we improve?

- ▶ people on the general waitlist increased from 2,443 last FY to 2,890 this year
- ▶ wait times also increased; clients now wait 36 months on average for general dental appointments.

## What's next?

- ▶ continue to advocate for increased dental funding
- ▶ implementing the Smile Squad program in primary and secondary schools
- ▶ trialling a high risk model of care designed to embed a preventative based approach to high risk clients.





# CLOSING THE HEALTH GAP THROUGH RECONCILIATION

Merri Health is working towards closing the health gap through respect, equity and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Alongside our health and social support services, we champion reconciliation inside and outside our organisation.

We work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander locals and the wider community to:



ensure our sites are culturally safe



improve service access and cultural appropriateness



improve health and wellbeing outcomes



celebrate the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community



increase awareness of the impact of racism on health and wellbeing outcomes



be leaders for reconciliation, and foster leadership across our organisation

## New Reconciliation Action Plan

Our ongoing commitment is formalised through a Reconciliation Action Plan. Developing a new RAP was a key priority after pausing in 2019 due to COVID. We are proud to have finalised our new Innovate RAP this year. It prioritises:

- ▶ increasing employment/engagement and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, volunteers and students
- ▶ being a sector leader around reconciliation, raising staff and community awareness
- ▶ building new partnerships with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations
- ▶ creating new cultural learning resources to engage a wider range of staff
- ▶ piloting innovative new projects, including Acknowledgment of Country across all Merri communications platforms.

## What did we achieve?

- ▶ developed our new Innovate RAP with ambitious targets
- ▶ commissioned a new RAP artwork from local Indigenous artist Simone Thomson
- ▶ supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, procuring \$8475 of goods
- ▶ ran our first virtual Koorie Conversations webinar
- ▶ developed and implemented a RAP marketing and communications plan
- ▶ launched a National Reconciliation Week campaign via social media, website, newsletters and internal communications, including a 'what can you do to support reconciliation' video and staff quiz
- ▶ promoted National Sorry Day and NAIDOC Week initiatives to staff and community
- ▶ delivered cultural appreciation training online for the first time, attended by 82 staff.

## What's next?

- ▶ innovate RAP to be endorsed by Reconciliation Australia
- ▶ launch and implement our new Innovate RAP and artwork
- ▶ launch our Acknowledgement of Country initiative across all Merri collateral.



# LGBTIQA+ SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SERVICES

Merri Health is committed to providing safe, high quality services that are inclusive for LGBTIQA+ individuals, and a workplace that is inclusive for all employees and volunteers.

We have championed LGBTIQA+ respect, equality and inclusion for many years. We actively work to address health inequalities and discrimination experienced by LGBTIQA+ communities, and offer tailored support.



We welcome Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual, same sex-attracted and gender diverse people and communities



## Rainbow Tick Accreditation

Merri Health is proudly a Rainbow Tick accredited organisation for the fourth year in a row.

This means we continue to meet all six standards outlined for accreditation, and have policies and procedures to make sure everyone feels comfortable accessing our service.

Merri Health's LGBTIQA+ working group ensures the organisation provides LGBTIQA+ sensitive and inclusive practices and is responsive to changing issues.

The working group also oversees the continuous improvement in our Rainbow Tick areas and facilitates staff training.

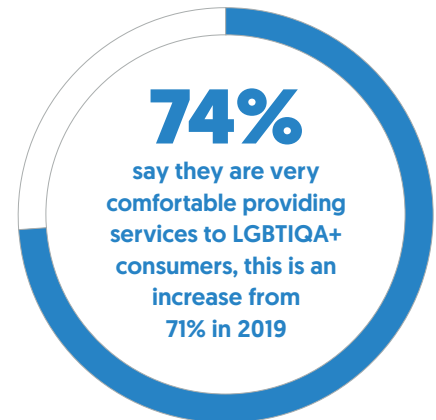
## LGBTIQA+ all staff survey

Every 18 months, we send out a voluntary LGBTIQA+ all staff survey which measures our inclusive practices, where we do well and where we can improve.

