



Merri Health
Healthcare that moves with you

Better health through partnerships and prevention

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



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



Acknowledgement of Country

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

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

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

Ngì-a-Gat Balit-Djak Yirramboi
(Building a Very Strong Tomorrow)
RAP artwork by Simone Thomson



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Acknowledgment

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



About this report

This annual report provides a summary of our operational and financial performance during the 2022-23 financial year.



Merri Health Carer Gateway Consumer Advisory Committee members.

It highlights how we work to create healthy, connected communities through high quality health services that respond to community needs.

It also contains information about our organisation, how it's structured, our Board of Directors, governance, actions and achievements in:



workplace wellbeing and development



partnerships with consumers



better health through quality and safe services



advocacy and support for diversity and inclusion

Better health through partnerships and prevention

This year's report celebrates positive health outcomes for individuals, communities and a stronger health system through our commitment to partnering with consumers and organisations to deliver innovative health prevention programs and quality, safe, health and social care services that respond to local needs.

How do we put this information together?

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

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

Where to find this report



This report can be found at each of our sites (see page 77) and on our website: merrihealth.org.au

Our purpose

To enrich diverse communities through quality healthcare and support services.

Our promise

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

Our values

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



La nostra missione

Arricchire varie comunità attraverso servizi sanitari e assistenziali di qualità.

La nostra promessa

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

I nostri valori

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

Ο σκοπός μας

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

Η υπόσχεσή μας

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

Οι αξίες μας

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

هدفنا

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

التزامنا

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

قيمتنا

نحن في Merri: نحفز ونشارك ونحترم ونستجيب ونبتكز

BOARD CHAIR AND CEO REPORT

It is with much pleasure that we present you with an account of our operations over the past 12 months as we take the opportunity to reflect on our achievements, our challenges and our aspirations for our future.

The 2022 -23 Merri Health Annual Report is themed 'Better health through partnerships and prevention'. It demonstrates our commitment to partnering in the development of innovative solutions for the provision of safe, quality health and social care that transpires into real outcomes for individuals, families, and communities.

Whilst providing care and support to our diverse communities is our main purpose and promise, we are also acutely aware of our role and responsibility in health prevention. Community health is well placed to educate and support communities to stay and remain healthy!

Excellence in care

This report provides us with an opportunity to reflect on our work and its impact as we deliver positive health and wellbeing outcomes for our community, and deliver on the vision and purpose of Merri Health.

Throughout the following pages you will have the opportunity to read about Merri's service development in response to service gaps and emerging needs.

Over the last 12 months we:

- ▶ provided **266,920** service instances
- ▶ supported **17,696** carers across Victoria
- ▶ **1,000** children received dental care through our Smile Squad
- ▶ grew our Stepped Care for Older Adults mental health service and saw **117** new client referrals
- ▶ launched a **new School Ties program** supporting children whose early primary years have been interrupted by COVID-19

We were excited to present the success and opportunities of our Chronic Pain Service to the Victorian Minister for Health in May when she visited our Coburg site. The Minister heard directly from clients about their improved health journeys. The service has reduced presentations to the acute sector and 83% of patients have reported improvement.

The reform environment continues to be rapid and evolving and we continue to prepare, review and respond. Aged care and mental health preparedness continues to be our priority.

Investment in our facilities is also a focus. In the last year we undertook a complete refurbishment of our dental services in Brunswick to ensure quality and safe care, and to provide a better client experience.

Community and consumer engagement

This year we:

- ▶ launched our **first Merri-wide Consumer Advisory Committee**
- ▶ **21% increase in community and consumer engagement activities** reported across the organisation
- ▶ supported **33 consumer-led community events** with **686 participants** in the Hello, Merri-bek! Party Program to celebrate culture and diversity

Partnerships

We continue to develop and foster positive and collaborative partnerships with a broad range of key stakeholders to support positive health, social and community outcomes.

This year we engaged with over 140 diverse partners. We also joined all 24 independent registered community health organisations to launch the Community Health First initiative, and highlight the significant value and contribution of community health to support Victoria's healthcare system.

Prevention

Health sustainability amid finite resources is fast becoming a pivotal point for governments and funders and there is ever increasing recognition that prevention is better than cure. Health economics continues to challenge where investment is best placed.

We are proud of the significant role we play in supporting, connecting and educating communities. Despite many challenges Merri Health has been able to identify and foster opportunities, resulting in growth in service offerings, increased access for individuals and communities, and greater geographical reach.

We have taken a proactive approach to advocating for investment in prevention funding and health promotion; and have a dedicated focus on measuring the impact of our work and the real outcomes experienced by our clients. This is evidenced by the establishment of our vibrant and robust Research and Evaluation Committee.

Governance

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Roxanne Adams who concluded her service on the Board of Merri Health as a Director in December 2022, including Chair of the Clinical Governance Board Sub-Committee for 12 months.



Julie McCormack
Board Chair

Tassia Michaleas
CEO

“Notable awards over the past 12 months include a winner at the Victorian Early Years Awards and Gold in the Australasian Reporting Awards for our 2022 Annual Report.”

We thank her and all our Directors, Sub-Committee and Community Representatives for their active service, deep commitment and tremendous contribution to the stewardship of the organisation.

We were pleased to welcome Kenneth Cheng, who was appointed to the role of Specialist Director Legal in September 2022.

Strategic oversight, environmental sustainability and cyber security have been key focus points for the Board. We continue to invest heavily in these areas to ensure the security and protection of our systems and information, and the privacy of our clients.

The Board has set an agenda to take stock of the environment, social and governance factors to evaluate the sustainability and ethical impact of Merri Health’s operations.

Our people

We would like to acknowledge our resilient and dedicated people. Without their leadership and commitment none of the great work and outcomes we support for individuals and communities would be possible.

Our team is innovative and has the courage and energy to push boundaries so we can continue to grow and reach more communities.

Our people are also highly engaged as evidenced by the latest employee engagement survey which saw engagement increase by 10% to 70%, and 83% of employees report

that Merri is a ‘truly great place to work’. This year we also held our first in-person all staff conference with 300+ employees, and 98% reporting increased organisational knowledge.

It would be remiss not to thank our fantastic community representatives and volunteers, who are integral to Merri’s success and give their time in a wide range of roles. In particular we would like to acknowledge our Board of Directors for their ongoing support and efforts.

Recognition

We are particularly proud that Merri Health was a finalist for the 2022 Victorian Premier’s Primary Health Service of the Year Award in recognition of our vast and enhanced service offerings. It was heartwarming to see our staff efforts for innovative, client-centered, quality service provision recognised.

Other notable awards over the past 12 months include a winner at the Victorian Early Years Awards and Gold in the Australasian Reporting Awards for our 2022 Annual Report.

Furthermore, Merri continues to be recognised as an Employer of Choice for Gender Equality by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.

Into the future

Mental health, aged care, carer services and environmental sustainability occupy our sphere of thinking and focus into the immediate future.

We look to the future with enthusiasm, ready to tackle increased client complexity, compliance and regulatory requirements. Merri Health is an agile, resilient and well-resourced organisation poised to confront the challenges and grasp the opportunities of an ever-evolving future.

Ethical decision making across all spheres of our operations is a key consideration as we mature and continue to be a learning organisation.

After a nine-year term as a Director including 2 years as Board Chair we farewelled Julie McCormack in August as her term came to an end.

Julie has been a strong advocate for community health services. Committed and dedicated, she has championed clinical governance, and mentored and supported new Directors as they have come on to the Board. We acknowledge and thank Julie for her efforts and contribution, and wish her well. *Tassia*

Tassia Michaleas
Chief Executive Officer

Julie McCormack
Chair

ACHIEVEMENTS AND AWARDS



Finalist Premier's Health Service of the Year Award



266,920
service instances provided



Gold in the 2022 Australasian Reporting Awards



17,696
carers supported across Victoria



Winner Victorian Early Years Awards for Ready, Set, Prep! Program



117
new Stepped Care for Older Adults client referrals



Employer of Choice
for Gender Equality by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency



1,000
children received dental care through our Smile Squad



Finalist Victorian Health Promotion Awards, Hello, Fawkner! Program



21%
increase in community and consumer engagement activities



High Commendation
Merri-bek Awards for Community Champions



686
participants and **33** community-led events in Hello, Merri-bek! Party Program



First Merri-wide Consumer Advisory Committee launched



98%
of staff increased their organisational knowledge



School Ties program launched



Refurbished dental spaces and equipment



Winner Victorian Early Years Awards for Ready, Set, Prep!

OUR REACH

Merri Health’s reach and footprint have continued to grow. We provide carer services state-wide and programs in regional Victoria through our Wangaratta site, alongside our heartland of Merri-bek and surrounds.

The North and West Metropolitan Region

The North and West Metropolitan Region consists of 14 local government areas, including Brimbank, Melton, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Wyndham, Banyule, Darebin, Nillumbik, Melbourne, Merri-bek, Moonee Valley, Yarra, Hume and Whittlesea, covering 2,891 square kilometres.

Diversity

It is highly culturally and socio-economically diverse. 32.9% of the population were born overseas with India, Iraq, Italy, Turkey and England the highest origins. Catholic is the most common religion at 23.4%, followed by Islam.

Health

The North and West Metropolitan population face a number of health issues. Adults are becoming more subject to mental health issues and declining wellbeing.

Chronic diseases are faced by many with 4.3% of the population living with diabetes, 8.6% of people have asthma and 6.8% have arthritis.

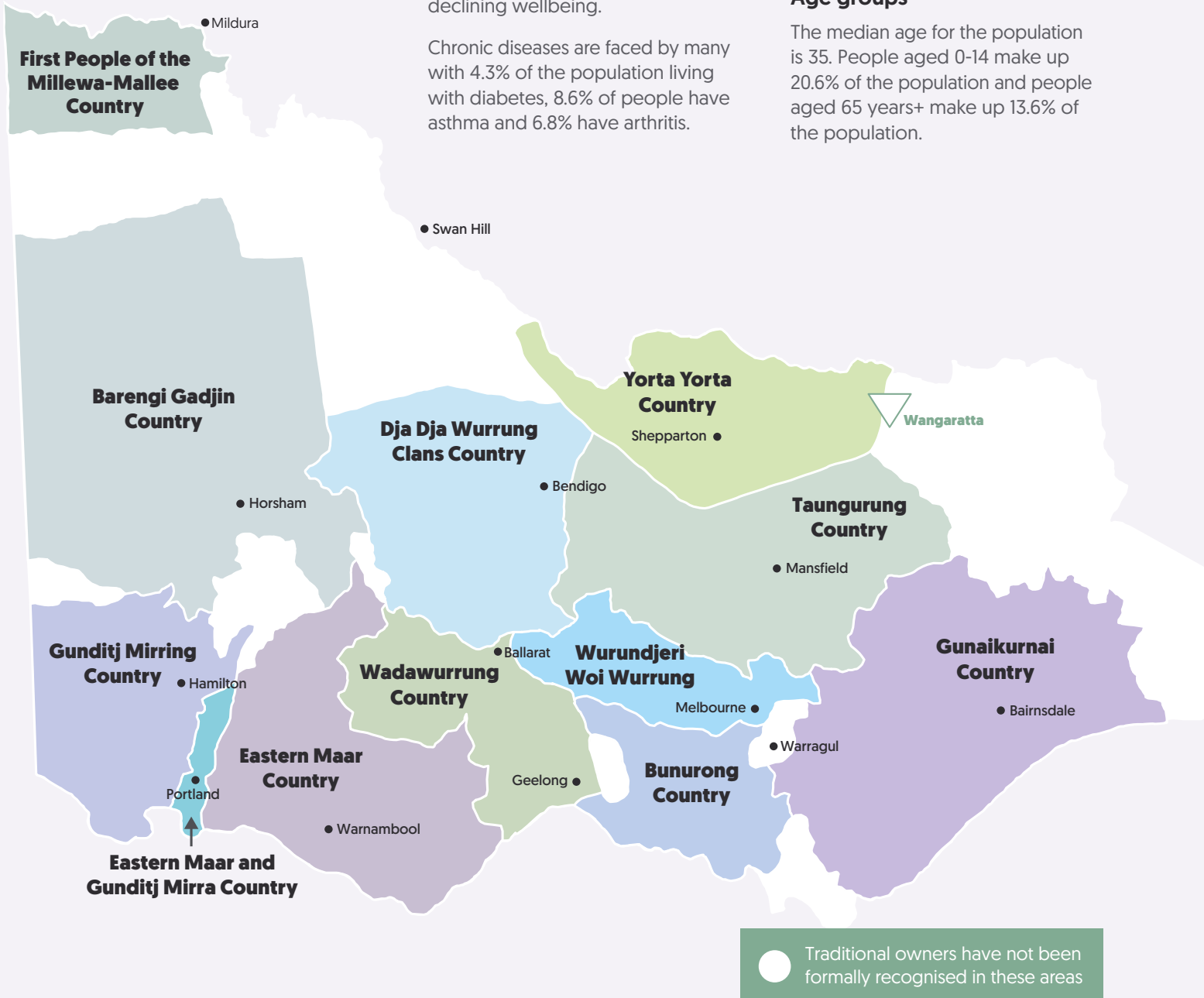
The leading causes of these health issues arise from exposure to harmful fumes, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity. Social loneliness is common as people in metropolitan regions are less likely to form social groups.

Languages spoken

42% of the population speak a language other than English at home, with Italian being the most common language spoken at home, followed by Arabic, Urdu and Greek.

Age groups

The median age for the population is 35. People aged 0-14 make up 20.6% of the population and people aged 65 years+ make up 13.6% of the population.



Disadvantage

One of the most disadvantaged communities in this region are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. They make up 0.6% of the population in Victoria and typically experience higher levels of chronic illness, suicide rates and psychological distress than non-Indigenous, with young people particularly at risk.

Within Merri-bek, Fawkner, Hadfield, Glenroy and Coburg North, residents experience higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage, a higher concentration of low-income households and higher rates of unemployment.

Wider Metropolitan Melbourne Region (Greater Melbourne)

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

Australia is the birthplace of 59.9% of people in the Region. 4.9% were born in India, 3.4% in China, 2.7% in England and 1.8% in Vietnam.

The majority (61%) speak only English at home, 4.3% speak Mandarin, 2.3% speak Vietnamese, 2.1% speak Greek and 2% Punjabi.

Health

Within this area 8.1% of people live with a long term mental health condition (depression or anxiety). Asthma affects 7.9% of the population, while 6.9% of people have arthritis, 4.5% live with diabetes and 3.3% have heart disease.

Age groups

Young people aged 0-19 make up 23.8% of the population, while 37.6% of residents are aged between 20-44, and 38.7% are aged 45 and above, the median age is 37. People aged 65 years are forecast to increase to 7.6% by 2026.

Disadvantage

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

Hume region

The Hume Region covers North Eastern Victoria and the Goulburn Valley and includes 12 Local Government Areas: Mitchell, Murrindindi, Shepparton, Strathbogie, Moira, Mansfield, Wangaratta, Benalla, Indigo, Wodonga, Towong and Alpine.

Merri Health has continued to expand service provision across the Region, coordinated through our Wangaratta site.

Diversity

Within the Hume population, English is the most common language spoken at home, followed by Arabic, Turkish, Punjabi, Assyrian and Chaldean. After Australia, India, Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon and Pakistan are the most common countries of birth, contributing to a culturally diverse population.

Health

More Hume residents live with long-term health conditions than the Victorian average. 10.7% of the population have a mental health condition compared to Victoria's 8.8% rate. 11.6% have arthritis and asthma affects 10% of people, higher than Victoria's 8.4% rate.

Age groups

Hume's median age is 45 years. People aged 0-14 make up 17.1% of the population and people aged 65+ make up 23.5% of the population.

Wider Regional Victoria

Across its 48 LGAs, Regional Victoria has a population of approximately 257,682 people.

Diversity

English (40.1%) and Australian (39.4%) ancestries are the most common. 7,694 of the population (3%) identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. 80.4% of the population was born in Australia, followed by England (2.2%), New Zealand at 0.9% and Malaysia at 0.8%.

Health

Due to the greater difficulty accessing health services, people living in rural and remote areas generally experience poorer health than those living in Metropolitan areas. They are also at a higher risk of developing mental health disorders due to loneliness, financial issues, natural disasters and low employment opportunities.

Age groups

The median age in Regional Victoria is 47, compared to 34 years in Metropolitan Melbourne. Children 0-14 make up 16.6% of the population, people 65+ make up 25% of the population.

** When updating population demographics, 'Outer Regional Victoria' was used through ABS.*

References:

- ▶ www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/health-wellbeing-profile-2020.pdf
- ▶ www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats
- ▶ Rural and regional Victorians (health.vic.gov.au)
- ▶ www.vgls.sdp.sirsidynix.net.au/client/search/asset/1161371
- ▶ www.health.vic.gov.au/regions/northwestern/about.htm
- ▶ www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/health-wellbeing-profile-2020.pdf
- ▶ www.app.remplan.com.au/hume-lga/community
- ▶ Birthplace | City of Merri-bek | Community profile (id.com.au)
- ▶ City Profile - Hume City Council
- ▶ Language used at home | City of Merri-bek | Community profile (id.com.au)
- ▶ Religion | City of Merri-bek | Community profile (id.com.au)
- ▶ Hume Language Profiles - Hume City Council

OUR SERVICES

We provide 70+ services to support the physical, mental and social health of our diverse communities.

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 Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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

Carer support

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

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

Child and family services

Promoting happy, healthy children and strong families with services like counselling, audiology, early parenthood coaching, support for children with a disability and Victims of Crime.

Chronic conditions

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

Community wellbeing

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

Dental services

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

Disability services

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

Health and wellness services

Supporting you to stay healthy and well with short-term education and exercise groups, healthy eating education, health services like physiotherapy, occupational therapy, podiatry and more.

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.

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 support people at every age and stage of life.

Our 391 staff work collaboratively with our clients to identify their needs and link them with the right services and programs to support their individual needs.

