



Bendigo
Community
Health
Services

Quality of Care REPORT 2024



Together we grow

Compassion | Connection | Community



Bendigo
Community
Health
Services

Welcome to our quality report

Our **274-strong workforce** proudly offered more than **50 services** in 2023-24 to our valued clients across **eight locations** in Bendigo central, Mitchell Street, Hopetoun Street, Holdsworth Road, Kangaroo Flat, Elmore, White Hills and Eaglehawk.

"Wow, what a lovely greeting! I received a warm smile and a jolly hello when I arrived for my appointment today at the Kangaroo Flat site. It really lifted my spirits."

"You have been exemplary in all aspects of your business. Great end-to-end service."

"[With Family Services help] there was support in helping me cope better, also to communicate with my children in a more positive way and mental health support in dealing with my trauma."

"What is different about BCHS Pelvic Pain and Endometriosis service is it isn't a medical model... They just listened. They asked me every question that no one's ever asked me that I hadn't even thought about... It's just been so, so much more validating than any of my previous experiences with straight medical options only."

"Please pass on my thank you to every member of staff because they all contributed something important to improving my mental and physical health."

FEEDBACK

BCHS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Bendigo Community Health Services acknowledge we live, work and enjoy Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Country.

We extend our appreciation to the Djaara and Taungurung peoples. We pay respect to Elders past and present for their continued holding of memories, traditions, culture and community aspirations.

We recognise sovereignty has never been ceded and express our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of colonisation and their lasting impact. May we walk forward together in harmony and the spirit of healing. It was and always will be Aboriginal land.



Artwork: *Healing a Community*
by *Paige Charles-Morgan*

Message from the Chair and CEO

It is a great pleasure to report back to our community about what we have achieved at Bendigo Community Health Services (BCHS) over the last year. It has been a huge year on many fronts.

As you will see reading through these pages, we have continued to be resilient and bold in the pursuit of equitable and quality health care for all.

Our Team

We thank, and are so proud of, all our BCHS staff and volunteers for their resilience, adaptability and innovation that ensured we carried on with the delivery of person-centred services for our community. It truly is humbling to be part of such a generous, committed team.

Community Voice

We are committed to deeply listening to our community and have a plan to develop a Community Participation Framework and a Lived and Living Experience plan so everyone can authentically and respectfully engage with our organisation across the City of Greater Bendigo.

Our Youth Ambassadors at headspace and the co-design of the Loddon Children's Health and Wellbeing Local with communities across Loddon have been powerful examples of the positive impact the community can make on the planning and delivery of services at BCHS.

Strategic Plan 2025-2027

After much consultation with staff and stakeholders, the Board adopted the co-designed Strategic Plan at a May 2024 Board meeting. This new plan will drive the decisions and directions of the Board and organisation and is aimed at meeting community needs in alignment with the:

- **Vision:** Better health and wellbeing across generations; and
- **Purpose:** Supporting you and your family to live healthy lives.

Importantly, the values of lived and living experience; equity; people; partnership; and integrity will guide the organisation and each of us in our desire to provide impactful community health services.

Leadership

Our Board and Senior Leadership team continued to provide great guidance to staff. We have a new Wellbeing Committee which has already provided an important voice to the organisation about where to focus wellbeing initiatives that support employees to feel safe, supported and respected.

We also have a new Clinical Governance and Quality Committee that will feed into the Board Clinical Governance Committee. We have huge ambitions for this committee and already have a list of important priorities. This team will provide stewardship to help define and measure the quality of care experience at the front line.

Board

We thank our Board Directors for their remarkable leadership, and for generously giving their expertise and guidance, which is highly valued.

Final sincere thanks to Executive Leader, Dale Hardy, for his support of the first six months of my tenure as CEO and for his support as acting CEO for periods of time over the past 12 months.

Both the Board and the CEO have greatly appreciated the support from the Office of the CEO team, Sharyn Brasher, Christine Whatley, Leanne Oberin and Kevin Pittman, Company Secretary.

A warm welcome to our new Executive Team: Dr Naveen Tenneti, Chief Operations Officer; Cathy Gaskell, Executive Leader Organisational Support; Dale Hardy, Executive Leader Community Partnerships & Integration, and our new Operations Managers: Julie Cairns, Christine Gibbins and Cilla Boucher.