### How did we do?



- **128** folx voluntarily completed this survey, up from 110 in 2019



### Where can we improve?

- **48.55%** felt their program area seeks to identify the needs of LGBTIQA+ consumers and uses this information to develop appropriate services.



## Q Health

QHealth offers counselling and support for LGBTIQA+ people who would like to talk about the concerns or impacts of their alcohol and drug use in a confidential, non-judgmental and queer-affirmative space.

Demand for services increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was challenging, however the team were able to successfully meet this need.

### What did we achieve?

- provided flexible services to meet clients' needs, including outreach support, whenever it was safe to do so

- developed a partnership with Flat Out, providing both pre and post incarceration release support to clients who are primarily Sistersgirls and gender diverse people
- appointed a part-time role to enhance the intake process, providing both active holding support for clients on the waiting list, as well as case support work
- exceeded our service target.

### What's next?

- the team will provide a combination of face-to-face, telehealth and outreach services to meet client needs.

### NOTE:

Sistersgirls are Indigenous people who were classified male at birth but live their lives as women, including taking on traditional cultural female practices [GLHV, 2016]. They are some of the most vulnerable peoples out of the collective LGBTIQA+ communities.



## Midsumma

Midsumma Festival is an annual celebration of queer, intersex, transgender, bisexual, lesbian and gay culture. Merri Health plays an active role each year in the festival and the Pride March to demonstrate our commitment to inclusive practice, and to engage and support LGBTIQIA+ communities.

This year, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the festival took a virtual approach. The Pride March went ahead in a COVID-safe manner.

### What did we do?

- ▶ Merri Health online stall with resources and information on our LGBTIQIA+ health services
- ▶ staff proudly flew the rainbow flag and participated in the Pride March
- ▶ we installed a giant safe spaces window display in in Sydney Road Coburg and encouraged people to take a photo and post to social media with the hashtag #RainbowHealthMatters to show their support for the LGBTIQIA+ community.

“

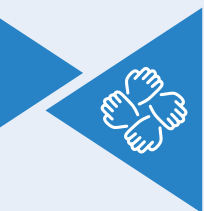
**I am both shocked and impressed at the same time to deal with a service that actually values the LGBTIQIA+ community and listens.**

**From the initial call I made and spoke to Nadie in your enquiries area who asked if I had a preferred pronoun, to the receptionist at your Coburg site who treated me with a genuine smile, your inclusive practice posters and humble friendly and respectful staff. I could not be more impressed.**

**Finally a service that actually means what they say. Believe me it's rare."**

— Service user (Brunswick)





# FAMILY VIOLENCE AND GENDER EQUALITY

Merri Health views family violence as a serious health issue and is committed to preventing and strengthening service responses for people experiencing family violence.

Gender inequality is the key driver of violence against women. Our goal is 'to create a better future for our community that is free of violence and is gender equitable, safe and respectful'. To achieve this we coordinate actions across the organisation in four strategic areas:



1

workplace commitment, leadership and culture



2

community education and awareness raising



3

workforce and organisational practice



4

service innovation and response.

## What did we achieve?

- ▶ we delivered frontline services including direct counselling and support to individuals experiencing the effects of family violence
- ▶ Merri's CEO spoke on workplace gender equity at a Moreland City Council event for International Women's Day 2021
- ▶ participated in over 10 prevention of violence against women networks
- ▶ led the Elder Abuse Prevention Network in northern and western metropolitan regions (see page 32)
- ▶ developed and delivered Upstander training (standing up to gender discrimination) to 15 Merri Health staff and 25 Moreland Council staff
- ▶ made gender equality training mandatory for all Merri Health leaders

- ▶ introduced family violence training for all staff inductions
- ▶ developed a Family Violence Information Sharing Policy and Toolkit and held workshops with all Merri's leadership team to embed the policy and toolkit
- ▶ achieved Workplace Gender Equality Agency Employer of Choice accreditation.