We have a strong commitment to improving health outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable

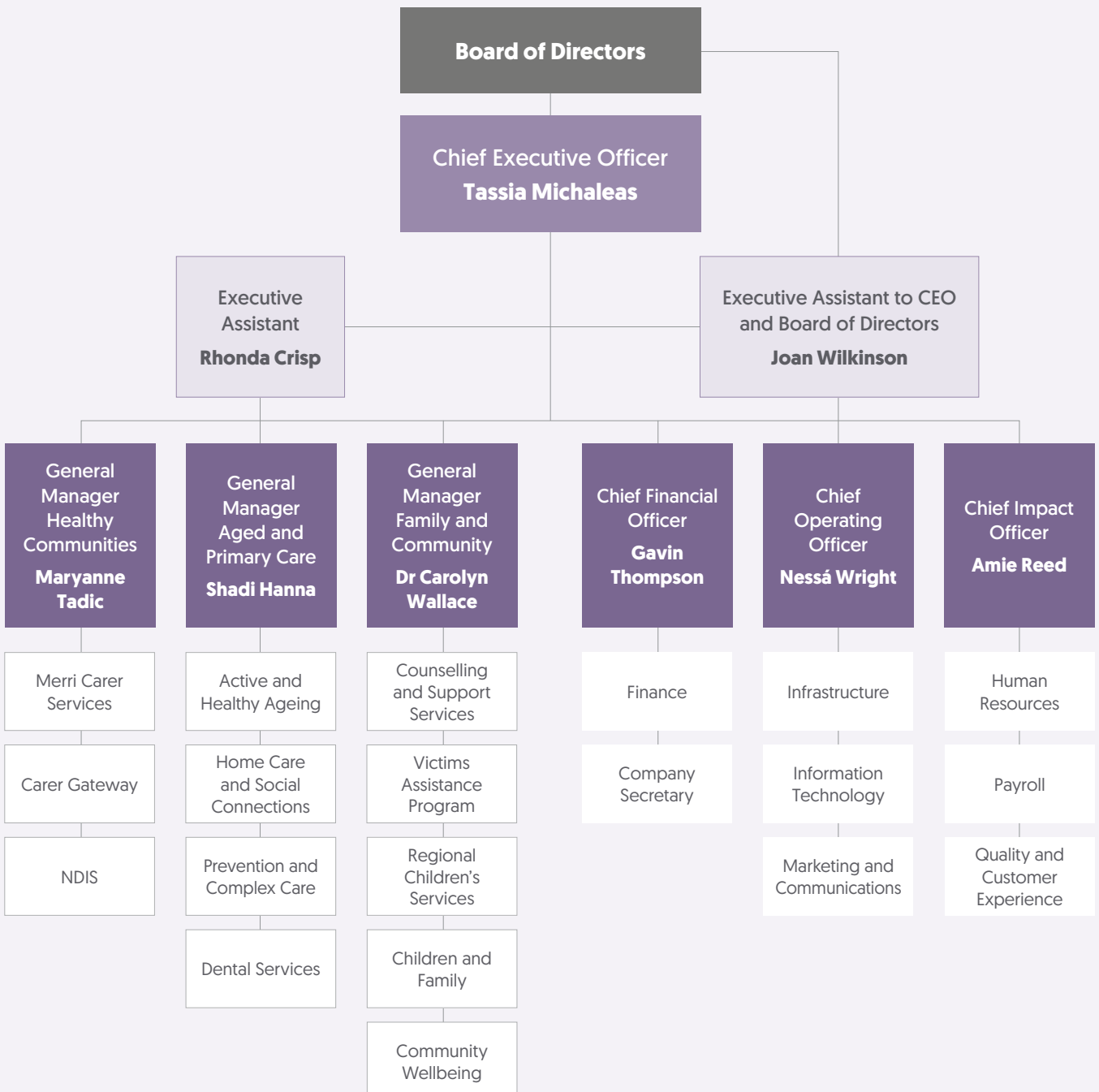
groups, young and older people, people with disabilities, from culturally diverse backgrounds, with complex health needs, and with various gender identities and sexual orientations.

Over the past year, we’ve provided more than 266,920 service instances from our nine 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, Impact and Finance.

Organisational chart



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Our Board of Directors informs our strategic directions, oversees governance and provides expert advice.



Julie McCormack

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.



Benjamin Maxfield

Deputy Chair

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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



Michael de Bruyn

Board Member

Michael has lived in Melbourne's northern suburbs for over 25 years and is now living in Coburg.

Michael currently works as a Government Relations consultant with over a decade of previous experience in the government sector including working as a Chief of Staff in the Victorian Government, as well as acting as a senior adviser to Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews.



Anne Jungwirth

Board Member

Anne Jungwirth is a keen advocate for high quality, accessible community-based health services.

Anne has worked in health education and health services for over 30 years including in policy development, primary care systems improvement and as CEO of a rural community health service.



Kenneth Cheng

Board Member

Kenneth Cheng is the Manager of Client Services at the Centre for Victorian Data Linkage in the Department of Health [Vic]. He is experienced in a range of health and human service areas through nine years as a public servant and brings over 15 years commercial experience in business development and management roles in the information technology sector.

Kenneth is a lawyer, has a Bachelor of Science (Hons), Juris Doctor, MBA (Exec) and is a Board Member of Inner Melbourne Community Legal.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

The Executive Leadership Team leads our operational strategy and workforce to deliver on 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.



Shadi Hanna

General Manager Aged and Primary Care

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

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



Nessá Wright

Chief Operating Officer

BCCJ, MER, EMBA

Nessá is a values-driven and collaborative leader who utilises her creative flair to enhance business operations and strengthen governance across varied settings in the not-for-profit sector. With vast experience in change management, governance, brand and communications, 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.

“The reform environment continues to be rapid and evolving and we continue to prepare, review and respond. Mental health, aged care, carer services and environmental sustainability occupy our sphere of thinking and focus into the immediate future.”

– Tassia Michaleas, Merri Health CEO



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.

Maryanne 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, AFCHSM

Carolyn has held numerous roles managing local services on the social determinants of health, and seeks to influence state and national social policy.

Carolyn 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.

STRATEGY AND PLANNING

Our Strategic Directions 2020-2025 provides a framework for our five-year vision. Our annual business, division and team plans further develop and operationalise this.

Strategic Directions 2020-2025

Our Strategic Directions outline our vision and guide our strategy. Following continued growth in revenue and reach, our focus is on strengthening Merri Health's core capabilities to enable further sustainable expansion, and agile responsiveness to the rapidly changing health and social needs of our community and future opportunities.

The strategy for sustainable service growth includes expanding our fee-for-service offering; 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.

Diversity Plan

Our strong commitment to supporting vulnerable and hard-to-reach client groups is detailed in our Diversity Plan.

It outlines our goals and practises focused on five groups:

- ▶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- ▶ culturally and linguistically diverse communities

- ▶ people with dementia
- ▶ people experiencing financial advantage
- ▶ same-sex attracted and gender diverse communities

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

Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)

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 2022-23 Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan outlines 72 actions we have committed to achieve over the two years.

Find out more on page 64.

Family Violence and Gender Equity Plan (FVGE)

We recognise 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 and we are proudly accredited by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency as an Employer of Choice. Our 2022-23 FVGE Strategic Action Plan guides our work to have an equal, inclusive and discrimination-free workplace.

Find out more on page 70.

Marketing and Communications Plan

Marketing and communications are critical to reaching, informing, engaging and supporting clients, our broader community, staff, stakeholders and partners. Our annual marketing and communication plan sets out our priority projects, audiences and success metrics.

Learn more on page 22.

Community Relationships Framework

Consumer participation and community engagement is recognised as a key enabler of our success in Merri Health's 2020-25 Strategic Directions. 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.

Learn more on page 30.



Staff at Be Merri Forum

COMMUNITY HEALTH FIRST

More people stay healthy and live independently through the care provided by community health services.

For 50 years, registered community health services have been responding to the needs of Victorian communities, supporting millions of people with high quality, high impact services.

This year, all 24 registered independent community health services across Victoria united to launch Community Health First (CHF). It demonstrates the vital role of community health in delivering world class critical healthcare and reducing the burden on hospitals and GPs through:

<p>Reaching the most disadvantaged</p> <p>Prioritise access for those who need it most.</p>	<p>Relationship-based care</p> <p>Build connections with all kinds of people to help them lead healthy lives.</p>	<p>Clinical capabilities</p> <p>High-quality primary care and multidisciplinary clinical services that keep people healthy and out of emergency waiting rooms.</p>
<p>Strong community connection</p> <p>Better support that responds to local needs right where people live and work.</p>	<p>Upstream investment in health prevention</p> <p>Health promotion programs set people up for better health, reducing unnecessary hospital admissions and medical costs.</p>	<p>Being agile and responsive</p> <p>We find innovative ways to address the social determinants of health through strong partnerships.</p>

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **partnered with all 24 registered independent Victorian community health organisations to launch CHF at Parliament**
- ▶ **collaborated with partners to publish *Strengthening Victoria's Health System through Community Health* position paper, outlining five priorities to improve our health system:**
 1. a cost-effective and better-funded system that can keep people healthy and well in their communities
 2. a trusted community health model that is consistent and responsive to local needs

3. an elevated role for community health to ensure holistic care that treats the person, not just the condition
4. accessible, affordable and quality care for everyone, especially vulnerable groups and regional and rural communities
5. every person has the skills, resources and supportive environment to achieve their full potential

What's next?

- ▶ collaborating with partners to provide innovative, responsive, accessible local services
- ▶ continuing to demonstrate the impact of community health and advocate for more Government funding

500,000+

people receive support from community health services annually

10,000

people employed by registered community health services



Community health leaders at Parliament launched Community Health First.



QUALITY AND SAFE SERVICES

Our commitment to monitoring, improving and innovating our delivery of care is demonstrated through our rigorous systems and processes.

Safe, high-quality services for all

We are dedicated to ensuring that all consumers receive safe, high-quality healthcare and services. Our key priorities have been the delivery of effective, person-centred and accessible care; and meeting our full three-year Accreditation against QIC, Human Services and Rainbow Tick standards, and Mental Health Standards Mid-Cycle assessment.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **successfully met all standards with over 225 indicators in our full accreditation review**

Key strengths noted by assessors included:

- our purpose and values are lived and reflected in how we operate
- leadership is visible – from the Board, the Executive and staff
- leadership role in the sector in terms of practice and development
- passionate about community, individuals and supporting them
- strong culture and practices around quality, safety and risk management, collaboration and networking, community engagement

- strong commitment to diversity and inclusion

Where can we improve?

- ▶ reviewing our systems, processes and technology so we can innovate and improve our service offerings
- ▶ auditing our processes to identify discrepancies between practice and standards

What's next?

- ▶ continuing to partner with community members to shape the way we deliver our services





Embracing client feedback

Consumer participation in healthcare is recognised and valued to improve healthcare quality. We're committed to nurturing genuine relationships and monitoring consumer feedback.

We welcome all feedback and provide five ways: phone, in-person, email, feedback kiosk at sites and our website.

This year, we also focussed on consumer journey mapping. This helps us to better understand consumer needs and pain points, so that we can improve consumer experience.

What did we achieve?

-  **9% increase in feedback**
-  **26% decrease in complaints**
-  **10% decrease in compliments**
-  **41% increase in in-person feedback after appointments**

Where can we improve?

- ▶ being able to meet the timely appointment requirements of our consumers. To do this, we have worked to understand their immediate requirements and actively encouraged them to share their experiences

What's next?

- ▶ communicating with funders about community needs to secure additional funding
- ▶ reviewing our consumer journey to identify where we can make positive changes to our processes, people and technology

“I've tried all the community health providers over the years as my dad has a lot of health issues. Merri is easy to deal with, a friendly group of people who really care and help.”

– consumer

BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES

Robust business support services ensure we are agile, adaptive to change; and support our sustainable growth and exceptional service delivery.

Human resources

Human resources are critical to our operations. This year, supporting the development, health and wellbeing of our employees remained a key priority. We introduced a new leadership development framework and invested in dedicated leadership training.

Continuing to evolve our culture and employee offering to attract and retain skilled staff in the competitive market was also a focus. We developed our Employee Value Proposition, introduced sector-leading leave and undertook a project to identify what and how we collect staff diversity information to ensure we are appropriately engaging and supporting our workforce.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **launched Wellbeing@Merri Strategic Action Plan** to provide a holistic, proactive approach to employee mental health and wellbeing
- ▶ **updated and launched our Employee Value Proposition** across our website after completing a review
- ▶ added a new Learning Experience Advisor to facilitate inhouse training

- ▶ introduced a centralised learning experience function, leadership development framework and best practice approach to developing our workforce
- ▶ **invested in leadership training for 50 frontline people leaders and 30 senior leaders**
- ▶ **introduced Gender Affirmation Transition Support Leave** and expanded Cultural and Ceremonial Leave, including substitution of public holidays

Where can we improve?

- ▶ Human Resources system limitations are creating additional work for HR and people leaders in the organisation. To overcome this, we are looking at a new system for all HR related functions
- ▶ workforce shortages, particularly for our clinical staff are continuing to be a challenge. To overcome this, we are looking at our attraction for new employees, and how to best utilise Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) across different functions

What's next?

- ▶ sourcing a new Human Resources Information System to allow more autonomy for people leaders to manage their staff needs

- ▶ continuing our focus on data security
- ▶ launching a new employee wellness platform to support employees' mental health and wellbeing in a way that works for them
- ▶ overhauling position descriptions, performance management and employee induction to create a better employee experience

Sector-leading leave

As an Employer of Choice, being responsive to our diverse employees is a priority to attract and retain a great workforce. As recruiting becomes even more difficult, we're continuing to adapt and evolve.

This year we have expanded our leave provisions to ensure we are providing an inclusive, respectful, flexible, and safe working environment including:

- ▶ Substituting Public Holidays
- ▶ Gender Affirmation Transition Support Leave
- ▶ Cultural and Ceremonial Leave



Be Merri All Staff Forum.

Improving our IT and systems

This year the IT team has continued to focus on re-platforming or refreshing legacy technology and improving corporate systems, infrastructure and information security. This is a multi-year project with many moving parts to help improve functionality and reduce risk.

We've also continued to develop our IT team, processes and systems, started working on a new IT Strategy to guide our work going forward and supported Merri Health's business as usual technology needs.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **implemented MS Teams voice, video and chat for all staff** to improve collaborative working and video-conferencing
- ▶ **increased data security**, completing significant system improvements to our policies and controls
- ▶ **built resilience and improved business continuity** by refreshing parts of our core infrastructure and networks

Where can we improve?

- ▶ we're limited by our legacy systems, so we're working to replace them
- ▶ we've struggled to fill team vacancies, but have been able to rely on partners and service providers to progress and meet day-to-day demands

What's next?

- ▶ finalising our new IT strategy
- ▶ continuing the transformation work we've started – moving from scoping and planning into delivery and implementation of some major re-platforming projects and starting work on others
- ▶ responding to emerging opportunities and events
- ▶ continuing to uplift our information security maturity
- ▶ improving the collaboration tools we provide for our teams
- ▶ refining our day-to-day operations and support to better serve our consumers
- ▶ improving quality and efficiency through automation

Efficient systems, resource use and spaces

Merri's infrastructure and facilities are diverse and evolving. They include management of nine sites and 46 fleet vehicles. Following a strategic review of our facilities last year, a key priority this year was implementing a plan to enhance and be more efficient with our spaces.

We supported multiple improvements of our spaces at sites and addressed service locations to ensure our facilities are fit for purpose. Improving our processes and resource use was also a focus. We also commenced discussions and planning to be part of the Coburg Health Precinct – an exciting state-of-the-art health hub to be developed in the North.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **20% reduction in our vehicle fleet** following a review of use; reducing our environmental footprint and creating savings that can be redirected to services
- ▶ **expanded aged care support in Mernda, via partnership with the City of Whittlesea's new Social Support Centre**
- ▶ **strengthened local community partnerships to maintain strong referral pathways, including:**
 - renewed agreements with DPV Health to continue providing Family Violence services through The Orange Door at our Vic Place site
 - expanded our partnerships with the Brotherhood of St. Laurence and their NDIS Support Coordination team for people 0 – 65 years
- ▶ **developed two factsheets for staff to streamline support and aid efficiency**



Where can we improve?

- ▶ further automating our Facilities service desk, space management and contractor management online systems and processes
- ▶ simplifying Merri's Business Continuity Plans to support staff to better respond to emergencies and reduce the impact on service provision

What's next?

- ▶ an additional podiatry clinic, multi-disciplinary consulting spaces and new fit for purpose specialist aged services space at Glenroy to meet the needs of children, older adults and those experiencing dementia
- ▶ consolidating and refurbishing our Preston site to better align with service needs
- ▶ enhancing our building safety and security systems



Fresh new dental look

Community members are enjoying fresh, newly refurbished dental spaces at our Brunswick site. The upgrades include state-of-the-art sterilisation and clinical equipment, and a colourful, modern 'pathway' design to help clients find their way to each of the treatment rooms more easily.

The key objectives were to support best practice through improved workflow and infection control, further improve the quality and safety of our services; and increase efficiency.

Completed in May 2023, the refurbishments were funded through a 2021-22 Metropolitan Health Infrastructure Fund Grant, Dental Health Services Victoria Capital Asset program and Merri Health.

Dental upgrades at our Brunswick site.



A new Coburg Health Precinct

In response to growing shortfalls in local health services and following extensive community consultation, Merri-Bek City Council decided to sell land on Bell Street Coburg in 2021 for the purpose of delivering a health and community services precinct.

Purpose built, this hub will provide local residents with quality health care in modern, inclusive and sustainable surroundings across a wide range of medical and allied health services.

Merri Health is working with the partners from Coburg Health Hub Pty Ltd to be part of the precinct and we look forward to sharing this new and exciting journey over the coming years.

Growing reach and impact through marketing

Effective, creative communications and marketing help drive our performance and growth, amplifying our ability to engage with our diverse stakeholders and connect them to relevant, timely information, opportunities, programs, services and events.

This year, marketing our Carer Gateway services to increase awareness and take-up across Victoria remained a key priority. We also focused on internal communications and events to build staff connection, and content to engage communities and partners in our service and health promotion initiatives.