Together we grow.

Melanie Eddy - Chair
Mandy Hutchinson - CEO

Internal news

Eagle eyes keep a watch on site revamp



The total refurbishment of BCCHS' Seymoure Street site in Eaglehawk began in 2023 and is expected to be completed in autumn 2025.

Thanks to a grant from the Victorian Government's Regional Health Infrastructure Fund, the development is the biggest investment in community health in Bendigo since the site was originally built. EBD Architects developed the masterplan with local builders Franklin & Walsh beginning works on the 48-year-old building in August 2023.

“Not only will the site ensure we can meet the changing and growing health needs of the community, it’s also going to add to the suburb’s architectural legacy.”

BCCHS CEO Mandy Hutchinson



Board of Directors 2023 Service Excellence Awards

Staff gathered at café Omari in the Bendigo Botanic Gardens in December to celebrate their achievements throughout 2023.

The Board of Directors Service Excellence Awards were presented to the following staff:



Excellence in Inclusion

Chronic Disease Management team, for its continual adaptation of services to broaden inclusivity, and to develop tools that are now being used by other services to emulate the team's achievements.



Excellence in Innovation

headspace Bendigo Youth Community Engagement Worker **Haylee Kennedy** for her work with First Nations young people, and for developing the confidence and skills in Youth Ambassadors to advocate for themselves and others.



Chantelle Ramsay, who moved from her role as nurse and manager in the Child Health Invest team, to lead the implementation of the new Loddon Children's Health and Wellbeing Local.



Excellence in Integrity

This category attracted only numerous nominations for the same person – Acting Senior Leader Non Residential AOD Services **Lisa Walklate**. Lisa's nominators used words like authentic, kind, caring, concerned and daring in terms of taking on new responsibilities, as well as being open and encouraging.



Excellence in Respect

Finance Worker **Edith Willoughby**, for always being willing to not only do her own job, but to respectfully help others with advice and support on getting the most out of available funding, and for ensuring BCHS meets all its legal obligations.



Communications Officer **Lauren Mitchell**, for being a quiet achiever who never says no to a request for help with advertising, layout and publications. Lauren is respected by all who work with her, and her work maintains and enhances community respect for BCHS.



Excellence in Togetherness

Senior Lead Medical Practice **Leah Wastell**, for taking on major new challenges and not only working to succeed in her own new role but to support, bring together and encourage others to succeed in theirs.

Kim Sykes Award

Refugee and Cultural Diversity Team, for making an amazing difference in the lives of many people. From learning about the laws of fishing to overcoming cultural barriers to good health care, this team is leading the way in fostering the integration and wellbeing of a whole group of people new to Australia.



I AM, YOU ARE, WE ARE BCHS

50 YEARS OF
COMMUNITY
HEALTH

BCHS closed its services on June 13, 2024 for an all-staff development day to connect, keep learning, give, be active and take notice. These Five Ways to Wellbeing flowed through the event, which was designed to strengthen the team, and in turn, the community health service.

Staff shared their wisdom and expertise on the day, which included exercises from Joel, of Exercise Physiology; anchor dropping from Joy, of Forensic Mental Health; and mindfulness from Sebastian and Siobhan, of Health Promotion. There was inspiration from CEO Mandy, encouragement to think differently from Lisa and Jason of Minds at Work, elevator pitches

from all the teams, great food from Crooked Kitchen and warm hospitality from the Baptist Church venue in Junortoun.

Board chair Melanie officially launched the Strategic Plan for 2025-2027, developed following months of consultation with a group of passionate staff.

The then-longest serving staff member, Paula May of Family Services (1979-2024), joined Melanie to cut a cake to mark the 50th anniversary of community health in Bendigo.

The day ended with an exquisite performance from the BCHS in-house bilingual choir leading a rendition of I am Australian.

Staff development day



Looking forward to 2024-25

The future starts today! Here are some initiatives and exciting events coming up for BCHS:



**Bendigo
Community
Health
Services**

Brand update

Your feedback has been heard and a new design has been decided on. As you can see, we have a beautiful new logo. There's so many things we can do with it and we're excited!



Website refresh

A new-look website to go with our new logo, yes please! Set to launch soon, the new BCHS website is contemporary, easy to navigate and accessible.