## What's next?

- ▶ we're on track for our third Employer of Choice citation by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), meeting updated 2021 requirements
- ▶ continue to deliver frontline services providing direct counselling and support to individuals experiencing the effects of family violence.



Merri Health's Carolyn Wallace and Jane O'Neill advocate for change at the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System.

## Advocating for victims in Parliamentary Inquiry

Merri Health was one of three organisations invited to speak at a Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System in June 2021.

Our Hume VAP Team Leader and General Manager Family and Community spoke about the impacts of lengthy time frames for court matters, which had become "crushing" during COVID-19, trauma-informed practice, and the importance of victim impact statements being heard in court.

Drawing on the experiences of Merri Health clients as they move through the criminal justice system, the team advocated for changes to improve victim's court experiences.

Parliamentary members asked questions about the issues Hume VAP raised.

## What did we achieve?

- ▶ advocated for victim impact statements to be heard in court, and other changes to better support victims
- ▶ we provided a written submission with input from clients VAP has supported
- ▶ supported VAP clients to share their lived experience with the Committee.

## Victim's assistance in regional Victoria

Merri Health's Victims Assistance Program (VAP) offers free support for people who have experienced a violent crime, both reported and unreported. We help them cope with the effects of the crime, explain 'legal talk', provide practical assistance and help them connect to other services that are right for them.

We deliver VAP in the North Metropolitan area of Melbourne and the Hume region which takes in 12 rural and regional LGAs.

Our team travels across the region to provide outreach support at client's homes, at court and other locations.

The Hume team includes a dedicated Koori engagement worker to increase access to support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Filling this position has been a challenge for many months and remains a priority.

## Animals included in family violence legislation

Since 2016, Merri Health has advocated for reform to family violence legislation to better protect victims and their pets, through the Keeping our Pets Safe (KOPS) project.

An initiative of our Victims Assistance Program, KOPS works to increase awareness of companion animals as both victims, and a barrier, to fleeing family violence.

Merri Health has partnered with seven Northern Metropolitan councils and the nation-wide Lucy's Project to identify animal-friendly respite services to assist victims leaving, address legislation and upskill councils to respond to the need to keep animals safe.

In 2021, the Victorian Parliament unanimously passed a motion to recognise that animal abuse is a form of family violence, animals are

vulnerable in the context of family violence, companion animals are considered family members, and in our laws, companion animals are considered property.

### What did we achieve?



- ▶ we successfully advocated via the **Keeping Our Pets Safe program** for reform to family violence legislation in Victoria to better protect victims and their companion animals



- ▶ **Merri's VAP and KOPS were acknowledged by MP Fiona Patten** for addressing the needs of families and their animals experiencing family violence

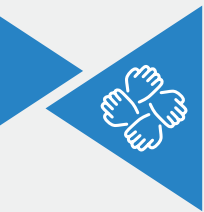


- ▶ **secured a grant from the City of Moreland to work with Women's Health in the North (WHIN)** to deliver family violence training to veterinary clinic workers.

### What's next?

- ▶ running additional training to veterinary clinic workers
- ▶ supporting researchers from Melbourne University to investigate the impact of family violence on victim survivors and their companion animals
- ▶ working with the Victorian chapter of Lucy's Project to advocate for the rights of family violence victims with companion animals.





# CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE

To better service our culturally and linguistically diverse communities, we provide interpreting services to help us communicate with our consumers and support their needs.



## Interpreter support

To better service our culturally and linguistically diverse communities, we provide interpreting services to help us communicate with our consumers and support their needs.

As an organisation, reshaping our services in response to community needs is a priority. This year we introduced video interpreting, alongside face-to-face and telephone, in response to COVID restrictions.