Our advocacy efforts included supporting visits from the Victorian Health Minister and Mental Health Minister; and dedicated campaigns aimed at improving the health of vulnerable populations and increasing sector funding.

We continued to leverage the power of social media and digital marketing to broaden our reach to target


audiences; and embraced innovation launching our first podcast and new technology platforms to enhance our publications.

What did we achieve?


▶ **Gold Australasian Reporting Awards for our 2022 Annual Report**

▶ **Merri Health's brand reach and positive engagement included:**

 **71,600**
website users

 **1,714,170**
total social media reach and engagement on Facebook

 **11,000**
impressions on Twitter

 **412,311**
impressions on LinkedIn
(from Nov-Jun)

▶ **quarterly newsletters distributed to 1,700+ community members and stakeholders**

▶ **dedicated advocacy campaigns to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, reached 16,000+ people, 71 stories, LGBTIQA+ and Family Violence and gender Equity initiatives reached 21,000 people**

▶ **launched our first podcast 'The Care Mosaic', listened to 500+ times**

▶ **introduced Joomag a magazine-style digital publishing platform to enhance our publications and SWIFT for greater email data security**

▶ **E-bulletins for programs including We're Game, Healthy Ageing, Elder Abuse Prevention Network and School Ties**

▶ **cross-functional events to build culture and positively promote Merri Health included:**

– **95.5%** positive feedback and 300+ staff attendees at BeMerri Staff Forum

– **100%** positive staff rating and **1369** LinkedIn video views for our International Women's Day leadership event promoting workplace gender equality

Where can we improve?

▶ **resourcing challenges delayed planned projects including website enhancements**

▶ **campaign project management platform to improve collaboration and streamline delivery**

Gateway to support

Merri Health leads a partnership of seven health organisations to deliver Carer Gateway services to support unpaid carers across Victoria.

A highlight this year has been the extensive range of marketing activities and new initiatives coordinated across the state that have grown awareness of Carer Gateway and Merri Health and helped carers connect to services.

These included:

▶ **launched The Care Mosaic podcast, ranked 10th in Apple Podcasts in Australia and Bronze winner in the international podcast Signal Awards**

▶ **launched 'The Caring Way' magazine, circulated to 14,000+ readers in person and online**

▶ **40,000 brochures and posters to 600+ GP clinics to boost GP referrals and reach consumers**

▶ **engaged with 5,500+ people through our participation at 5 major expos and events:** Care Expo, Melbourne Disability Expo, Carer and Ageing Well Expo and more!

▶ **2,000+ radio advertising spots across regional and metropolitan areas, including dedicated campaigns on 3KND Indigenous radio, LGBTQI station JOY FM and SBS Radio to reach Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese and Arabic speaking communities**

▶ **200,000 households matched with carer data indicators received information via letterbox**

▶ **digital marketing campaigns tailored to engage different carer audiences saw our ads shown 14,396,192 times across channels: Google, YouTube, Spotify, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, prompting 89,731 people to click through to the Carer Gateway website for services and information**



What's next?

- ▶ growing our marketing and communications team to better meet organisational needs
- ▶ enhancing website functions and search engine optimisation to improve consumer navigation
- ▶ greater focus on our Aged Care services to connect consumers to our Home Care Packages and allied health services
- ▶ *Supporting Carers Every Week* multi-channel campaign and ongoing Carer Gateway state-wide promotion
- ▶ exploring new channels including Tik Tok to connect to young carers
- ▶ implementing new collaboration and project management tools to improve marketing delivery



Carer Gateway team at the Melbourne Care Expo.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

We understand that climate and health are interconnected. We're reducing our carbon emissions and strengthening our response to climate change and environmental sustainability.

Becoming a more sustainable health service

Climate change is a health threat for many people in our community. As extreme weather events worsen, the risk of adverse human health impacts and subsequent pressure on health services is increasing.

Merri Health is taking proactive action to offset these impacts by reducing our carbon footprint and treading more lightly on the earth.

We will do our part to achieve the global goal of reaching net zero by 2050, as set out in the United Nations Paris Agreement of 2015, to which Australia is a signatory.

This year we have committed to enhance our response to climate change as a community healthcare provider and as an employer. This means leading by example and finding practical ways to reduce our impact on the environment.

We have engaged Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) consultant, Apricot Consulting to help us to:

- ▶ better understand and reduce our carbon footprint
- ▶ strengthen our resilience to the growing impacts of climate change
- ▶ operate as an environmentally aware organisation

In partnership with Apricot, we are undertaking a full environmental and carbon emission assessment to determine our current status, and develop a strategy, action plan, targets and reporting framework to drive this work into the future.

We look forward to achieving our goal of evolving into a more sustainable health service.



Environmental initiatives in place

Over the years, Merri Health has incorporated a range of sustainability practices across our organisation, particularly to reduce waste.



located paper recycling bins throughout our sites



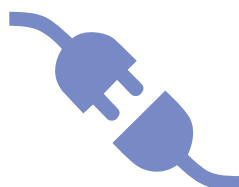
adjusted printer settings to reduce paper waste



more shared waste bins at workstations



given staff reusable coffee cups and drink bottles



established channels to re-use or recycle our e-waste



replaced some of our energy inefficient heating/cooling appliances



reduced our car fleet by 20% in line with use



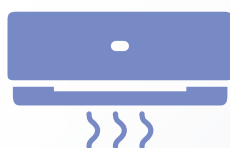
supported staff-led initiatives such as composting and battery recycling



purchasing biodegradable office supplies including waste bags, disposable cups and crockery



upgraded to energy efficient LED lights



reduced energy use by setting our heating, ventilation, and air conditioning to 20-26 degrees

What's next?

Creating an action plan that responds to the outcomes of the assessment, and prioritises our efforts to:

- ▶ operate more sustainably, use renewable resources where possible and minimise damage to the environment
- ▶ source materials locally to reduce our carbon footprint and seek to work with suppliers and organisations with similar sustainability values and principles
- ▶ identify and remove or minimise negative environmental impacts of our products, services and operations
- ▶ limit unnecessary packaging and identify ways to reduce waste

“At Merri Health, we recognise the link between health and the environment and our role as leaders to step up and demonstrate sustainable healthcare practices that care for the generations of our future.”

– Nessa Wright,
Chief Operating Officer

OUR PEOPLE AND WORKPLACE WELLBEING

Supporting employee health and wellbeing, fostering development and maintaining an inclusive, respectful workplace where our people can thrive!

Our workforce

During the 2022-23 financial year, our workforce decreased by 9%, from 429, to 391.

Of our workforce:

 **82%**
identify as female

 **16%**
identify as male

 **2%**
identify as gender diverse

Inclusive workplace

We are proudly Rainbow Tick accredited and strongly committed to providing safe, respectful and inclusive environments that support the rich diversity of our staff, clients and community.

We provide education and training to address health inequalities and discrimination including:

- ▶ inclusive practice training focusing on cultural and linguistic diverse communities
- ▶ LGBTIQ+ inclusive practise training
- ▶ Cultural appreciation training focusing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- ▶ Upstander training
- ▶ Responding to vulnerability training

Training and leadership development

We provide both mandatory and optional training for all staff to support professional learning and development, as well as promoting a safe and inclusive work culture.

Our Learning Management System provides 127 different training modules and a further 194 we can purchase.

Additionally, this year 50 frontline people leaders undertook 6-month leadership development training. All 30 senior leaders were supported with quarterly professional development, including change management, leader as coach and strategic business planning; and 35 employees undertook a four-part emotional intelligence course.

Our volunteers

Volunteers are a highly valued extension of our workforce and contribute to many programs, such as helping clients at home, in groups and at community events.

Volunteer opportunities were limited by COVID restrictions, and our active volunteers declined.

Relaunching our volunteer program with a new framework is a focus for next year.

Flexible workforce

Flexible workplace arrangements support gender equality and inclusive workforce participation.

Currently, there are more than 221 flexible workplace arrangements, which all staff can access.



Staff at Be Merri forum.

Wellbeing@Merri

This year we launched a new Wellbeing@Merri Framework. It encompasses four pillars - mind, body, joy and growth – that form the foundation of health, wellbeing and safety at Merri Health, and expands on what we already have in place.

The holistic, proactive program provides an individual, tailored approach that includes pre-existing and new diagnosis.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **85 employees supported**
- ▶ **106 different wellness plans provided**, responding to musculoskeletal, mental health and wellbeing, physical, condition plan, illness/disease, and COVID-19 related conditions

Active and Thriving

Staff use of our 'Active & Thriving' 24/7 wellness app continued to grow this year, with more team members logging their healthy habits, including

setting personal challenges to improve their sleep, physical activity or mental fitness via the app, and accessing the library articles provided.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **130 challenges completed**, up 124% from 58 last financial year
- ▶ **3736 healthy habits logged**, 104% increase from 1830 last year
- ▶ **1486 library articles accessed**, up 136% from 629 last year
- ▶ **18% of Merri employees actively using Active and Thriving**





Staff at Be Merri forum.

Be Merri Forum builds shared culture

Building a shared culture and employee connections across divisions was a priority this year to address COVID-19 impacts. Merri has grown in recent years, and remote onboarding, hybrid work and multi-sites had reduced 'whole team' identity.

To promote engagement, break down silos and grow staff knowledge, skills, relationships and wellbeing, we held our first ever in person Be Merri Staff Forum in May.

The conference-style event aimed to:

- ▶ provide a fun and informative event to engage staff
- ▶ increase knowledge of key Merri Health's strategic pillars, committees, projects, and opportunities to be involved
- ▶ build Merri team identity and culture
- ▶ facilitate staff connections across teams
- ▶ design and deliver a program for people to self-select activities

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **300+** staff attended
- ▶ **45+** diverse presentations, activities and information sessions about different services and programs, wellbeing sessions, a fun quiz and photo wall
- ▶ program co-designed and delivered by team members across the organisation
- ▶ **140** responses to post-event survey showed high engagement and positive feedback:



“The best all staff forum I’ve been too since being with Merri for 10 years.”

“Having the opportunity to learn more about the programs and teams at Merri and the amazing work everyone does. Also the mindfulness activity, quiz and raffle were super fun.”

“It was great to see the breadth of services available and get a taste of what they provide.”

“I learned a lot, and interacted with many new people.”

- **98% grew their knowledge of Merri Health**, including valuable insights into committees, projects and opportunities to get involved
- **96% said it gave opportunity to meet and connect with staff in other areas**
- **96% would attend another forum in the future**
- successfully communicated Merri’s key strategic pillars, aligning staff with Merri’s long-term goals and vision

Where can we improve?

- ▶ increase planning and implementation time to maintain high quality
- ▶ allocate additional project coordination resources to reduce strain on organising staff balancing core business
- ▶ improve sound quality in large spaces to ensure inclusivity for all

What’s next?

- ▶ exploring running Be Merri Staff Forum conference-style again in Q4 2023/24 following exceptional positive feedback

CONSUMERS AND COMMUNITY

Working alongside consumers and community members in a person-centred, responsive way helps ensure our services truly meet the diverse needs of our community.

Community participation and engagement is embedded across all levels of our organisation.

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

This year, facilitating greater consumer participation in program development, improving our reporting, launching our Merri-wide Consumer Engagement Committee pilot and continuing to deliver innovative health prevention programs that engage target communities were our priorities.

Improving our reporting

We report our community engagement activities quarterly to track our performance and identify areas for improvement.

Staff report using the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) *Public Participation Spectrum* [slightly adapted].

This also enables us to monitor how deeply we engage along the spectrum of inform to empower.



What did we achieve?

- ▶ updated our reporting tool to make it easier for staff to submit activities and saw a significant and consistent increase in reporting
- ▶ **18.9% increase in reported engagement activities** from 2022
- ▶ captured new data on newsletter distribution and our social media reach
- ▶ **61% of activities directly engaged consumers** or community members

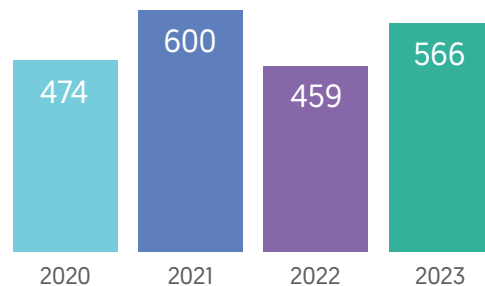
Where can we improve?

- ▶ supporting staff to report all activities and provide relevant information is an ongoing challenge

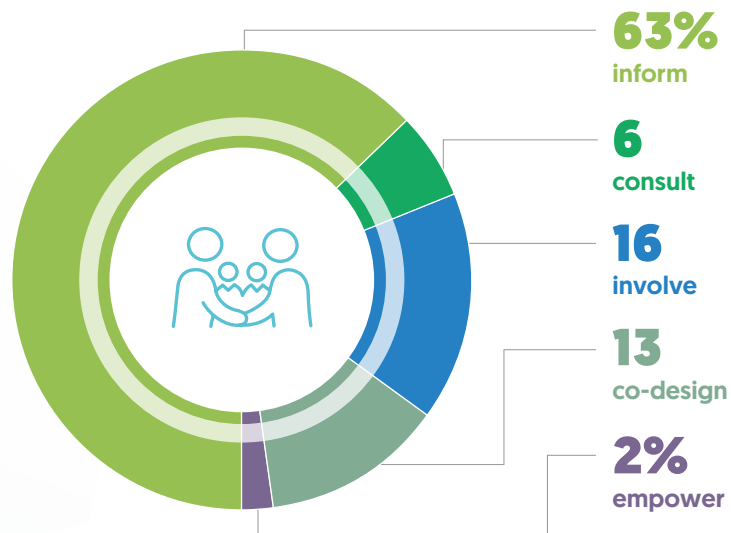
What's next?

- ▶ running interactive training sessions to diverse Merri Health teams to help build their reporting capacity
- ▶ exploring different ways to measure our impact

Total engagement activities reported



Engagement activity types 2023



* Note, reporting is by calendar year. Currently we do not collect individual participant data. One person may be represented multiple times, particularly where activities are re-occurring.

Our three-year community engagement action plan

Our Community Engagement Committee is an action-oriented group of Merri Health staff across divisions.

The group is guided by a 3-year Action Plan 2021-2023. Its purpose is to:

- ▶ drive innovative improvements in our engagement strategies
- ▶ develop and/or support mechanisms to increase the level and quality of consumer and community participation across Merri Health

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **84% of target actions completed** or on track
- ▶ **32 staff attended tailored training** on 'gathering consumer insights' and 'client journey mapping' delivered in partnership with Impacto Consulting,
- ▶ **Community Engagement dedicated training module completed**, ready for launch in 23-24
- ▶ **Awareness Calendar marking important cultural, religious, and social awareness dates developed** and shared with all staff

Where can we improve?

- ▶ transitioning to new committee members took longer than planned, resulting in delays for progressing some action items

What's next?

- ▶ launching the Community Engagement training Learning Management module
- ▶ developing a yearly community of practice for staff to share resources and learnings

Involving consumers as partners in decision-making about their healthcare and treatment leads to more effective health services, and improved health outcomes.

Father and son at Craigeburn Festival.



Piloting a Consumer Advisory Committee

This year we ran a seven-month pilot for a Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC). The CAC is a fundamental element of our Community Relationship Framework.

It aimed to create a formal mechanism in which consumer representatives could provide insights from their lived experience

to help influence system change and enhance program design, planning, and evaluation, while also contributing to decision making at all levels.

The pilot completed in June 2023 and is currently being evaluated.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **7 projects referred to the CAC** from **6 different teams**, across **3 divisions**

- ▶ **100% of staff who referred a project said the CAC input provided value to their program** and that they would refer another project to the CAC

- ▶ **10 consumers recruited to the CAC and involved throughout the pilot said they would like to remain on the CAC if it continues**

What's next?

- ▶ assessing the evaluation report and recommendations



Merri Health Consumer Advisory Committee members.

Delivering health innovations

We continue to develop and deliver award-winning innovative health promotion programs that respond to the population health needs of our community.

This year, in response to changes in funding guidelines, we undertook a needs assessment on healthy eating, active living and tobacco-related harm within Merri-bek. The aim was to understand community and stakeholder perceptions of whether these health issues are important to the local community, and what areas should be prioritised for action.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **completed targeted needs assessment, reviewed data, research and reports**
- ▶ **42 community members from diverse population groups and 78 people from local services, schools and groups across Merri-bek consulted**

- ▶ **we learned about the barriers to living an active life**, in particular: financial barriers, time, access, inclusivity, safety and accessibility, behavioural factors, awareness of what's available
- ▶ **identified a need to focus initially on increasing participation of girls and women in active living**

Challenges

- ▶ along with many other community health services, the Department of Health announced a 10-15% reduction to health promotion funding from July 2023. Continuing to meet the health promotion needs of our community with less resources will be an ongoing challenge. To meet this challenge, we will continue our focus on partnering with local organisations on collaborative projects, to share resources and broaden our reach within the community

What's next?

- ▶ adding active living to our health promotion priorities for 2023-2025, in addition to mental wellbeing and violence
- ▶ initial focus on increasing participation of girls and women in active living, including working with sporting clubs to create healthy environments that engage girls and women
- ▶ commencing a new community champions program that draws on the strengths of local community members to increase awareness of active living opportunities, services and programs in the community





Tackling gender-based violence in sport

Game On! This year we launched a new program We're Game to help tackle gender inequality and prevent violence against women through sports.

Working in partnership with Active Merri-bek (YMCA), Women's Health in the North, Merri-bek City Council, Tennis Victoria, Coburg Football Club and Swinburne University, we are supporting sports and leisure settings in Merri-bek to create an action plan to promote gender equity and tackle harmful behaviours and attitudes in their organisations.

The program draws on guidelines from Sport and Recreation Victoria to tackle gender-based violence in sport at a community level.