BCHS' 50th anniversary community wellbeing event

A special anniversary requires a special event, and while we the organisation had cake, it's time to celebrate with the community! Set for Friday, November 29, at the Garden for the Future, our Together We Grow Fun Fair will feature lots of family-friendly activities and entertainment.



Reopening of our Eaglehawk site

We don't want to wish the spring and summer away, but bring on autumn! Our Eaglehawk site will be upsized, beautified and ready to go, we can't wait!

New initiatives



Karl connects with his calming influence

Bendigo Library saw the beginning of a new chapter with the placement of BCHS' community connections project worker, Karl Quast, to assist staff, patrons and disadvantaged community members.

Providing support, training and mentoring for library staff, Karl received positive feedback with the majority saying he brought a calming influence, making their jobs more manageable and giving them more confidence to work with patrons who have high needs. On average, Karl engaged with **14 people from the community a day**, mostly supporting patrons who experience homelessness, mental health problems, substance abuse issues, disability and ill physical health. His work led to less emergency room presentations and ambulance callouts.

Karl has...

- Facilitated 32 group wellbeing sessions for Bendigo Library staff.
- Developed and delivered three training sessions for 45 Goldfields Library staff, with more training sessions in the works.

“Karl provided some practical and useful tips around de-escalating situations and working with people from trauma-informed backgrounds. He is very grounded in his approach and promoted people-centred language and unconditional positive regard in ways that seemed doable in our everyday work. He’s such an asset!”

Snapshot of just some of the outcomes

- **Ten** people supported to attend primary health services for ongoing support (both at BCHS and externally), screening and treatment for acute and chronic illnesses such as schizophrenia, hepatitis C and Type 1 diabetes.
- **One** pregnant woman supported to receive maternal health care.
- **Nine** people supported to see a dentist for acute and chronic issues with three people now on the waitlist to receive dentures.
- **Six** people supported to obtain birth certificates.

High powered partnership helps low-income Victorian households

BCHS partnered with Midland Solar and the Bendigo Sustainability Group to ensure **220 solar panels were installed on low-income households across 30 locations.**

Over \$48,000 was fundraised under the **Giving Power campaign**, while the Solar Victoria rebate contributed more than \$40,000. There was no cost to households.

BCHS' role was to ensure candidates provided evidence that they met eligibility criteria and understood the project.

This collaboration achieved the following savings to the end user:

- For the year: \$26,953.05.
- Per month: 30 properties saved \$74.86.
- Per year: 30 properties saved close to \$900.
- Over the next 10 years: \$269,530 in total project savings.
- Over the life of the installed equipment: \$539,060.



Getting a move on



Families at two Bendigo primary schools stepped up to the school run in a different way thanks to the implementation of the **Move Your Way program** by the health promotion team.

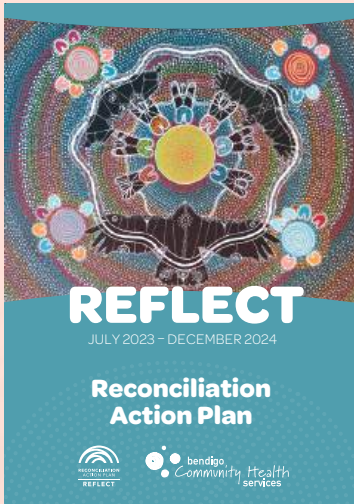
Aiming to empower local primary school students to walk, cycle or scoot to school, the pilot program launched at **Bendigo Violet Street** and **St Liborius primary schools** with a range of techniques used to encourage more active travel, such as introducing car-free zones around the schools and the use of Tag On technology. Tag On provided students with electronic tags to tap onto a kiosk when they arrived at school, logging their arrival and the mode they took to get there.

“Once students ‘tag on’, a notification is sent to their parent or guardian, so they know their child has arrived safely, which has been really popular with families who’ve used the system,” BCBS health promotion officer Sebastian Goscha said.

The project reached **352 students** with both schools recording changes in the way students arrived. Feedback from students, parents and teachers was mostly positive and the program has now had expressions of interest from other local schools.

BCHS Reflects: Voice, treaty, truth

Actions speak louder than words and after it was announced that BCHS had developed a Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), it launched in March 2024.