### What does the data tell us?

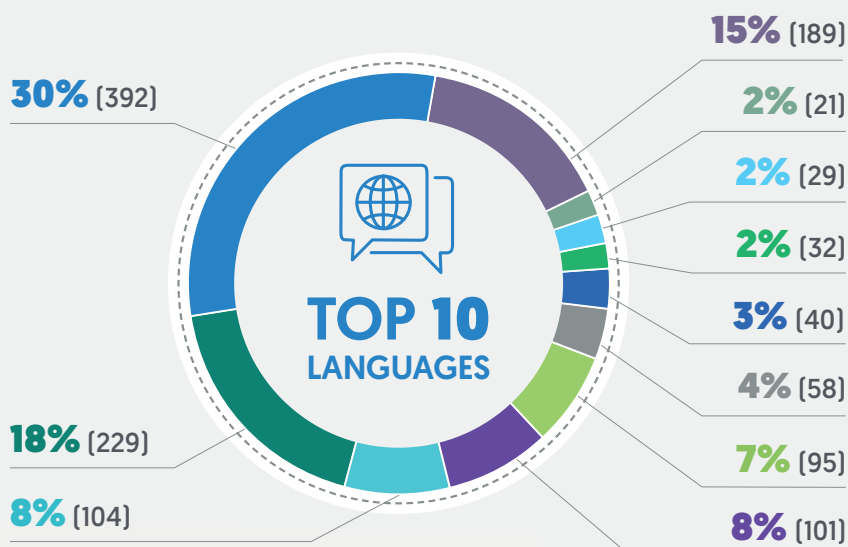
In FY 2020/21

- ▶ we completed 1291 interpreter service bookings, a decrease from 1791 completed bookings the previous financial year. This is largely due to a drop in face-to-face interpreter sessions during lockdown, which we expect as in-person clinical appointments were reduced with COVID-19 restrictions
- ▶ use of phone interpreters decreased slightly on the previous year, but is on a growth trend over the last two years in line with the introduction of telehealth.

### INTERPRETER BOOKINGS COMPLETED

	Face to Face	Telephone	Video	Grand Total
2018/2019	1,154	664		1,818
2019/2020	943	848		1791
2020/2021	459	823	9	1291
Variance 19/20 to 20/21	-484	-23	+9	-500

The top five languages requested were Arabic [30%], Italian [18%], Turkish [8%], Farsi [8%] and Greek [7%]. Farsi and Vietnamese requests have increased. Demand for Mandarin interpreters decreased from the fifth most requested in financial year 2019/20 to the seventh.



- ▶ Arabik
- ▶ Italian
- ▶ Turkish
- ▶ Farsi
- ▶ Greek
- ▶ Vietnamese
- ▶ Mandarin
- ▶ Assyrian
- ▶ Spanish
- ▶ Kiswahili
- ▶ all other languages

% of total bookings  
(completed bookings)





# COMMUNITY AND CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

Meaningful community engagement and participation is central to Merri Health's values and purpose. It underpins the design and delivery of our services, ensuring they are responsive to community needs.

Our new Strategic Directions highlight the importance of community engagement to our success. This year we focussed on strengthening our foundation, developing robust processes, and building internal capacity; while actively engaging with consumers and community.

## Community engagement through COVID-19

We had reasons to celebrate! This year, we reported our full second year of community engagement data; and we improved the way we collect and report, adding more analysis, case studies and key learnings to share across the organisation.

Merri Health has embraced (and slightly changed) the five engagement approaches developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) to measure our engagement.



inform

consult

involve

co-design

empower

Type of engagement approach	Number of activities per engagement type	% of activities per engagement type	Number of activities per engagement type	% of activities per engagement type
	2019/20	2020/21	2019/20	2020/21
Informing community	169	228	36%	38%
Consulting community	141	102	30%	17%
Involving community	84	198	18%	33%
Co-designing with community	59	60	12%	10%
Empowering community	21	12	4%	2%
<b>TOTAL engagement activities</b>	<b>474</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>100.%</b>	<b>100%</b>

This helps us monitor how deeply we engage with stakeholders along the spectrum of inform to empower; so we can track our performance to improve outcomes. We were not able to compare all data to the previous year, as we changed our recording templates to ensure that we draw on data more accurately.