We made good progress against our objectives to grow:

1. networks and partnerships between the sports, active recreation and primary prevention sectors and community organisations
2. settings in Merri-bek adopting best-practice primary prevention initiatives
3. understanding of the effectiveness of the guidelines as a tool to drive change in diverse communities

We're Game is harnessing the power of sport to drive action on gender equity in Merri-bek while also increasing the participation of girls and women in active living.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **8 sports and leisure settings engaged in We're Game:** Brunswick Baths, Coburg Leisure Centre, Oak Park Leisure Centre, Pascoe Vale Outdoor Pool, Coburg Olympic Swimming Pool, Coburg Football Club, Moomba Park Tennis Club, Coburg Tennis Club

- ▶ **3 settings completed gender equity audits**
- ▶ **strength-based approach** increasing motivation for action
- ▶ **2 violence prevention and gender equity information sessions** delivered
- ▶ **greater impact through intersectionality.** We're Game brings together community and women's health, leisure centres, sports clubs, local government, state sporting associations, research partners and community

Where can we improve?

- ▶ exploring options for future funding for the partnership work to continue to grow

What's next?

- ▶ growing the partnership and the number of organisations contributing to the dataset
- ▶ holding another workshop with partners to aid feedback and capacity building

Partnering to measure social inclusion

Social inclusion is an important part of individual and community mental health and wellbeing. Since 2018, we have partnered with diverse organisations supporting social inclusion and connection in different ways through the Social Inclusion Shared Measurement Program.

This year we took on the lead role of coordinating the program's partnership and resources, focussed on:

- ▶ building our partners' capacity to conduct evaluation of programs
- ▶ embedding shared evaluation questions into partners' monitoring and evaluation activities
- ▶ achieving wider impact by developing processes and resources to collect and share evaluation data

- ▶ advocating for this shared way of working and for our ability to measure social inclusion

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **8 organisations signed partnership agreements**
- ▶ **3 resources developed:** survey guide, data template and data collection notice
- ▶ **2 workshops held with partners,** with average of 20 attendees
- ▶ **15 presentations at network meetings** across the region to support participation
- ▶ **suite of 5 questions endorsed by partner organisations** to use to measure social inclusion
- ▶ **24 projects provided data with 642 participant responses** to the suite of questions
- ▶ **71% of participants in partner projects reported improved social inclusion**

- ▶ **Data dashboard developed** to display responses for partners involved in trialling it

- ▶ **4.2/5 rating** of our support by participating organisations
- ▶ **4.6/5 rating** of the overall partnership experience
- ▶ **Selected to present at the Australian Evaluation Society Conference in Brisbane in September 2023**

Where can we improve?

- ▶ exploring options for future funding for the partnership work to continue to grow

What's next?

- ▶ growing the partnership and the number of organisations contributing to the dataset
- ▶ holding another workshop with partners to aid feedback and capacity building

Fostering community leadership and connection

We were excited to continue to engage our broad and diverse communities through our Hello, Merri-bek! program. This one-year project aimed to increase social connections within and between communities; and grow participants' leadership and community mindedness.

This year's Hello, Merri-bek! included two programs:

- ▶ The Great Idea Program invited applications for local community development projects. A selection panel of ten multicultural women chose the three successful projects.
- ▶ The Party Program, a small grants program supported community-led events for International Women's Day (IWD). Event hosts were given \$100 gift cards and an activity pack to support their event.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **33 IWD Party Program events** supported; **686 participants** across the events
- ▶ **IWD party program participants reported:**
 - **76%** increased ability to be a leader
 - **73%** increased their social connections
 - **73%** had more opportunities to be involved in community projects and initiatives
 - **79%** increased their sense of belonging

- ▶ **17 applications received for The Great Idea program**

- ▶ **3 new Great Idea Program initiatives supported:** a Playgroup for Autistic Children, a Wellbeing Program for Women Aged Over 55 and a Women's Social Group

What's next?

- ▶ continuing The Great Idea Program, with a focus on ideas for getting people moving and active in the community

“We love the buzz that these types of events create in our community. We especially love that we can deliver them at low cost but create such a huge impact on each attendee. Everyone felt welcomed and no one felt left out.”

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

We actively partner with universities, hospitals, wider organisations and consumers to support evidence-based practice, improve our services and contribute to sector knowledge.

Our 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. Key research projects this year included:

MARC healthy ageing partnership

We are proud to be the first community health service to partner with the Melbourne Ageing Research Collaboration (MARC).

Led by the National Ageing Research Institute, MARC is a collaboration between health, research, aged care, and advocacy organisations with a shared goal to improve the lives of older people.

It aims to provide practical and innovative solutions to urgent issues affecting older people, their carers and health professionals.

We joined MARC in January 2023 and collaborated on the Prolonged Grief In Older People (PG65+) resource development project.

Prolonged grief disorder affects 21% of bereaved older people.

In conjunction with MARC, we developed a training resource to help aged care staff recognise the signs of prolonged grief disorder and support older people effectively.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **co-designed 10 micro-learning lessons on prolonged grief disorder of 5-10 minutes each, which were developed and published on the EdApp mobile app**

- ▶ **provided feedback on content development, and were actively engaged in testing the usability and acceptability of this new micro-learning resource**
- ▶ **improved staff knowledge about prolonged grief disorder, and increased confidence in supporting older adults with prolonged grief after using the EdApp micro-learning resource**
- ▶ **found the app is user-friendly and delivers learning efficiently**

Where can we improve?

- ▶ not all staff members who registered for the training completed the micro-learning lessons. In future, we will look at different ways to better engage staff in training

What's next?

- ▶ supporting more Merri Health staff to complete the micro-learning lessons on prolonged grief disorder
- ▶ applying the micro-learning approach to more topics such as lessons on preventing falls at home for our aged care community
- ▶ modifying the lessons so they can be made available to consumers as well as staff



MOTION reducing knee replacements

MOTION is a two-year collaborative research trial we are working on led by La Trobe University, and St Vincent's Hospital. MOTION stands for Monitoring the Influence of Care for patients with knee osteoarthritis.

It aims to reduce the need for knee joint replacement surgeries and the hospital burden through exercise and education.

We have been involved with the research trial planning since 2019 until MOTION's commencement in 2022. We are collaborating with St Vincent's Hospital on the RISK: Reducing Inappropriate Surgery of the Knee component of the trial.

This involves delivering a community-based OsteoArthritis Hip and Knee Service (OAHKS) assessment service, non-operative management programs, and referrals to other Merri Health services.

What did we achieve?

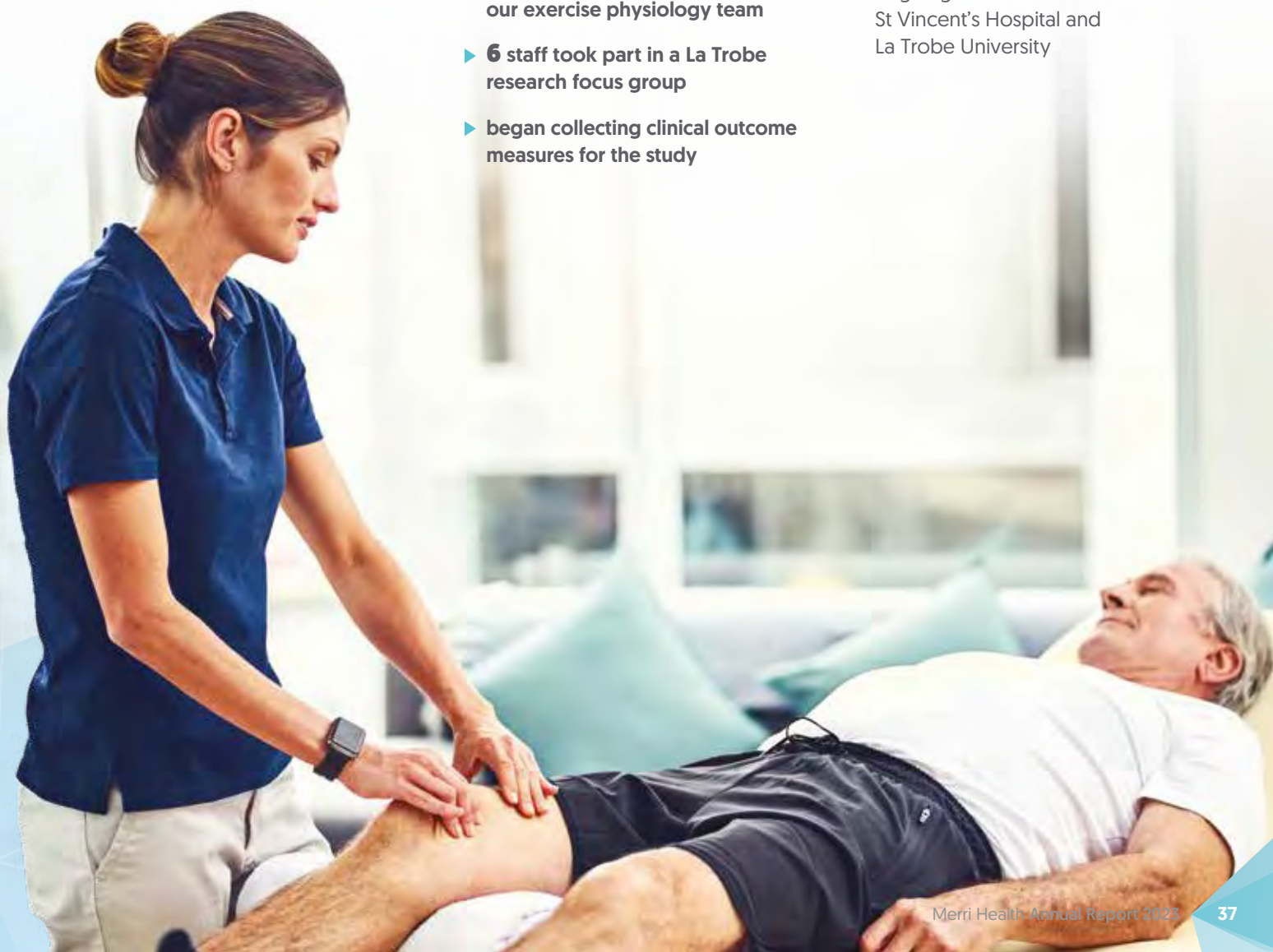
- ▶ **developed treatment and escalation pathways for clients attending Merri Health for the MOTION project**
- ▶ **New referral pathways for consumers aged 65 years+ via My Aged Care**
- ▶ **provided clinical assessment and intervention with MOTION pathways, evidence-based practice with the OAHKS assessment, and intervention and assessment by physiotherapists and dietitians**
 - **30 clients had been referred and received care by September 23**
- ▶ **Good Life with osteoArthritis Denmark (GLA:D® is a not-for-profit initiative led by La Trobe University) education and exercise group recommenced in Brunswick in response to consumer demand**
- ▶ **supported the recredentialing of all our current GLA:D credentialed staff, and trained 6 new staff and our exercise physiology team**
- ▶ **6 staff took part in a La Trobe research focus group**
- ▶ **began collecting clinical outcome measures for the study**

Where can we improve?

- ▶ it was challenging providing services within the timeframe of the study for My Aged Care referrals. Partnering with St Vincent's to identify the challenges helped us design a process to benefit clients, and the referrer
- ▶ limited referrals have come from St Vincent's Hospital, which means we haven't yet reached the target number of participants for our recruitment phase

What's next?

- ▶ completing the recruitment phase of the project
- ▶ providing ongoing clinical service to clients via the MOTION pathways
- ▶ completing OAHKS review at four months and 12 months to assess our outcomes; data collection for will be completed in December 2024
- ▶ ongoing collaboration with St Vincent's Hospital and La Trobe University



CARER SUPPORT

Increasing support for unpaid carers across Victoria who care for family members, friends or neighbours who are frail due to age, disability, mental or chronic illness. We provide a range of services through federal and state funding.

Supporting unpaid carers across Victoria

We are in our third year of leading a partnership of seven health organisations to deliver Carer Gateway services in Victoria with Alfred Health, Grampians Health, Barwon Health, Bendigo Health Care Group, FamilyCare, and Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Ltd.

Funded by the Federal Government, Carer Gateway provides counselling, respite care, group support, coaching and more for unpaid carers.

This year we have focused on reviewing and building our collaboration strategy with consortium partners, our Carer Advisory Group (CAG) and our Young Carer Advisory Group; continued marketing to raise awareness and referrals; and further developing our systems, processes and staff capacity.

This has resulted in an increase in the number of carers accessing Carer Gateway's services, expansion of our carer coaching, in-person peer support services and improved data and reporting.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **17,696** carers received a service, up 1.56% from last year
- ▶ **14,417** new clients registered
- ▶ **23,779** carer support planning sessions conducted, up 13.6% from last year
- ▶ **24,563** tailored support package services created
- ▶ **11,394** emergency respite services provided
- ▶ **56,381** intake calls received, with an average wait time of 45 seconds each
- ▶ training about advocacy and engaging stakeholders delivered to **12 people**: 9 Carer Advisory Group (CAG) members and 3 staff

- ▶ launched Rainbow Crew LGBTIQ+ peer support group with Alfred Health
- ▶ creative collaboration between the Young Carer Advisory Group, Visible, headspace and artist Ziggy Grana
 - to create illustrations highlighting responsibility and identity in young carers that showed at the Gertrude Street Projection Festival
- ▶ **265** carer engagement presentations delivered across the state
- ▶ **4** prominent state-wide carer expo engagement opportunities with Victorian carers
 - Care & Ageing Well Expo, Melbourne Care Expo, Melbourne Disability Expo, Midsumma Festival



- ▶ **102 local events** – supported consortia partners with planning and coordination of events. These included LGBTIQ+, CALD, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Mental Health and Young Carer focused events
- ▶ **5 roadshows planned for future delivery and 2 roadshows planned and delivered across regional Victoria, reaching more than 250 carers**
 - in: Pakenham, Bairnsdale, Morwell, Bendigo, Ballarat
- ▶ **1500+ carers reached state-wide via in-person engagement at events/expos.** Of these, 20% - 30% of carers instantly registered for a call-back from our Intake team. This has directly contributed to the increase of new carer registrations
- ▶ **strong collaboration and partnership** with our consortia allows us to identify the diverse needs of carers and tailor our services to meet these needs

Where can we improve?

- ▶ linking more carers into peer support groups will help carers to connect with other carers in their local community in a safe and inclusive environment
- ▶ carers lives are busy and can be unpredictable. We are implementing ways to combat difficulties in attending events, for example, hybrid meetings/ events and supporting with transport needs
- ▶ young carers need a space to thrive, and we are working towards expanding the types of services and supports they need

What's next?

- ▶ recruitment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Advisor to identify how the Carer Gateway can better engage with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and provide appropriate supports and services
- ▶ establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group

- ▶ upgrading our contact centre, including live chat, in response to feedback about service accessibility from the Young Carer Advisory Group. This will also benefit people with hearing and/or speech impairment further increasing the ways in which carers can engage with Carer Gateway
- ▶ establish additional In-person Peer Support groups (IPPS) – general, young carer and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander centrally run and facilitated by counsellors/ psychologists
- ▶ improved pro-active monthly feedback processes on customer experiences
- ▶ launching Palliative Care carer support
- ▶ Intranet to improve partner communications

“The Carer Gateway team were very helpful... I don’t know what I would have done without the support provided by the Gateway team.”

– carer

“I am deeply grateful and satisfied with the exceptional service and support provided.”

– carer



Carer Gateway empowers carer to pursue her passions: THUC'S STORY

Thuc, a carer from Melbourne's West, put her personal interests on hold for 13 years for her caring role. As her children got older and she had more capacity, she began to look for support. With the help of Carer Gateway, Thuc has embarked on a journey to reignite her artistic passion.

After registering and working with the free coaching service for carers, she identified reactivating her art practise as a personal goal.

Along with working on her own art pieces, Thuc wants to be part of the art community. Together with her coach, she identified several art hubs she could join to meet other like-minded artists.

Thuc is well on her way to reaching her goals. Thuc has expressed feeling like she has 'started her life again', and says she is also enjoying her day-to-day life more. Thuc's ultimate goal is to have her own art exhibition.

Thuc showcases her artwork.



Supporting unpaid carers in the North and West

Nearly 200,000 people provide unpaid and often unrecognised care to family members or loved ones in Melbourne's North and West. Our catchment area covers 13 local government areas.

We support carers in our community directly through Carer Services. Programs underway include Carer Gateway, the Support for Carers Program (SCP), Northern Respite Services (NRS), and Mental Health Community Support Services (MHCSS).

We undertake needs assessments and goal planning, and provide information and referrals, in-home services such as respite and personal care, carer coaching, carer counselling, equipment and vouchers, and health and wellbeing items. We also run a range of groups, events and activities.

This year we focused on increasing the number of carers supported through Carer Gateway, improving our service quality, systems and processes, restructuring and consolidating the program, implementing changes in response to state government recommissioning, and monitored Aged Care Reforms for impact on our NRS service.



What did we achieve?

- ▶ **3,289** carers supported
- ▶ **12,063** hours of SCP services, 134% of our annual target – provided to 749 distinct carers – that's 166% of our annual target!
- ▶ **358** mental health carers supported by our MHCSS program, 450% of our annual target!
- ▶ **2,276** carer counselling sessions, **1,389** carer coaching sessions delivered by Carer Gateway

- ▶ **300+** carers joined and are actively using our WhatsApp carer groups
- ▶ **509** carers referred to peer-support groups
- ▶ **188** events and activities for priority groups including Seniors Week Mingle, Koorie Carers Lunch, Rainbow Crew activities, Mindfulness Meditation workshops and art therapy. These boost carers' connection and wellbeing.
- ▶ **83** 'About us' presentations to community groups, external providers, carer-led support groups, healthcare professionals, councils, schools, network groups

Where can we improve?

- ▶ supporting even more carers under Carer Gateway to meet our target
- ▶ linking more carers into peer support groups will help carers to build support networks around them and connect with others in similar circumstances
- ▶ maintaining healthy staffing and resourcing levels to support carers quickly and maintain a positive workforce



Merri Health staff and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Koori Carers Lunch.

What's next?