“

**Engagement for us is more than just sharing information. We want to give community a voice in our organisation and empower people to participate in all aspects of service design planning, governance and of course delivery.”**

– Tassia Michaleas  
Chief Executive Officer

#### What did we achieve?

- ▶ 26.5% increase in reported engagement activities compared to the previous year
- ▶ total 600 engagement activities, up from 474 the year prior
- ▶ engaged all current consumer advocates, referred them on to committees and sought their advice on projects and programs
- ▶ recruited three new consumer advocates, though active recruitment was paused
- ▶ gave consumer advocates access to all Merri in-house training
- ▶ our community engagement advisor partnered with eight teams across Merri to facilitate greater involvement by community, consumers, carers and their families, and staff in service delivery, improvement and re-design. Teams included HARP, Carer Gateway, COVID-19 taskforce, dental care, NDIS – Merri Mates, prevention of complex care, independent living team and the community wellbeing team.

#### Where can we improve?

- ▶ growing our Consumer Participation Register has been an ongoing target. This year, we put active recruitment on hold while we developed organisation-wide processes and resources, as we did not have a coordinated, central process to monitor where consumers are involved in projects and committees.

“

**Last night I saw the advertisement on Facebook (you asked me for my opinion). I was glad to see that my feedback was taken on board and it was superb.”**

– Consumer

### Action plan to embed engagement

Our community relationships framework (see page 19) helps us to embed and measure community engagement more consistently. This year we extended embedding of the framework by three years due to short-comings in a number of areas, including establishing a consumer advisory group.

Our Community Engagement Internal Working Group (CEIWG) also developed an ambitious three-year strategy and action plan, aligned to our strategic directions and community relationship framework. The plan outlines actions in seven areas to address root causes preventing us from excelling in community engagement.

### Consumer advisory group

Merri Health's consumer engagement advisor and Carer Gateway engagement team is piloting a young carer and adult carer advisory group based on best-practice models. This key project included developing processes, resources and a cost model to pay consumers for their time - a significant development in our consumer partnerships.

Carers are currently being recruited for both advisory groups and will review and add value to the processes. These will be adapted to guide Merri Health's organisation-wide community engagement practices and Community Participation Register.

#### What's next?

**Continue to embed community engagement practice and build staff skills through:**

- ▶ implementing our comprehensive CEIWG action plan
- ▶ delivering community engagement training for Merri staff biannually in partnership with Impacto Consulting (first session in September 2021)
- ▶ launching an online community engagement training module for all staff in response to requests for advice and support to integrate engagement into programs
- ▶ launching our 'Inclusive, Accessible and Respectful Communications Guide' to assist staff in developing resources and communications that are sensitive and appropriate to priority Merri audiences
- ▶ adapting carer advisory group resources and policies to guide the growth and management of Merri's Consumer Participation Register.



## Be Merri Health and Wellbeing Festival

In December 2020 we held our third, and Covid-19 adapted, Be Merri Health and Wellbeing Week.

This annual festival of activities aims to:

- ▶ raise awareness of, and connect people to local services, places and spaces that support health and wellbeing
- ▶ create opportunities for social connection, supporting mental health and wellbeing
- ▶ offer learning opportunities through skill sharing.

Traditionally Be Merri features fun, face-to-face activities related to learning, wellbeing and social connections.

To cater for changing COVID-19 conditions, Be Merri was adapted to feature online and offline events for the first time.

Changing restrictions threw up challenges as plans and risk management procedures needed to be regularly reviewed and changed.