- ▶ linking carers into services and supports more quickly by booking appointments for a holistic assessment at the intake and registration stage
- ▶ increasing brokered services such as respite and in-home supports
- ▶ increasing the number of carers being successfully linked into peer support groups
- ▶ offering regular fun and engaging activities and special events for carers and their families

“Free help from a genuinely caring team. The cost of medical attention especially mental health is so incredibly high that this program makes it possible for a ‘me’ experience too.”

– Mindfulness Meditation workshop participant

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Supporting parent bonding and the health and wellbeing of children from early childhood to schooling.

Strengthening parenting teams

Research shows that babies do better when parents co-operate and manage their stress.

Family Foundations is an evidence-based 10-week program that supports families expecting or caring for a baby aged up to 12 months. Social work or counselling professionals use discussion-based activities, modelling, and skills practice to strengthen the parenting team.

Specific skills include: emotional regulation, stress management, conflict resolution, attachment, healthy communication, co-parenting, and problem solving.

This year we were able to return to face-to-face delivery. We introduced group programs for the first time, and a short-term counselling service for couples requiring additional support. We also continued to work with our evaluation partner Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) to assess outcomes.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **200+** families took part, 25% increase on the year prior
- ▶ **78%** completed all 10 sessions
- ▶ **4-5** new intakes per week [average]

- ▶ **launched weekend group sessions** to make the program more accessible for working families
- ▶ **completed phase II evaluation report with MCRI; participants reported:**
 - statistically significant and meaningful changes in co-parenting relationships, mental health, and parenting
 - decrease in depressive, anxiety and stress symptoms, parental conflict, harsh parenting behaviour, infant sleep and crying problems for mothers
 - increase in co-parenting behaviour, parenting confidence, and warm parenting behaviour for mothers
 - decrease in parental conflict, harsh parenting behaviour, and infant crying problems for fathers
 - increase in parenting confidence for fathers

▶ commenced phase III evaluation of Family Foundations

- ▶ **began consultation with First Nations organisations** to determine if the program is culturally appropriate and safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Where can we improve?

- ▶ increasing capacity will help to meet the program's growing waitlist
- ▶ offering the weekend program as a regular option to individual families and in a group setting will help to make it more accessible, for example to working families

What's next?

- ▶ securing funding beyond the end of 2024
- ▶ completing consultation and a report on the appropriateness of Family Foundations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- ▶ continuing to advocate for Family Foundations perinatal care
- ▶ building networks with maternity education and other key areas
- ▶ completing Phase III evaluation in collaboration with MCRI

“We were able to bring all our issues into the sessions. Taking part was a good challenge for me, because it pushed me out of my comfort zone and made me start exploring new areas in myself and our relationship.”

– Abdul Motraje



Building the foundations for a happy family life together: OLIVIA AND ABDUL'S STORY

Olivia Gao and Abdul Motraje learned about the Family Foundations program on social media, and joke that it probably saved their marriage.

The program gave the pair some useful tools and support for navigating life's new challenges, and helped them feel less alone.

They had been together for six years and married for nearly four, but the arrival of a baby and the transition into parenthood, in a new city with no family support, was stressful.

"We had a very strong relationship before the baby came. I never anticipated that things would change so much when we had a baby," says Olivia. "We went being so close to all of a sudden feeling so tired and far apart. Even basic things like eating dinner together and sleeping together – gone. We turned on each other because we didn't have anyone else to turn on."

"We were able to bring all our issues into the sessions. Taking part was a good challenge for me, because it pushed me out of my comfort zone and made me start exploring new areas in myself and our relationship," says Abdul.

"It was very nice to have some outside direction when entering unfamiliar territory. The dark side of parenting is ignored or not really talked about in the community, but we quickly realised other couples were having similar experiences."

Making friends with other new parents was an unexpected bonus. Both would recommend the course to others.

You really have nothing to lose by taking part," says Abdul. "It's free, and you can take your baby along with you. It has made a huge and positive difference in our marriage and growing family."



Supporting children in Regional Victoria

Our Ovens Murray Early Childhood service in partnership with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) support children who are younger than 6 with development delays, and children younger than 9 with a disability and their families to access the right supports and services when they require it.

This year we focused on building parent and carer capacity to maximise support for their child from mainstream services and NDIS plans.

We also worked to build inclusion of children with social-emotional support needs in early childhood and education settings.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **620+** children and their families supported
- ▶ **increased support required for growth of complex plans being developed** and more people needing support in the region
- ▶ **50+** playgrounds assessed for accessibility
- ▶ **commenced development of an easy-to-read information package** on accessible playgrounds in the Ovens Murray Region

Where can we improve?

- ▶ staffing remained a challenge, however we were able to recruit for three vacant positions

What's next?

- ▶ supporting children and their families transition to a new NDIS computer system and processes to improve the experience of people in this region accessing the scheme
- ▶ continue to help children and their families access supports as they need it



Stories for kinder kids affected by floods

When floods ravaged North Eastern Victoria in October 2022, many children experienced devastating impacts including:

- ▶ **evacuating their homes**
- ▶ **seeing their kindergarten services destroyed**
- ▶ **their kindergarten closing for safety reasons**
- ▶ **seeing unusual activities such as emergency services in the streets and sandbagging**

To support their mental health, we developed social stories and resources for kindergarten children, their families and their teachers.

Written in simple language with pictures, social stories explain situations and give children coping strategies to help them make sense of challenging feelings and experiences.

We also developed a tip sheet to parents to talk to their children about the floods.

The resources were distributed to kindergartens in the Goulburn region and Ovens Murray region and shared to reach broader regions of Victoria and Southern New South Wales.



Aftermath of the floods damaged local kindergarten's playground and equipment.

Partnering to improve outcomes for young students

This year we launched our new School Ties program to help address the impacts of Covid-19 for students from Foundation to Grade 3 in Metropolitan Melbourne, particularly in north Merri-bek.

School Ties addresses the needs of families, schools, and community organisations and is funded through a 12-month Federal Government COVID Recovery Grant.

We partnered with schools, local organisations and our community to improve academic growth, school engagement and student wellbeing.

The program included educational and wellbeing innovations and interventions for students, professional development workshops for school staff, and support for Community Champions – community leaders who help us to share information with the community about services and supports for children and families.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **10 primary schools** and **4 community organisations** in Merri-bek funded to take part in School Ties
- ▶ **3 community-based activities** for parents, carers and children in northern Merri-bek initiated and led by champions in our community
- ▶ **100+ school staff attended professional development workshops delivered by School Ties**, covering a range of topics about the impact of COVID-19 interruptions to student learning

Where can we improve?

- ▶ continuing to build on relationships with Primary Schools to grow and support initiatives that improve the health and wellbeing of children and keep communities connected

What's next?

- ▶ continuing to support students by delivering activities in schools and through community organisations

“Oh wow! The program is AMAZING. My kids and I loved it. In fact, my kids wait for Wednesday. They have made new friends and even found some old ones.”

– Parent, Handwriting Support Workshop

Primary school children practising their handwriting at School Ties workshop.



CHRONIC CONDITIONS

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

Easing the burden of chronic pain

An estimated 3.2 million adults live with chronic pain in Australia. In addition to discomfort, they face an increased risk of anxiety, depression, social isolation, and low self-esteem.

Our free Chronic Pain Service (CPS), supported by the North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network (NWMPHN), provides innovative, integrated and responsive care in the community to improve long-term health and wellbeing outcomes for clients, and reduce hospital waiting lists.

It gives consumers the tools to manage their pain, using a variety of tailored, evidence-based approaches.

This year we focused on making chronic pain care more accessible to our diverse communities, improving physical and mental wellbeing through an evidence-based, multidisciplinary self-management program, and developing links with more services to expand the CPS' reach and support a more integrated approach to pain care.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **117 new patient referrals;** increasing total clients supported to nearly 300 in 3 years
- ▶ **83% of patients reported making at least some overall improvement**
- ▶ **77.8% reported improvement in their physical abilities**
- ▶ **60% reported clinically significant improvement in anxiety**

- ▶ **72.7% made a clinically significant improvement in how pain interferes with their daily life**
- ▶ **16.5 median wait times,** down from 28 days last year
- ▶ **98.7% of wait times under 3 months,** 1.5% improvement on last year and significantly lower than the national average [55.7%].
- ▶ **99 clients born outside Australia, representing 41 countries;** 1% were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, 1.2% had refugee status, 2.8% of clients were gender diverse
- ▶ **100% CPS client survey respondents said CPS positively influenced other areas of their life, work and/or relationships**
- ▶ **100% would recommend the service to a friend**

Community members participated in our free Chronic Pain Service.



- ▶ funding extended by the NWPHN until July 2024 in recognition of its innovation and effectiveness.
- ▶ developed a Chronic Pain Peer Support Group in partnership with the Australian Pain Management Association [APMA] to support people completing CPS
- ▶ collaborated with GPs, private clinics, tertiary hospitals, NWMPHN, and other community organisations to share information and support referrals

Where can we improve?

- ▶ increasing targeted communication and engagement with GPs and stakeholders in LGAs with lower referral rates
- ▶ recruitment of allied health and psychology positions remains challenging. We reviewed our position descriptions and used social media advertising platforms to address this

What's next?

- ▶ continuing to work with the NWMPHN on funding opportunities
- ▶ further building referral pathways with tertiary hospital partners
- ▶ running a monthly peer support group with a trained facilitator who graduated from our program
- ▶ facilitating more education talks for peer support groups, in partnership with APMA
- ▶ presenting our work at an education seminar for GPs to increase awareness and referrals

Preventing diabetes with education

An estimated one in 20 people in Merri-bek live with diabetes. By providing diabetes information sessions to our community, we raise awareness of the risk factors and strategies to delay or prevent type 2 diabetes.

This year we partnered with Merri-bek libraries and neighbourhood houses to deliver sessions in different locations to reach as many people as possible. Run by a multidisciplinary team, they provide practical tips for consumers to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **4 workshops delivered**
- ▶ **87.5% of participants said they better understand how to reduce their risk of developing type 2 diabetes**
- ▶ **77% of participants said they better understand the risks of type 2 diabetes**
- ▶ **87.5% of participants agreed the session was a positive step towards a healthier lifestyle**

- ▶ **3 attendees from the sessions registered with Merri Health** and began accessing our services

Where can we improve?

- ▶ stronger marketing to reach more people who might benefit from these sessions
- ▶ we recognised that holding information sessions at our sites was a barrier to community accessibility, so we partnered with neighbourhood houses and saw a rise in attendance

What's next?

- ▶ delivering four sessions next year in priority locations, including Glenroy and Fawkner Neighbourhood Houses
- ▶ reviewing referral data to track participants who access our services after attending a diabetes session
- ▶ communicating with GPs to raise awareness of the information sessions
- ▶ creating a diabetes clinic for the community

“This program is amazing and has been life changing. This isn’t common knowledge and nothing I could find on Google could teach me what I learnt through this program. I am very grateful for this opportunity.”

– CPS participant

“It was very effective! It has greatly helped me in managing my stress and anxiety related to pain, and as a consequence reduced the pain itself.”

– CPS participant

Hospital partnership easing back pain

One in six Australians have back problems, with 750 people per 100,000 hospitalised.

The Back Assessment Clinic (BAC) has been running in partnership with the Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH) since 2016. As a tertiary partner the RMH clinic offers local care in the community and helps to reduce the burden on the hospital system.

The BAC is held weekly with a consultant rheumatologist, a registrar, and advanced practice physiotherapists who provide timely assessment and collaborative management for people with back pain.

This year we continued to support the accessible clinic for our community, and offered a referral pathway into Merri Health services to holistically aid client health and wellbeing.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **700+ clients attended in 2023**, up from 600 in 2022
- ▶ **BAC extended to 2025**; capacity to support 2 extra clinic spaces confirmed August 2023 to meet increased demand, demonstrating the community benefits from our close partnership with a key tertiary hospital
- ▶ **multiple client referrals made from BAC to Merri Health services and other local services**

Where can we improve?

- ▶ creating more pathways will support clients referred from BAC to Merri Health via My Aged Care (MAC) for older clients in a timelier manner
- ▶ using RMH hardware at Merri sites proved challenging at times, but working in partnership with RMH IT has supported this and reduced consumer impacts

What's next?

- ▶ measuring outcomes and impact on BAC clients who are referred on to our services

“It’s a great clinic and so easy to access rather than travelling into the city which is hard with my condition.”

– BAC client

“What a well-run clinic with a fast turnaround from referral to appointment – I thought I was going to have to wait years!”

– BAC client

Reducing respiratory and heart hospital admissions

We provide the Hospital Admission Risk Program (HARP) Complex Care service in partnership with The Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH) and cohealth to help clients better manage their chronic heart failure and respiratory conditions in the community, and reduce avoidable hospital admissions.

The goal is for clients to manage their health independently at home and in the community.

HARP supports clients with care coordination, evidence-based care from nurses and allied health staff,

1:1 home and community visits, weekly rehabilitation groups; working closely with clinics at the RMH, the wider health system and community medical practitioners.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **35 patients successfully completed the pulmonary rehabilitation program.**
Of those clients:
 - **88%** showed improvement in wellbeing and overall condition management
 - **86%** reduced their Hospital Anxiety Depression Scale (HADS) depression score
 - **71%** improved their 6 metre walk test
 - **52%** reduced their HADS anxiety score
- ▶ **42 exercise sessions and 20 education sessions provided through our Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program**
- ▶ **9% overall increase on targets from last financial year**
- ▶ **exceeded targets by 42% for the CHF Program**
- ▶ **exceeded targets by 26% for the Respiratory Program**

Where can we improve?

- ▶ the Diabetes Coordination Service transitioned from Merri Health to RMH, impacting the team. Through advocacy RMH has agreed to continue to provide local community services from our sites to limit the impact to our clients

What's next?

- ▶ measuring outcomes and impact for clients from a clinical outcome perspective to demonstrate HARP's clinical significance and community impact
- ▶ working with RMH on model of care recommendations for the future, which will include demand increase for the service, increased complexity of the client cohort and supporting processes and infrastructure

Strengthening our prevention and chronic illness care model

We began the Prevention and Chronic Illness Care (PCIC) Model of Care project in 2021. Through it we are identifying the strengths of our work in this area, and opportunities for improvement so that we can continue to support clients with best practices in the future.

We work to deliver our services in line with evidence-based care and treatment for people in our community who are at risk of or who have existing health and chronic conditions. This support targets a wide range of client needs, including musculoskeletal conditions, diabetes and respiratory and cardiac conditions.

Alongside continuing to provide person-centered care, this year we have focused on improving key PCIC processes. We have implemented an integrated initial needs assessment, case conferencing, and risk stratification, and captured data to monitor the success rate of our changes and their benefits to our clients.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **integrated Initial Needs Assessment embedded into PCIC practice**
- ▶ **commenced case conferencing**
- ▶ **created monitoring systems to assess our service improvements, including an evaluation template and pending dashboard**

Where can we improve?

- ▶ continuing to provide the very best care while also implementing changes to PCIC processes and procedures

What's next?

- ▶ continuing to embed the identified changes to PCIC processes and monitor the improvements via our dashboard
- ▶ developing a satisfaction survey to measure self-reported experiences from PCIC clients

DISABILITY

Supporting people with a disability to live life to the fullest with more independence and control.

Supporting people with a disability

Under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), people with disability receive a plan of funded supports they can use to purchase services that support them to enjoy an improved quality of life.

Merri Health has delivered NDIS services since 2016 offering Early Childhood Early Intervention through MerriKids, Allied Health, and psychosocial support groups through the Healthy Mind Hub.

Despite significant efforts over many years, the complex pricing structure of the NDIS remained a critical challenge.

After seven years supporting NDIS clients, we made the difficult decision to stop delivering in 2023, due to the ongoing challenges of making the program financially viable, whilst delivering high-quality services.

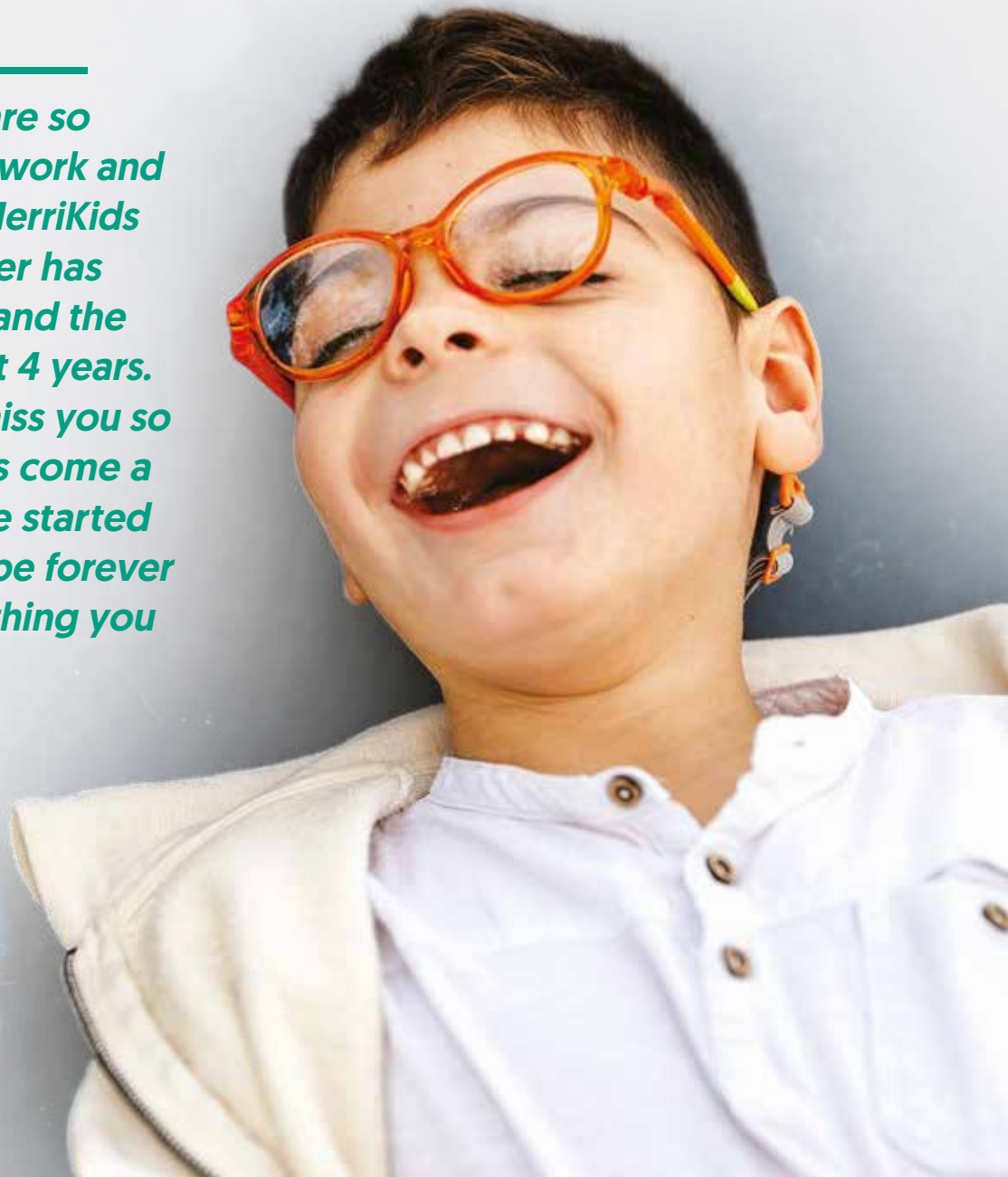
We worked closely with our clients to support their move to another NDIS provider of their choice.

We also supported staff to transition to new roles at Merri Health or other organisations.

We are proud of what we have achieved for people with disability who have accessed our NDIS services and remain committed to supporting people with a disability to live fulfilling and happy lives, and ensuring our services, spaces and communications are inclusive and accessible.

“My family and I are so grateful for all the work and support that our MerriKids OT and Key Worker has provided my son and the family over the last 4 years. We are going to miss you so much. Our son has come a long way since we started together and will be forever grateful for everything you have done.”

– MerriKids client



What did we achieve?

- ▶ **133 clients supported**
 - **54** from MerriKids
 - **79** from NDIS Allied Health
- ▶ **redistributed our toys, books and resources**
 - within Merri Health, to local kindergartens and childcare centres and equipment libraries, and to MerriKids families in need

Challenges

- ▶ due to ongoing challenges in the NDIS pricing structure, we made the difficult decision to stop delivering NDIS Services in January 2023

What's next?

- ▶ continuing to support children aged birth to six with a developmental delay or disability and their families in the Ovens Murray region as the Early Childhood Partner for Early Childhood Early Intervention services

Better outcomes through prevention

Our Supported Residential Services (SRS) Support Program assists people living in pension-level SRSs in the Northern Metropolitan Region to manage their health and wellbeing, connect with their community, and engage with meaningful and enjoyable activities.

The program supports residents who are frail or have a disability and need support in everyday life.

Our focus this year was on preventive healthcare through educating residents about dental hygiene, healthy eating and completing skin checks.

Skin cancer was of particular concern at one location, as residents were not receiving skin checks from their GP.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **successfully completed checks at Lalor Skin Cancer Clinic** and achieved excellent preventive health outcomes for over 50% of the consumers who attended.

Of the **25** residents from one SRS location who agreed to a full skin check:

- **10** had excisions
- **1** was diagnosed with skin cancer
- **1** had a melanoma
- **2** were caught just in time

- ▶ **216** residents of all **7** SRS locations were provided with dental care kits and access to dental hygiene education sessions in partnership with cohealth
- ▶ **20** residents attended workshops on healthy eating and diabetes
- ▶ residents in **2** SRS locations were given a healthy-swap key chain to support healthy food choices when eating fast food

Where can we improve?

- ▶ partnering with our allied health services to foster educational opportunities will help us to better support residents' ongoing health needs

What's next?

- ▶ monitoring all SRS locations to ensure that dental products are available to residents or to encourage residents to purchase them
- ▶ partnering with the Living Well, Ageing Well program to deliver workshops on Food and Mood at each SRS
- ▶ liaising with GPs and skin cancer clinics to ensure residents' skin cancer checks are completed

DENTAL SERVICES

Dental care, treatment and education for children and adults.

Delivering smiles across our community

We helped a record number of people across Merri-bek to safeguard their dental health this year.

We expanded our Smile Squad program, which provides free dental care to government primary and secondary school students in partnership with Dental Health Services Victoria.

Our voucher program initiative also encouraged more adults to access our dental care.

We also focussed on improving our service by upgrading our sterilisation room facilities and adding oral health educators to our clinical workforce.

A key performance measure is how quickly we respond to dental emergencies. We report on this using a Dental Health Services Victoria tool that classifies patient needs as category 1-3 according to urgency.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **3,717** people accessed our dental services, up 24.9% from last year
- ▶ **98% infection control result – exceeding 95% target**
- ▶ **low prescriptions given**, showing that our clinicians have a great understanding of antimicrobial stewardship principles
- ▶ **92% triage compliance for Category 2 emergencies – exceeding 80% target**
- ▶ **85% triage compliance for Category 3 emergencies – exceeding 75% target**
- ▶ **1,000 children from 9 schools received Smile Squad dental care**
- ▶ **7 new Smile Squad staff members recruited**
- ▶ **completed the refurbishment of a new sterilisation room**
- ▶ **hosted the Victorian Minister of Health on World Oral Health Day** and demonstrated our Smile Squad program

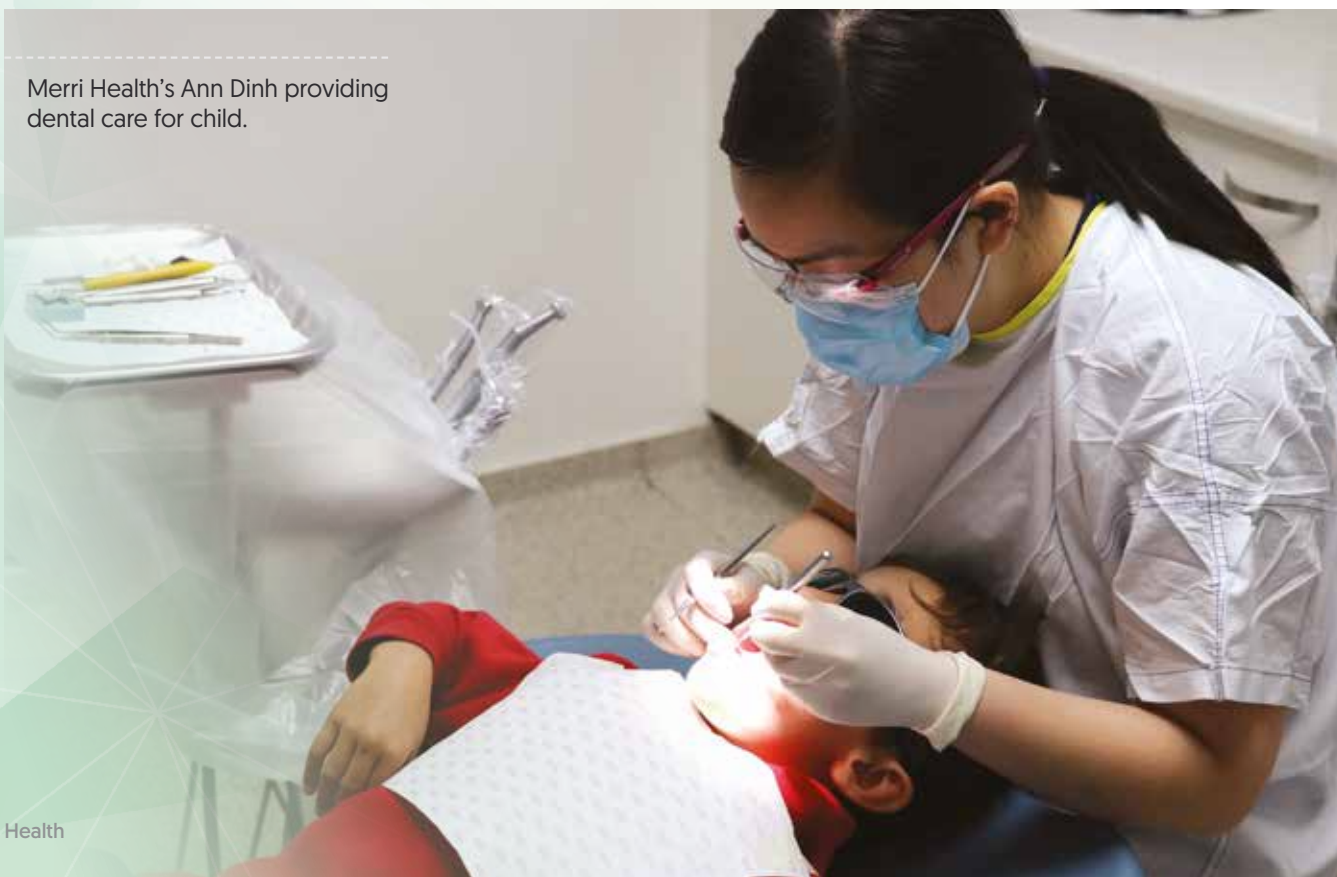
Where can we improve?

- ▶ 78% triage compliance for Category 1 emergencies, slightly short of the target 85%
- ▶ continued advocacy to increase our funding to help reduce waitlists, improve timely access to care and support prevention of oral diseases and early intervention for consumers
- ▶ growing our workforce is an ongoing challenge. We are implementing several strategies to attract experienced staff

What's next?

- ▶ expanding Smile Squad to reach 2,500 students and 20 schools next year
- ▶ exploring other outreach possibilities, including homeless shelters and aged care
- ▶ centralising the sterilisation of reusable medical devices
- ▶ advocating to the State Government for more dental chairs and ongoing funding

Merri Health's Ann Dinh providing dental care for child.





Merri Health General Manager, Healthy Communities, Maryanne Tadic (left), Victorian Health Minister, Mary-Anne Thomas (second from right), Dental Health Services CEO, Susan McKee (middle) celebrated World Oral Health Day at Glenroy Central Primary School.

School kids get first-ever dental care with Smile Squad

This year, we celebrated a year delivering free Smile Squad dental care for students in Melbourne's North, including many who saw a dentist for the first time.

This included 28 percent of children who signed up for Smile Squad services at Coburg North Primary School, who needed care for more significant dental issues.

At Glenroy Central Primary School, where over 70 percent of students signed up to receive Smile Squad care, 36 percent needed treatments for dental decay and required multiple sessions.

During COVID-19 restrictions some children were unable to access dental appointments, resulting in an increased risk of more serious dental problems.

Merri Health CEO Tassia Michaleas said, "We're proud to celebrate a year of bringing kids the dental care they deserve and need through Smile Squad. Early treatment and education help set children up for lifelong better oral health."

Smile Squad is led by Dental Health Services Victoria and delivered by community dental agencies across the state.



"We're proud to celebrate a year of bringing kids the dental care they deserve and need through Smile Squad. Early treatment and education help set children up for lifelong better oral health."

– Tassia Michaleas, Merri Health CEO

HEALTHY AGEING

We promote healthy ageing in our communities through services that strengthen wellbeing, choice, independence and social connection.

Improving quality and safety of aged care services

We are committed to providing high quality aged care services to our community.

This year we have focused on supporting consumers at home, post-pandemic transitions, using technology to support quality aged care, and incorporating more sustainable services.

Ensuring we remain compliant with changing aged care regulations and Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety [the Commission] recommendations was also a priority and we implemented a range of initiatives in response.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ implemented Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS) and reported 16 incidents, demonstrating our commitment to quality improvement and transparency, as only 25% of providers made a report. Of the incidents, 15 were from our Home Care Packages (HCPs) program, mostly due to missed shifts
- ▶ supported clients to actively participate in Merri Health's Consumer Advisory Committee pilot
- ▶ achieved **100% staffing for our Social Support Programs**, enabling the service to operate at capacity without wait times for consumers

- ▶ **96% productivity level for filled positions in Aged Care Allied Health services, where high service demand continued**
- ▶ **had input into multiple aged care industry consultations and completed a review of our intake processes**

Where can we improve?

- ▶ workforce challenges worsened, with our vacancy rate for allied health and nursing increasing to 17%. We are exploring initiatives to recruit and retain staff
- ▶ the ongoing implementation of the Aged Care Reforms agenda is a challenge, due to changing timelines and priorities

What's next?

- ▶ continuing our implementation of the Aged Care governance improvements
- ▶ developing an Aged Care Advisory Group informed by Merri Health's Consumer Advisory Pilot
- ▶ improving our service model and preparing for the transition to Support at Home Program
- ▶ implementing recommendations from the Aged Care Intake project
- ▶ implementing a new client management system

Keeping older people connected

We support older people and people with dementia aged 65 years+ (and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years+) to stay healthy, active and connected with community through enjoyable and meaningful Social Support Program (SSP) activities.

The client-focused activities support participants to use existing skills, learn new things and achieve personal goals.

A wellness theme recognises client capabilities and encourages their involvement in familiar recreational activities.



Our focus this year was on involving clients in the program review and design process and increasing participation through effective marketing. We introduced several new programs, collaborated with other service units, and successfully grew in-person participation across the programs.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **90.4%** of Commonwealth Home Support Program/ SSP targets reached
- ▶ **cognitive stimulation therapy program delivered in collaboration with Merri Health's Specialist Aged Services (S.A.S).** This evidenced based therapy program supports social engagement and reinforces existing skills for clients living with memory loss

- ▶ **launched new Men's Program to support our growing male client base**
- ▶ **40 clients per week attended new Wednesday Fun Day program** to encourage clients to enjoy a meal and develop friendships together
- ▶ **Weekly Outings Program for clients** to enjoy different scenic destinations and make new friends and connections
- ▶ **131% increase in centre-based respite for carers** from 50 hours per month to 240 from additional respite funding and increased capacity

Where can we improve?

- ▶ more marketing will improve community awareness of the programs

- ▶ staff shortages made meeting client needs such as multilingual language support and funding targets a challenge. Focusing on recruitment will help to overcome this.

What's next?

- ▶ collaborating with other service units to deliver joint programs and create additional referral pathways
- ▶ ongoing marketing and engagement with referral agencies to increase awareness and uptake
- ▶ engaging emerging retirees in the co-design of programs to meet their goals and aspiration
- ▶ developing new programs



“I connect with other people, and I have made new friends that I wouldn't have met if I didn't come to these programs. The staff listen and respect me and welcome me.

I also meet people my age. I get new experiences and go to new places that I have never been to – even though I have always lived in Melbourne. It's like a holiday for me.”

– Rose

Supporting older people with home care

Our Home Care Packages (HCP) support older people with complex or changing care needs to live independently in their homes and community for longer.

This year our youngest consumer was aged 64 years and our oldest was aged 103 years.

Demand for HCPs continued to grow in 2023. To meet demand, we grew and refined our team and systems to improve service delivery,

made our offerings clearer, made our fee structure as competitive as possible.

We also prioritised meeting key milestones of the Aged Care Reforms. This included continuing to prepare for the July 2025 transition to the Support at Home program by improving consumer experiences through the delivery of essential care and services.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **6.2%** increase in HCPs managed
- ▶ **109** new Home Care Agreements signed and **367** people supported through our HCP
- ▶ **109** subcontractor arrangements in place
- ▶ promoted consumer safety and eliminated risk
- ▶ thorough annual compliance, subcontractor performance management and identifying and reporting of serious incidents under the Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS)



Improving quality of life for people with Parkinson's

An estimated four in every 1,000 Australians live with Parkinson's disease, with the incidence increasing to one in 100 for people aged 60+.

This year we launched a Parkinson's Disease Group to support clients living with Parkinson's disease to better manage their condition, improve their quality of life, and connect with peers for support and socialisation.

We co-designed the group with clients, and partnered with Carer

Gateway and Merri Health programs to organise guest speakers on common issues arising from Parkinson's Disease.

The group runs over an 8-week period and takes a multi-disciplinary approach to education and exercise sessions.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **co-designed and launched a Parkinson's Disease group**
- ▶ **12** consumers supported through **3** group programs
- ▶ **24** sessions delivered including:
 - exercise sessions for balance, co-ordination, and strength

– information sessions about maintaining nutrition, swallowing and speech difficulties, energy conservation, managing incontinence, preventing foot problems, and supporting carers

- ▶ **35%** increase reported in client knowledge about available support
- ▶ meaningful improvement achieved in consumers' walking tolerance, balance, and overall confidence to manage their condition
- ▶ all clients found the group beneficial and informative, and enjoyed the social connection
- ▶ some clients wanted to continue with other Merri Health programs

Where can we improve?

- ▶ staff shortages impacted our delivery of essential care and services. Consolidating our team and strengthening internal collaboration will help this
- ▶ embedding the importance of the SIRS by sharing key learnings and improvements through the Aged & Primary Care Quality and Safety Committee meetings

What's next?

- ▶ improving consumer experience from first point of contact by capturing feedback and continuing to build staff capacity to respond
- ▶ continuing to implement the Aged Care Reforms for the transition to Support at Home
- ▶ implementing a new client information management system which will bring all Aged Care Services together
- ▶ increasing marketing to build awareness and client uptake of new HCP

Where can we improve?

- ▶ catering to consumers with different physical needs while maintaining group numbers and safety was a challenge which we addressed by increasing our staff-to-client ratio. We also now encourage carers to accompany clients to the group to maximise outcomes

What's next?

- ▶ delivering 3-4 groups annually to support people with Parkinson's disease
- ▶ promoting the group to relevant stakeholders
- ▶ expanding our service to include clients from other programs

Improving sleep health

Poor sleep can lead to an increased risk of falls, hospital admissions, and residential care placements for older adults. Tertiary sleep services have long wait lists and are not always accessible for our community members. To help overcome these outcomes and barriers to access in our communities, this year we piloted a Sleep Well Group Program.

Developed and run by occupational therapists to improve participants' sleep health and quality of life and to support clients to retain their independence, it is run over eight weekly sessions.