Activities were co-designed/co-created with consumers and community and included:



### ▶ offline:

**Fawkner Footprints** – adventure hunt through Fawkner, and  
**Seedling Surprise** – surprise plant stations across Moreland



### ▶ online:

**Community Connections Challenge** – a five day online challenge, and  
**Confident kids: Positive Parents Webinars** – two online interactive sessions with child, adolescent and adult psychiatrist, Dr Deeta Kimber.

## What did we achieve?

We are extremely proud of the various stakeholders we involved as part of Be Merri:



- ▶ engaged over **10,000** consumers and community members through events and promotion



- ▶ **internal planning and delivery** engaged: 13 Merri teams, 3 working groups, 4 consumer advocates and 2 volunteers
- ▶ **external planning and delivery** involved: 9 partner organisations, 29 community consultations



- ▶ **co-designed and created all activities with community** including: children, women and older people from diverse CALD communities, folk identifying as LGBTIQ+ and local business owners.

## What's next:

- ▶ planning for Be Merri 2021-22. Our original plan to hold a series of pop-up events at existing community festivals including Fawkner Festa is being reviewed due to extended lock-downs and ongoing COVID-restrictions. Hybrid online/offline events are being considered once again.

“

**I loved seeing my own language represented in this Be Merri booklet.”**

– Member from Bangladeshi community in Fawkner



## Hello Fawkner!

Fawkner is a culturally diverse suburb in Moreland with a large proportion of newly arrived families. Hello Fawkner! is a three-year project that aims to improve social cohesion, connection and respect for diversity in Fawkner, through four initiatives:



### 1 The Great Idea Program



### 2 The Harmony Day Party Program



### 3 The Fawkner Times e-newsletter



### 4 The Fawkner Times newspaper

These programs help build community leadership and the capacity of local residents to develop, run and share initiatives that strengthen their community.

Many community events were postponed due to COVID and activities adapted to an online format where possible.

## What did we achieve?



- ▶ over **\$23,000** was provided for **community-led activities**



- ▶ **13** applications for The Great Idea program and four projects selected



- ▶ the Fawkner Times newspaper and e-newsletter reached more than **3500** people



- ▶ **25** COVID-safe Harmony Day parties in March 2021.



- ▶ supported all participants to run COVID-safe events by completing a COVID safe event checklist.

## What's next:

- ▶ funding extended from the Department of Social Services for another 12 months
- ▶ deliver the **Great Idea Program**, **Harmony Day Party Program** and **monthly Fawkner Times e-newsletter** in 2021-22.

“

This project has deepened our connection with the Fawkner community and allowed us to collaborate with and help locals of all different cultural backgrounds and project types.”

– Participant



## Listening to our consumers – feedback and complaints

Listening to consumers and responding to feedback helps us to improve the way we do things; and client experiences. We value client feedback and provide five ways for people to comment on our staff and services.

These include:



over the phone via our dedicated feedback line



through a feedback form on our website or available at all Merri sites



by email



in person by sharing feedback with a Merri staff member who logs it in our system



via electronic feedback kiosks at select Merri sites.

## Results

In FY 2020-21, consumers provided **290** feedback comments:



- ▶ a **25% increase in compliments** received compared to the previous year.

Themes included:



treatment/care of consumers by clinicians



administrative staff (Access and Reception)



positive clinical outcomes for clients



our aged care service and its programs.



- ▶ a **9% decrease in complaints** received compared to the previous year.

## Where can we improve?

Complaint themes focused on:

- ▶ communication/lack of information
- ▶ accessing a service
- ▶ service availability.

## What's next?

- ▶ quality improvement activities focused on improving our communications and addressing negative feedback
- ▶ investing in upskilling staff with training opportunities available virtually.

“

**My family has used Merri on and off for some time. I really value your safe and happy space.”**

– Consumer

“

**I have been sitting in the foyer waiting for my mum and have been very impressed with the way your front desk has answered calls on this new virus, very commendable.”**

– Consumer







# RESEARCH AND EVALUATION COMMITTEE

One of the pillars of our Strategic Directions 2020-2025 is providing quality and safe services through the provision of models of care that are informed by an evidence base and evaluation. In 2021, we established two new groups to strengthen our research and evaluation capability, and ensure we implement best practice.