The program is aimed at clients aged 65+, or 50+ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. Through education and scaffolding it supports them to improve and manage their sleep, empowers them to engage in daily activities, and to address issues of low mood and anxiety.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **2 Sleep Well Group Programs delivered, with 8 participants, referred by 3 different Merri Health services**
- ▶ **100% of participants reported they:**
 - would recommend the program
 - were able to do more activities following the program
 - experienced reduced anxiety levels
 - experienced improved mood levels

- ▶ **80% said it helped them manage their sleep challenges**
- ▶ **100% showed improvement in daytime sleepiness**
- ▶ **100% showed an improvement in daily functioning related to sleep**
- ▶ **80% of participants increased their sleep time by an average of 1 hour**
- ▶ **80% had a significant increase in sleep efficiency** (time asleep while in bed)
- ▶ **2 participants with clinical insomnia had no clinically significant insomnia after completing the program**

Where can we improve?

- ▶ training more therapists in sleep interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia will enable us to deliver the program to more than six clients at a time
- ▶ expanding the reach of the program will enable us to help more older adults in our communities

What's next?

- ▶ delivering 3-4 Sleep Well Group Programs next year
- ▶ continuing to expand our referral network internally and strengthening our relationships with tertiary partners such as the Royal Melbourne Hospital Sleep Clinic



“I had the best 8 weeks with group and the staff. I learnt so much about bad sleep habits.”

– Client



“Keep up the good work with the various topics relevant to our lives. Thank you.”

– Scam webinar attendee

Living Well, Ageing Well

Our Living Well, Ageing Well (LWAW) program supports people aged 40 to 65 who experience social isolation or loneliness to increase their confidence and independence to connect with local activities.

This includes supporting people to develop individual goals and access health services, recreational and leisure activities, volunteering opportunities, and life-long learning activities. Establishing meaningful social connections supports their psychological and physical wellbeing.

LWAW also provides education, capacity building and wellness seminars and groups to promote healthy ageing and preventative healthcare.

This year we focused on developing new and meaningful seminars and workshops, engaging consumers with surveys, and strengthening our internal and external partnerships so that we could offer a wider range of topics in our seminar series and reach more people in the northern corridor.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **22 seminars and workshops delivered** – 32% more than last year
- ▶ **402 consumers attended workshops this year** – 57% more than last year
- ▶ **partnered with Ambulance Victoria, NBN, DPV Health, Justice Connect, Local Councils, Local Neighbourhood Houses, and libraries to deliver our seminars**
- ▶ **30 consumers responded to surveys focused on identifying:**
 - themes of interest for consumers to assist review of our seminars/workshops
 - health conditions and topics that consumers were interested in learning about
 - enablers and barriers to access the service (e.g., program cost, mode of service delivery)
 - how to best engage with our consumers and community

Where can we improve?

- ▶ occasionally we had to cancel and reschedule a seminar if a guest speaker or presenter was unexpectedly unavailable, with no back up option in place. This reduced attendance at the rescheduled seminar as some interested community members were not available

What's next?

- ▶ continuing our engagement with stakeholders
- ▶ increasing internal collaboration to deliver more health and wellness seminars
- ▶ increasing community feedback opportunities to better meet the needs of consumers
- ▶ reviewing LWAW eligibility criteria so our programs are open to a larger cohort of the community
- ▶ contingency planning for seminars, identifying internal Merri staff who are trained or skilled in different areas of healthy ageing to actively involve them in LWAW seminars

Leading elder abuse prevention in the North and West

We continued to lead the Elder Abuse Prevention Networks (EAPNs) for the northern and western metropolitan regions.

Together we work to prevent and respond to elder abuse through awareness campaigns, advocacy, community and service provider education.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ led Elder Abuse Prevention Networks (EAPNs) in the northern and western metropolitan regions, supporting **109** members across **74** organisations

- ▶ supported World Elder Abuse Awareness Day:
 - **2,000** people reached via social media campaign
 - **100** showbags shared for members of the western EAPN to support community members
 - **37** community members engaged through event and quiz
- ▶ improved collaboration practices at our bi-monthly network meeting to encourage information sharing and connect professionals across the sector
- ▶ commenced development of an age inclusivity website audit tool to ensure older people can access information they need and aren't excluded from services

Where can we improve?

- ▶ working with industry partners to ensure the elder abuse response system gaps are filled

What's next?

- ▶ continuing our work as the Victorian Government has committed further funding to the Elder Abuse Prevention Networks through to July 2027
- ▶ trialling the age inclusivity website audit tool internally with the goal of sharing learnings across the EAPNs to improve practice across the Regions

Merri Health's Karen Edwards with community member at World Elder Abuse Awareness Day event.



SUPPORTING BETTER MENTAL HEALTH

We continued to meet increased demands for mental health support through tailored, stigma-free support services.

Counselling needs increase

We provide short to medium-term counselling and support services for people experiencing depression, anxiety, relationship difficulties, grief, and other issues. Our support is confidential and culturally respectful.

This year we focused on continuing to provide a client-led, person-centred service, providing counselling via telehealth and in-person to make it more accessible to our community. We also provided group sessions based on the local needs.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **5,000** hours of support provided
- ▶ **400+** clients supported, with almost 50% from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ▶ collaborated with our Allied Health team to develop a group program
- ▶ promoted our 'drop in' duty service to internal and external partners, including Service Access, Allied Health, the Dental Team, the Maternal Child Health Service, and Coburg Library
- ▶ hosted the Mental Health Minister to demonstrate program outcomes and advocate for more mental health community health services

Where can we improve?

- ▶ increasing demand for mental health support placed strain on our services, evidenced by an increased wait list from time to time during the year and a reduction in community support options that we could refer clients to
- ▶ continuing to tailor our services will help to ensure that we are inclusive and responsive to community and individual needs

What's next?

- ▶ developing consumer feedback and evaluation mechanisms
- ▶ continuing to promote our duty service to make sure consumers can access support when they need it
- ▶ exploring options to improving wait times, including offering single sessions or counselling by students on placement
- ▶ developing stronger relationships with internal and external partners to expand our knowledge base and help to meet increased demand for our services from asylum seekers



Good mental health for older adults

Our Stepped Care for Older Adults (SCOA) program is a tailored mental health initiative for people with mild to moderate mental illness, and/or who are at risk of social isolation and loneliness.

The program is for people aged 65+, or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples aged 50+, in Melbourne's Northern and Western Metropolitan areas.

Delivered by experienced mental health clinicians and a community connector, SCOA is free to access. Participants receive one-to-one support and can connect with psychosocial and clinical groups too.

This year we focussed on providing goal-directed mental health support and reducing loneliness in the community, addressing barriers to accessing SCOA for client and increasing awareness to support more referrals.

We also developed a group program to help foster social connections, which was co-designed with our consumers to ensure it met their interests and needs.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **117** new referrals
- ▶ **80%** of consumers reported **reduced loneliness**
- ▶ **8** group programs delivered for exercise, creative art, social walking, and anxiety management
- ▶ **reached people from 25 different countries of origin**
- ▶ **16%** of consumers required **an interpreter**
- ▶ **engaged GP, aged care agencies, aged care mental health services and other key stakeholders** to enhance support for our SCOA consumers
- ▶ **reduced barriers to accessing SCOA by using interpreters, seeing consumers in their homes** to negate mobility and transport issues, and providing psychoeducation in group settings
- ▶ **provided regular program updates and case studies to our reference group for input into quality improvements and more appropriate referrals**
- ▶ **successfully reached consumers in the western region** by delivering SCOA to older adults at the Morton Homestead Play Space in Melton

Where can we improve?

- ▶ most of our referrals come from northern Melbourne. By strengthening relationships with primary health networks and community services in the west, we can better support older adults in that area
- ▶ we have seen a reduction of older adults requiring mild mental health support this year, as mental health needs have escalated since the pandemic. Exploring how to work more effectively in the early intervention and prevention space will help us to better meet the needs of our community

What's next?

- ▶ increasing access to SCOA for residents in the western metro area
- ▶ continuing to address the prevalence of loneliness among older adults with our clinical work
- ▶ continuing to provide evidence-based and time-limited interventions for older adults requiring moderate mental health support

Merri Health CEO Tassia Michaleas and Board Director Ann Taylor welcomed Minister for Mental Health Gabrielle Williams MP and local MP Anthony Cianflone.





Social connection and better sleep: BERNIE'S STORY

Bernie was referred to our Stepped Care for Older Adults (SCOA) program in early 2023 by St Vincent's Hospital.

Bernie has lived in Abbotsford for more than 45 years. Since the passing of his wife, Eva, in 2015, Bernie has experienced grief, anxiety and sleep problems, accompanied by low moods.

Bernie took part in the program's Café and Stroll, Active Body Healthy Mind and Sleep Therapy groups.

He enjoyed them all, but says it was in the Active Body Healthy Mind group that things "started to get interesting" through camaraderie and a lessening of his burdens through shared experiences.

"This was a mixed group of people with complex issues. We all hope to find peace and satisfaction and the probing of our wide range of issues illustrated to many of us that as we take life for granted, we do have these shared problems."

Bernie had his greatest success with the Sleep Therapy Group.

"I didn't realise how many bad habits I had in regard to restful sleep, which took valuable time from my sleep cycle. Now most of the time I am able to sleep without waking a number of times during the night. I'd recommend it to anyone."

He liked the way each course was structured, and enjoyed meeting other people from different cultures

***"Don't give up!
If you recognise that
you have a problem,
don't bottle it up.
Go and see a health
professional, there
is plenty of help out
there. You can do it!"***

– Bernie



and backgrounds. Bernie was even inspired by one new friend to take up piano lessons, which he still enjoys.

He says he'd definitely recommend the program to other older people who are struggling with their mental health.

"Don't give up! If you recognise that you have a problem, don't bottle it up. Go and see a health professional, there is plenty of help out there. You can do it!"

Stepped Care for Older Adults client.



Linking food and mood

Recent evidence shows that high consumption of ultra-processed foods is associated with elevated psychological distress.

In response, we developed Food and Mood, an interactive information session designed by our dieticians to give our community an accessible way to learn about healthy eating, the mind-body connection, and how to make initial steps towards change.

The content focused on gut health and dietary changes, such as increasing plant-based foods into diets, reducing caffeine, sugary foods and fried foods, and healthy snack options for children.

We delivered the workshop to a range of groups in the Merri-bek community, with a focus on women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and youth.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **8 workshops** delivered across **7 venues**, attended by **114 participants**
- ▶ **participants agreed that the workshop:**
 - improved their knowledge on food and mood
 - improved their understanding of what they can do to improve what they eat

- encouraged them to recommend the workshop to others
- met their expectations of what the workshop would cover
- was a positive step towards a healthy lifestyle

- ▶ participants strongly agreed that the information was easy to follow

Where can we improve?

- ▶ a marketing strategy will help to reach a greater number of people in our community
- ▶ improving participant outcome measures to be more accessible and easier for participants to complete will aid feedback
- ▶ improving collaboration with other Merri Health services will help us to streamline our offerings and expand the reach of this program

What's next?

- ▶ delivering more workshops in collaboration with other Merri Health services and community partners
- ▶ reviewing data to track referrals through to our services via the workshop
- ▶ improving connections with other internal programs to provide healthy eating information across the age spectrum and across services

CLOSING THE HEALTH GAP WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

We're closing the health gap through culturally safe and inclusive services and initiatives that promote respect, equity and recognition.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to face poorer health outcomes than non-Indigenous people. We are committed to closing this health gap by creating local environments that are culturally safe and inclusive, and supporting and delivering community health initiatives that promote recognition, respect and equity.

This year we focused on progressing our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), launching cultural awareness training, supporting initiatives to 'change the date' and help our staff and community to learn about the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Voice to Parliament.

Our innovate RAP was launched in 2022 and will be completed in December 2023. Endorsed by Reconciliation Australia, it details 72 actions we have committed to across four focus areas:

Relationships, Respect, Opportunities, Governance. Our RAP formalises and consolidates our ongoing commitment and achievements to date, our partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and opportunities to grow and develop in this important space.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **16,000+** people reached from **71** stories posted across social media, website, newsletters, and intranet via our RAP communications plan
- ▶ **launched our bespoke cultural awareness online training**, mandatory for new staff and all leaders
- ▶ **partnered with Girrawayi Ganyi Consultants to deliver cultural awareness training to 39 staff** to build capacity and culturally safe service delivery
- ▶ **our Board Chair signed the online canvas to support the Uluru Statement from the Heart**
- ▶ **supported Changing the Date by introducing a leave policy for staff to substitute the January 26 public holiday**
- ▶ **updated our cultural leave policy to support First Nations staff to participate in cultural activities**
- ▶ **8 learning sessions about the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Voice to Parliament delivered to staff and Board Directors**
- ▶ **2 local secondary schools supported to increase their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures**
- ▶ **assisted a new nature playgroup to invite Traditional Owners to do a Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony**



Merri Health's Jillian Dent, Board Chair Julie McCormack and Director's Benjamin Maxfield and Ann Taylor celebrated 30 years of The Long Walk with Michael Long.



Where can we improve?

- ▶ increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, students and volunteers at Merri Health
- ▶ building our staff's confidence to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in culturally safe and respectful ways

What's next?

- ▶ continuing staff and community engagement with the Uluru Statement from the Heart
- ▶ increasing relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations
- ▶ reviewing learning opportunities available to staff to improve their confidence in delivering culturally safe services
- ▶ engaging with our community to determine next steps once the RAP is completed in December 2023

Growing awareness of the Voice to Parliament

Reconciliation in Merri-bek aims to increase our community's capacity to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to live free of discrimination, violence, and exclusion, and to have improved mental wellbeing.

Our focus for this year was to increase community understanding about the First Nations Voice to Parliament. This included community engagement activities that informed a communications campaign and a small grants program supporting community-led events during National Reconciliation Week, from 27 May to 3 June.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **13,820** people reached from **25** social media posts about **The Voice**, informed by our engagement activities
- ▶ **569** Northern Merri-bek residents participated in **32** community events, supported by the National Reconciliation Week Party Program
 - hosts received **\$100** and an activity pack to hold parties in people's homes, parks, and a school

- ▶ **50+** community members and **125** staff engaged in discussions and surveys about The Voice
- ▶ **94%** of Party Program participants agreed that it increased their knowledge of a Voice to Parliament and what it means
- ▶ distributed an info sheet about The Voice to staff, community members and via our website
- ▶ strengthened relationships with Reconciliation Victoria, Merri-bek City Council, Sowing Sistas, and Merri-bek Council's First Nations Advisory Committee

Where can we improve?

- ▶ more time and resources will help us to effectively work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and community
- ▶ growing staff members with lived experience will aid meaningful engagement

What's next?

- ▶ recruiting an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander-identifying position to focus our work in schools in 2024

“Attending this chat helped me to explore the topic of The Voice to Parliament more in-depth and helped me to feel clear about the issue and confident to chat with others in my life.”

– Staff member



Reconciliation Australia's Workplace Barometer

This year, for the first time we participated in Reconciliation Australia's Workplace Barometer surveying our staff on their commitment to and understanding of reconciliation.

We learned:

- ▶ **78%** were confident to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a way that is culturally respectful

- ▶ **0%** had seen or personally experienced racism towards Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace in the last year
- ▶ **100%** support promoting and celebrating National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week in the workplace
- ▶ **99%** support partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations or communities
- ▶ **90%** are interested in getting involved with activities that support reconciliation or cultural understanding
- ▶ **91%** support engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses as suppliers
- ▶ **75%** felt our organisation has a strong, visible stance against prejudice and racism internally

LGBTIQ+ COMMUNITIES SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SERVICES

We support LGBTIQ+ consumers and communities by providing safe, inclusive services and partnering with others with shared values.



Merri Health

LGBTIQ+ people experience mental ill health at rates two-four times higher than the broader population. Additionally, many are less likely to access support or services due to fear of discrimination.

As a proud Rainbow Tick Accredited organisation, we are committed to providing safe, inclusive health services, and promoting initiatives that celebrate the contribution of LGBTIQ+ communities and address health inequalities and discrimination.

Our LGBTIQ+ Committee provides valuable guidance and oversight in this space. It is made up of 11 members, including a community representative, who identify predominately with LGBTIQ+ lived experience.

This year we focused on continuing to address health inequities and discrimination, offering tailored support to all who need it, maintaining our Rainbow Tick Accreditation, surveying and upskilling staff, being active with our LGBTIQ+ partners and allies, and growing our own allyship.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ achieved full **3-year** accreditation against the Rainbow Tick standards
- ▶ **190** staff members completed our bi-annual staff survey of LGBTIQ+ inclusive practices – our highest ever completion rate to date
- ▶ delivered ongoing internal training around LGBTIQ+ policy and procedures
- ▶ Rainbow Crew carer peer support group launched
- ▶ completed database inclusive fields project to improve the quality of our databases and build capacity to appropriately and respectfully reflect diverse client identities
- ▶ supported Wear It Purple Day and IDAHOBIT (International Day Against LGBTIQ+ Discrimination) on 26 August 2022 and 17 May 2023 with active involvement
- ▶ joined **5000+** community members to support Midsumma Carnival, celebrating queer, intersex, transgender, bisexual, lesbian and gay culture

Midsumma Carnival 2023.



Growing staff allyship

Our most recent staff survey around LGBTIQ+ inclusive practice shows our commitment to providing services that are inclusive for LGBTIQ+ individuals and to providing a workplace that is inclusive for all employees and volunteers.

We achieved our highest survey completion rate ever this year, with a significant increase in positive responses to the same question in the 2021 survey.

- ▶ **79.53% of staff worked with clients who identify as LGBTIQ+ at Merri Health – up 13.4%**
- ▶ **61.24% rated their knowledge of the needs, barriers and issues affecting the LGBTIQ+ community as ‘somewhat knowledgeable’ – up 17.84%**
- ▶ **72.09% believed there are no barriers for LGBTIQ+ consumers to access services at Merri Health – up 1.5%**
- ▶ **96.13% said they had never experienced discrimination at Merri Health because of their gender identity or sexual orientation – up 2.01%**
- ▶ **79.01% of staff described their gender identity – up 8.18%**

- ▶ **95% said they were not aware of any situations where LGBTIQ+ clients or staff have been discriminated against on the basis of their gender identity or sexuality by Merri Health staff or other clients – up 4.24%**

Where can we improve?

- ▶ meeting consumer demand in a timely fashion is an ongoing challenge, especially as we have limited services and resources for our target communities

What’s next?

- ▶ continuing to partner with our community and community representatives, who are critical to the way we shape and deliver our services into the future
- ▶ engaging with the alcohol and other drug sector partners and advocating for LGBTIQ+ inclusive practices
- ▶ developing stronger partnerships with service providers and community groups
- ▶ continuing to deliver quality services in multiple ways, including outreach, Telehealth and centre-based appointments and services



Rainbow Tick accreditation

We are thrilled to share that when we had our full 3-year accreditation against the Rainbow Tick standards at the end of 2022, we met all standards inclusive of indicators.

The assessors were especially impressed with:

- ▶ **how the way we operate reflects our purpose and values**
- ▶ **the visibility of leadership from our Board, Executive and staff**
- ▶ **our willingness to learn and find ways to do better**
- ▶ **our sector leadership, in terms of practice and development**
- ▶ **our passion for supporting our LGBTIQ+ community and consumers**
- ▶ **our strong commitment to diversity and inclusion**
- ▶ **our quality, safety and risk management, collaboration and networking and community engagement culture and practices**

Where can we improve?

- ▶ supporting staff to report activities and provide relevant information is an ongoing challenge. Updating our reporting tool has made it easier for staff to report; we will continue to focus on this

What’s next?

- ▶ running interactive training sessions to diverse Merri Health teams to help build their reporting capacity



Henry presenting at IDAHOBIT film screening event.

Queer affirming counselling

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

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

Over the past year, demand for Q Health's queer affirming service has increased. This year we focused on providing safe and inclusive support for neurodivergent people and sourcing extra funding to meet demand.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ **29 new LGBTIQ+ consumers entered the Q Health program**
- ▶ **250+ episodes of support delivered, exceeding our target**
- ▶ **hosted a counselling student from the Australian College of Applied Professions** on a very positive six-month student placement

"I am trans. Merri has never judged me, always addressed me using my pronouns and never ever looked at me differently. It makes me feel valued and safe."

– LGBTIQ+ consumer

- ▶ **secured funding for a psychosocial program from North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network (NWMPHN)** to focus on the intersection of mental health, AOD use and neurodivergence within LGBTIQ+ communities
- ▶ **involved in the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association's Sex, Sexuality and Gender Diverse Alcohol and Other Drug Worker's Network**

practical support to clients while they're on the wait list for ongoing support. Our newly NWMPHN-funded psychosocial program will also help to address support needs for some clients

- ▶ increased demand also makes it difficult to refer consumers to other support services in a timely fashion

What's next?

- ▶ additional funding to ensure that we can concentrate on supporting LGBTIQ+ communities with neurodivergence and/or mental health issues who also need help with AOD
- ▶ continuing to provide quality services and advocacy for LGBTIQ+ people

Challenges

- ▶ keeping wait times to a minimum as service demand increases is becoming a challenge. We aim to keep our wait times down by using an active holding model, which provides short term

Connecting queer carers through Rainbow Crew

We partnered with the Carer Gateway Consortia, Alfred Health Carer Services and Uniting Carer Services to launch Rainbow Crew in March 2022.

Rainbow Crew connects LGBTIQ+ carers through monthly catchups online or in-person social events.

The group is inclusive and provides emotional support, with space for everyone to share. It also allows members to create meaningful connections and make potential friendships.

"It's great to be in a group with people who are both carers and queer, because we can all be really upfront and honest about how our lives are going, both in terms of our caring role and also just in terms of dealing with being queer in a world where not everyone is favourable towards queerness."

– Liana, active Rainbow Crew member



CULTURALLY SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SERVICES

We provide information in multiple languages and interpreting services to better service our culturally and linguistically diverse clients.



Interpreter support

The catchment area for Merri services is highly diverse, culturally and linguistically. Interpreter support enables clients to communicate their needs in the language they are most comfortable with and enable them to have meaningful involvement in care planning and making informed choices about their health care.

The demand for over the phone interpreting services has decreased as Covid-19 cases within the community reduced.

What does the data tell us?

In FY 2022/2023:

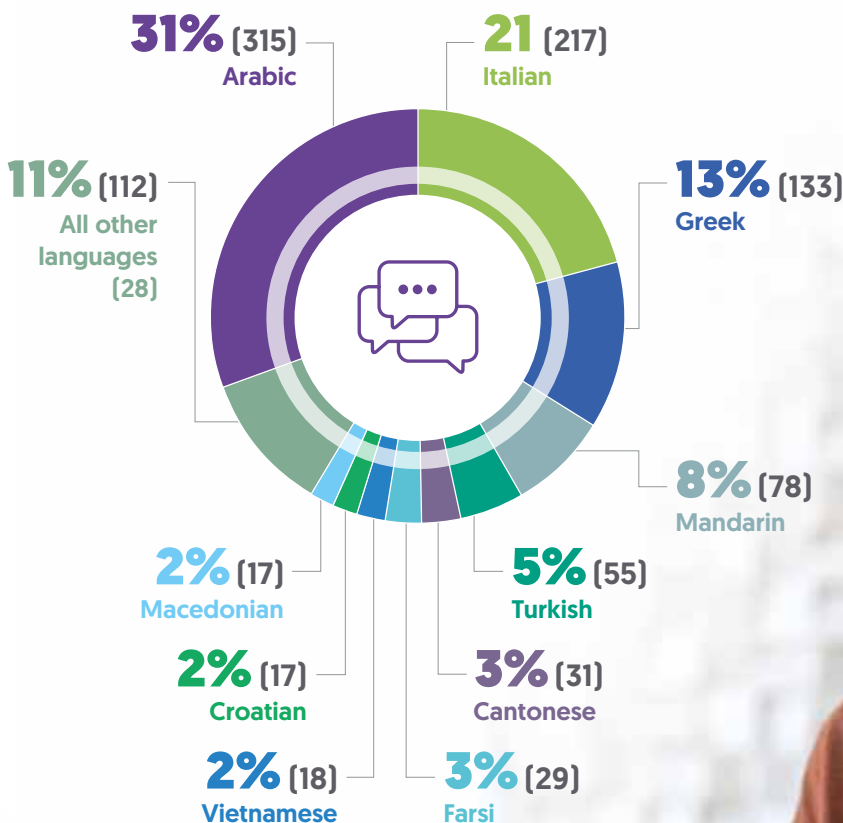
- ▶ **1022 interpreter bookings were completed**, 23% decrease in interpreter services used to due NDIS services ceasing
- ▶ **A 3% increase in Cantonese requested interpreter services**

Interpreter bookings completed

Period	Face-to-face	Telephone	Video	Total
2021/2022	658	665	7	1330
2022/2023	583	437	2	1022
Variance 20/21 + 21/22	-75	-228	-5	-308

Top 10 languages

The top five languages were Arabic (31%), Italian (21%), Greek (13%), Mandarin (8%) and Turkish (5%). Farsi and Vietnamese requests decreased over the past year, while Cantonese requests increased.



ADDRESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE AND GENDER EQUALITY

Merri Health is deeply invested in promoting gender equity, preventing family and gender-based violence, and providing support to people who experience family violence.

One woman is killed nearly every week in Australia due to family violence. Merri Health is deeply invested in supporting people experiencing family violence, and in reducing violence across our communities.

We recognise that gender inequality is a key driver of violence against women and a significant health issue for those who experience discrimination and family violence.

Gender inequality is therefore a priority area for our work, both internally and in the communities we serve.

We're proud to be recognised as an Employer of Choice for Gender Equality by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency – one of only 129 organisations nationally.

Our Family Violence and Gender Equality Committee drives our Family Violence and Gender Equality Strategy and is focused in three strategic areas:

- 1** Leadership, workplace commitment and responsiveness
- 2** Community education and awareness raising
- 3** Workforce and organisational practice

This year we focused on increasing gender equity in a range of ways, with internal and external awareness campaigns, partnerships to prevent gender-based violence through sport, and continuing our leadership of the Elder Abuse Prevention Networks in the Northern and Western Metropolitan Regions.

Panelists at International Women's Day event to support gender equity.



What did we achieve?

- ▶ **Workplace Gender Equality Agency Employer of Choice citation**
- ▶ **21,000** people reached through family violence and gender equality communications plan via social media and newsletters, including internal and external campaigns to support International Women's Day, Elder Abuse Awareness Day, Week Without Violence and 16 Days of Activism
- ▶ **led the Elder Abuse Prevention Networks in the Northern and Western Metropolitan Regions**
- ▶ **recruited an implementation officer to embed the Multi Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) framework across our organisation** and ensured best practice for a sector-wide approach to respond to family violence
- ▶ **partnered with Women's Health in the North, leisure centres, local government and sports clubs on We're Game**, a whole-community initiative aiming to prevent gender-based violence through sport
- ▶ **continued supporting The Orange Door in Hume Merri-bek to co-locate with Merri Health in Coburg**
- ▶ **supported staff to walk in solidarity with victim-survivors and thousands of people across Victoria** to raise awareness of gender-based violence at the 14th Annual Walk Against Family Violence

Leaders #EmbraceEquity in the workplace

Staff members and leaders across Merri celebrated International Women's Day on 8 March at a special panel discussion to champion women's achievements and workplace gender equity.

Five Merri leaders shared their knowledge, insights and 'leadership lessons I wish I knew earlier' to support others navigating their careers and promote workforce gender equity.

The raw, honest and heartfelt discussions included dealing with imposter syndrome, navigating 'failures', caring responsibilities, tackling gender equity and what gives them the confidence to lead.

- ▶ **100% of survey respondents felt the panel discussion provided helpful information for their own careers**
- ▶ **100% would like to attend another similar event**

“Alongside our work, we proudly celebrate initiatives that promote respect for all gender identities, and we're delighted to recognise the unique contributions and achievements of women on IWD.”

– Maryanne Tadic, General Manager Healthy Communities

Partnering with The Orange Door

Merri Health is proudly partnering with The Orange Door to increase support for families experiencing family violence in the Hume Merri-bek area.

The family violence service is now co-located with Merri Health at 21 Victoria Street, Coburg.

The Orange Door is an intake, referral and information service for people who are experiencing or have experienced family violence, and families who need extra support with caring for children. It links clients and workers with the right supports depending on each person's situation.

This partnership has enabled Merri Health's Family Services team to work more closely with The Orange Door.

The team provides comprehensive support to the whole family, who may be experiencing a range of challenges related including mental wellbeing, family violence, child wellbeing, parenting, housing or finances.

The goal of The Orange Door is to streamline the process for people experiencing family violence to gain support by creating a direct linkage to consult.

Standing up for victim-survivors at The Walk Against Violence

Merri Health joined people across the globe to support the 16 Days of Activism initiative that encourages individuals, communities and organisations to address gender inequalities, gender-based violence and take action to prevent violence before it starts.

We united with hundreds of people to raise awareness and walk in solidarity with victim-survivors of gender-based violence at the 14th Annual Walk Against Family Violence.

“We all need to be leaders and stand up for change to eliminate gender-based violence.”

– Carolyn Wallace,
Former General Manager
Family and Community

Staff joined The Walk Against Violence to end gender-based violence.



Supporting victims of violent crime

For 20 years, our Victims Assistance Program (VAP) has offered free support to people who have experienced a violent crime.

We have helped them cope with the effects of a crime, explained 'legal talk', provided practical assistance and connected them with the right services.

Unfortunately, funding changes following a re-tendering process resulted in Merri's VAP services ceasing at the end of the financial year.

VAP has been an exceptionally valued program providing critical support and high-quality services to clients across the Hume and Northern Metropolitan Regions.

What did we achieve?

- ▶ exceeded set targets for numbers of clients from diverse backgrounds:
 - Northern team exceeded their target by an average of 51%
 - Hume team exceeded their target by an average of 49%
 - resulting in more than half of victims serviced by the program being from a diverse background



- ▶ **successfully recruited an Aboriginal Engagement Worker to the Northern team,** which further supported our engagement and support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims and their families
- ▶ **continued to have staff co-locating at a number of police stations across the Northern and Hume regions,** which supported the referral process and the development of positive working relationships with local police

- ▶ **continued funding of Family Violence Practice Lead roles within both teams**
- ▶ **engaged in regular meetings with system service navigators at The Orange Door across the Northern and Hume regions** to establish and maintain collaborative practices between the services
- ▶ **celebrated 20 years of supporting people who have experienced a violent crime in our communities**

Challenges

- ▶ as of end June 2023, the VAP program ceased due to a change in funding

What's next?

- ▶ support all clients to transition to other service providers
- ▶ redeploy staff to new roles at Merri Health or other organisations

BOARD OF DIRECTORS PROCEEDINGS

Board attendance at meetings 2022/2023

Director	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Julie McCormack (Chair)	11	-	11
Benjamin Maxfield (Deputy Chair)	11	1	10
Joe Caputo	11	-	11
Ann Taylor	11	-	11
Sam Garrasi	11	1	10
Seide Raffoul	9	-	8
Anne Jungwirth	11	-	11
Michael De Bruyn	11	-	11
Kenneth Cheng	9	-	9
Roxanne Adams	5	1	4

Company secretary and executive support

Gavin Thompson

Company Secretary

Joan Wilkinson

Executive Assistant to the Board of Directors

Directors attendance at sub-committees 2022/2023

Finance, Audit and Risk Management

Director	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Sam Garrasi (Chair)	6	-	6
Kenneth Cheng	4	1	3
Benjamin Maxfield	3	-	3
Julie McCormack (Board Chair)	3	1	2

Quality, Safety and Clinical Governance

Director	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Roxanne Adams (Chair)	1	-	1
Michael de Bruyn	4	-	3
Anne Jungwirth	4	-	4
Ann Taylor (Guest)	4	-	4
Benjamin Maxfield	-	-	1
Julie McCormack (Board Chair)	4	-	4

Community Engagement

Director	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Ann Taylor (Chair)	4	-	4
Joe Caputo	4	-	2
Seide Raffoul	4	1	0

Commissioning

Director	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Ben Maxfield (Chair)	4	-	4
Julie McCormack (Board Chair)	4	-	4
Sam Garrasi	4	-	1
Ann Taylor	4	-	3
Michale de Bruyn	2	-	0
Anne Jungwirth	2	-	2
Roxanne Healy	2	-	1

About sub-committees

Finance, Audit and Risk Management

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

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

Quality, Safety and Clinical Governance

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

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

Community Engagement

This sub-committee meets quarterly (or more frequently if required), with the purpose to consult with community representatives on activities and services of Merri Health.

The sub-committee makes recommendations to the Board about how to engage with the community and obtain meaningful feedback and potential improvements.

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

Board committee meetings

Community representation on Board sub-committees 2022/2023

Finance, Audit and Risk Management

Community Representatives	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Geraldine Allen	6	2	4
Paul Girdler	6	2	4
Nigel Hedges	6	3	3

Quality, Safety and Clinical Governance

Community Representatives	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Simone Pike	4		4
Celine Johns	4	0	0
Ewa Mazuruk	4	1	3

Community Engagement

Community Representatives	Potential	Apologies	Attended
Mairi Rowan	4	1	3
Alison Black	4	1	3
Susy Pinchen	4	1	3
Adua Rosso	4	1	3
Jo Szcpanaska	4	1	3
Chiara Lawry	4	2	2
Tenielle Furze	4	1	3

FINANCIAL REPORT

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

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

Statement of Comprehensive income

for the year ended 30 June 2023

	2023 \$'000	2022 \$'000
Revenue	56,601	41,535
Income	18,615	31,627
Gain on property sale	1,065	-
Total revenue and income	76,281	73,162
Expenses		
Employee benefits expense	36,014	37,632
Depreciation and amortisation	2,646	2,629
Finance costs	233	115
Supplies	276	271
Computer expenses	1,890	1,592
Consulting and legal costs	1,244	1,058
Client costs	10,153	8,889
Communication	404	629
Motor vehicle expenses	264	243
Occupancy costs	1,091	1,019
Payments to other agencies	16,266	14,070
Repairs and maintenance	286	230
Employment expenses	697	756
Other expenses	2,371	2,675
Total expenses	73,835	71,808
Total operating surplus	2,446	1,354
Revaluation of assets	1,669	(297)
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR	4,115	1,057

Statement of Financial Position

as at 30 June 2023

	2023 \$'000	2022 \$'000
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	30,376	16,805
Trade and other receivables	355	513
Other current assets	5,484	11,090
Total current assets	36,215	28,408
Non-current assets		
Lease Assets	2,322	1,768
Financial Assets	6,511	6,153
Property, plant and equipment	7,913	6,855
Total non-current assets	16,746	14,776
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	5,485	5,446
Other liabilities	18,670	10,342
Lease liabilities	1,203	1,001
Provisions	4,809	4,846
Total current liabilities	30,167	21,635
Non-current liabilities		
Provisions	1,017	1,466
Lease Liabilities	1,318	886
Borrowings	-	2,853
Total non-current liabilities	2,335	5,205
Net assets	20,459	16,344
Equity		
Reserves	3,095	1,426
Retained earnings	17,364	14,918
Total equity	20,459	16,344

CONTACT US

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

Our sites

Brunswick

11 Glenlyon Road
Brunswick VIC 3056

Brunswick West

382–386 Moreland Road
Brunswick West VIC 3055

Coburg

93 Bell Street
Coburg VIC 3058

Merri Central

Ground floor, Unit 4
19 Pentridge Boulevard
Coburg VIC 3058

Fawkner

79 Jukes Road
Fawkner VIC 3060

Glenroy

5D Cromwell Street
Glenroy VIC 3046

Preston

Level 1 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

All services

 1300 637 744

 info@merrhealth.org.au

Carer support

 1800 422 737

My Aged Care*

 1800 200 422

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



Your feedback is important to us

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

You can provide feedback by:

 (03) 9389 2234

 quality@merrhealth.org.au

 merrhealth.org.au



Merri Health

Healthcare that moves with you

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

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