## Research and Evaluation Committee

The Research and Evaluation Committee champions and provides oversight of Merri Health's research and evaluation activities, ensuring ethical conduct and alignment with our values and Strategic Directions.

This includes:



driving the Merri Health research/evaluation agenda



promoting best practice in research and evaluation at Merri



reviewing organisation wide proposals for internal and external research projects



providing advice on governance for all research proposals



promoting and providing leadership for ethical conduct of all research



seeking out research partners and funding opportunities.



## Research and Evaluation Community of Practice

The Research and Evaluation Community of Practice [CoP] was established in June to help embed research and evaluation practices into our programs. It provides a forum to build the knowledge and capability of staff, and to promote knowledge sharing.

Our first Research and Engagement CoP attracted 20 people. The Hello Fawkner! team shared their program evaluation, including qualitative and quantitative research, to demonstrate the impact of their initiatives.

The CoP identified four key themes relating to the importance of Merri Health engaging in research and evaluation activities.

These are:



1

impact for clients – how do we know and show we are making a difference?



2

best practice and evidence base – knowing it, adding to it and using it



3

embedding evaluation into Merri



4

showcasing our work once we have the evidence of impact

### What's Next?

- ▶ mapping process to get a comprehensive picture of all our current research and evaluation activities. This will help us to focus our efforts, identify any synergies and plan for future activities.
- ▶ a CoP chat group to share resources, current evaluation and outcome measurement practices between quarterly meetings is underway.



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS PROCEEDINGS

## Board attendance at meetings 2020/2021

Director	Eligible to attend	Apologies	Attended
Carlo Carli (Chair)	11	1	10
Darryl Annett	11	0	11
Julie McCormack	11	0	11
Joe Caputo	11	0	11
Benjamin Maxfield	11	0	11
Ann Taylor	11	0	11
Sam Garrasi	11	0	11
Seide Raffoul	11	0	11
Roxanne Adams	5	0	5
Sheena Watt	3	0	3

## Board attendance at planning retreat 2021

Director	Board Retreat
Carlo Carli (Chair)	✓
Darryl Annett	✓
Julie McCormack	✓
Joe Caputo	✓
Benjamin Maxfield	✓
Ann Taylor	✓
Sam Garrasi	✓
Seide Raffoul	✓
Roxanne Adams	✓

## Company secretary and executive support

**Gavin Thompson**  
Company Secretary

**Joan Wilkinson**  
Executive Assistant to the Board of Directors

## Directors designated board committee meeting attendance/board attendance at sub-committees 2021/2021

### Finance, Audit and Risk Management

Directors	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Sam Garrasi	5	0	5
Darryl Annett	5	0	5
Carlo Carli	5	2	3

### Quality, Safety and Clinical Governance

Directors	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Julie McCormack (Chair)	5	0	5
Benjamin Maxfield	5	0	3
Seide Raffoul	5	0	0
Roxanne Adams	1	1	0
Ann Taylor	Guest	Guest	4
Sam Garrasi	Guest	Guest	1

### Community Engagement

Directors	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Ann Taylor (Chair)	6	0	6
Joe Caputo	6	1	5
Benjamin Maxfield	Guest	Guest	3
Sheena Watt (Resigned)	0	0	0

### Commissioning Committee

Directors	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Sheena Watt (Chair) (Resigned)	1	0	1
Benjamin Maxfield (Chair)	3	1	3
Julie McCormack	4	1	3
Darryl Annett	4	3	1
Sam Garrasi	4	1	3
Ann Taylor	4	1	4
Carlo Carli	4	1	2

## About sub-committees

### Finance, Audit and Risk Management

This sub-committee oversees financial performance, compliance, risk management and internal and 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 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 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 team. We are grateful for the support we receive in-kind from community representatives on our Board sub-committees.

## Board committee meetings

### Community representation on board sub-committees 2020/2021

#### Finance, Audit and Risk Management

Community Representatives	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Geraldine Allen	5	0	5

#### Quality, Safety and Clinical Governance

Community Representatives	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Simone Pike	5	1	4
Celine Johns	5	5	0
Roxanne Adams	4	0	4

#### Community Engagement

Community Representatives	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Mairi Rowan	6	0	6
Alison Black	6	2	4
Susy Pinchen	6	0	6
Adua Rosso	6	2	4
Jo Szczepanska	6	2	4
Mustafa Koukklan	5	0	1
Chiara Lawry	2	1	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](http://merrihealth.org.au)

## Statement of Comprehensive Income for the year ended 30 June 2021

	2021 \$'000	2020 \$'000
<b>Revenue and income</b>		
Revenue	38,120	26,062
Income	29,428	21,478
<b>Total revenue and income</b>	<b>67,548</b>	<b>47,540</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Employee benefits expense	34,003	29,149
Depreciation and amortisation	2,710	2,457
Finance costs	191	210
Supplies	187	194
Computer expenses	1,422	834
Consulting and legal costs	959	830
Client costs	6,816	4,977
Communication	572	399
Motor vehicle expenses	258	288
Occupancy costs	1,321	1,028
Payments to other agencies	16,839	5,313
Repairs and maintenance	263	217
Employment expenses	501	480
Loss on disposal of PP&E	-	459
Other expenses	1,064	1,018
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>67,106</b>	<b>47,853</b>
<b>Total operating surplus/(deficit)</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>[313]</b>
Revaluation of assets	227	[246]
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>	<b>669</b>	<b>[559]</b>

## Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2021

	2021 \$'000	2020 \$'000
<b>Current assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	21,369	14,325
Trade and other receivables	521	591
Other current assets	3,171	1,743
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>25,061</b>	<b>16,659</b>
<b>Non-current assets</b>		
Lease Assets	2,724	3,330
Financial Assets	6,913	7,193
Property, plant and equipment	11,404	12,356
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<b>21,041</b>	<b>22,879</b>
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Trade and other payables	9,202	6,414
Other liabilities	9,596	6,840
Lease liabilities	1,176	1,219
Provisions	4,691	4,020
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<b>24,665</b>	<b>18,493</b>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>		
Provisions	1,593	1,413
Lease Liabilities	1,703	2,160
Borrowings	2,853	2,853
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	<b>6,149</b>	<b>6,426</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>15,288</b>	<b>14,619</b>
<b>Equity</b>		
Reserves	1,724	1,497
Retained earnings	13,564	13,122
<b>Total equity</b>	<b>15,288</b>	<b>14,619</b>

# CONTACT US

## 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

### Craigieburn

Connections @ Hothlyn  
120 Hothlyn Drive  
Craigieburn VIC 3064

### Epping

Epping Community Services Hub  
713 High Street  
Epping 3076

### Pentridge Boulevard, Coburg

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 and 2, 110 Chifley Drive  
Preston VIC 3072

### Vic Place

21 Victoria Street  
Coburg VIC 3058

### Wangaratta

Level 3, 62–68 Ovens Street  
Wangaratta VIC 3677  
t: 1300 362 739

## All services

☎ 1300 637 744

✉ [info@merrihealth.org.au](mailto:info@merrihealth.org.au)

## National Disability Insurance Scheme

☎ 1300 637 744

✉ [ndis@merrihealth.org.au](mailto:ndis@merrihealth.org.au)

## Carer support

☎ 1800 422 737

## Victims Assistance Program

☎ 1300 362 739

## 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

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](mailto:quality@merrihealth.org.au)

🌐 [merrihealth.org.au](http://merrihealth.org.au)



## ANNUAL REPORT 2021



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