BCHS' vision for reconciliation is for a society where recognition and respect characterise our interactions with First Nations peoples. The four cornerstones of our Reflect RAP are:

- **Relationships:** Understanding, building, strengthening and promoting reconciliation and mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.
- **Respect:** Understanding and valuing cultural protocols, and building and demonstrating respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights and histories.
- **Opportunities:** Improving employment outcomes (recruitment, retention, professional development and cultural leave) and supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.
- **Governance:** Establishing and maintaining a working group to support implementation of RAP commitments and provide accountability and transparency through reporting of achievements, challenges and learnings, both internally and externally.

Development of our next RAP began in August 2024.



You don't need to learn to live with it - help with endometriosis is here

Hope was launched for those with endometriosis and pelvic pain in March 2024 with the official opening of BCHS' Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic.

One of the first clinics of its kind in Australia, the day featured Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care the Hon Ged Kearney as well as Federal Member for Bendigo Lisa Chesters.

It was a crucial moment in time for the one in seven women the debilitating condition affects. It has been open for GP referrals since January 2024, accepting clients across the Murray Primary Health Network – from Mildura in the north west, across to Albury in the north east and then down to Marysville in the Goulburn Valley.

BCHS has assembled a multi-disciplinary team to support clients, including nurse Mary-Anne McCluskey, physiotherapist Shirein Henry, psychologist Mary Sandilands and doctor Karishma Kaur. The service has also been vocal in getting the word out to the community about the importance of the clinic.

“Our message is: You do not need to learn to live with it,” said Dr Kaur. “If it affects you, come and see us and we will help you. We are dedicated to offering personalised treatment plans, expert guidance, and compassionate support to help our patients manage their condition effectively.”

And the message was heard loud and clear. In its first six months the Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic received **95 referrals** for women and gender diverse people from across the region.

BCHS has received more than \$700,000 over four years to operate the clinic, as part of the Federal Government's \$58.3 million package for endometriosis and pelvic pain health care.

Pictured top: The Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic team

Pictured below: BCHS Board attending the Clinic opening



Community alliance

BCHS' submission into women's pain highlights how we can prosper

We have nothing to lose and everything to gain by addressing women's pain with a cohesive, multi-service, life course approach, BCCHS has affirmed in its submission to the Victorian Department of Health's Inquiry into Women's Pain.

After seeking community feedback, the issue overwhelmingly identified by local women and girls was the need to be believed and to have their pain experiences validated, not just by healthcare professionals but by society too, from educators to workplace leaders.

BCCHS' submission, written by Bronwyn Moore, made six recommendations:

1. Integrated education and training on women's reproductive experiences across the community, workplaces and within health professionals' curriculum.
2. Use co-design methods to develop culturally appropriate education resources.
3. Develop comprehensive strategies that address the cultural gender bias as it relates to under or misdiagnosis and treatment of women's pain.
4. Create a culture that listens, believes and validates women's experiences.
5. Implement value-based, person-centred service delivery models.
6. Create additional MBS item numbers that recognise the added cost of lengthy consultations, including for professional services provided by nurses, allied health professionals, and specialist pain management psychologists.

"The recommendations, proposed solutions and implementation strategies we have made reflect BCCHS' values and vision for equitable healthcare. It's informative, purposeful and takes into account the experiences of women and girls from myriad of backgrounds."

BCCHS CEO Mandy Hutchinson

Pill testing support creates change

BCCHS joined with the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association in January, 2024 to call on the State Government to implement a drug checking service, as per recommendations from five Victorian coronial inquiries.

Then BCCHS Executive Leader Wellbeing, Inclusion and Independence, Dale Hardy, said drug checking services, or pill testing, encouraged people to reconsider consuming illicit drugs.

"Without a drug testing service, the only chance we have of detecting hazardous substances are when it's too late," he said.

On June 24, 2024, the Victorian Government announced it would introduce a drug checking service to the state, starting with an implementation trial.

"We applaud the Victorian Government for following through on this important step in minimising the harms caused by drug use," Dale said.

BCCHS' day-to-day actions to support people using drugs include counselling and education for clients and their families, residential and non-residential withdrawal programs, mobile drug safety services and access to clean injecting equipment.

Flood recovery team a source of resilience

The BCHS flood recovery team again stepped up to support those affected by the floods and storms of summer 2023.

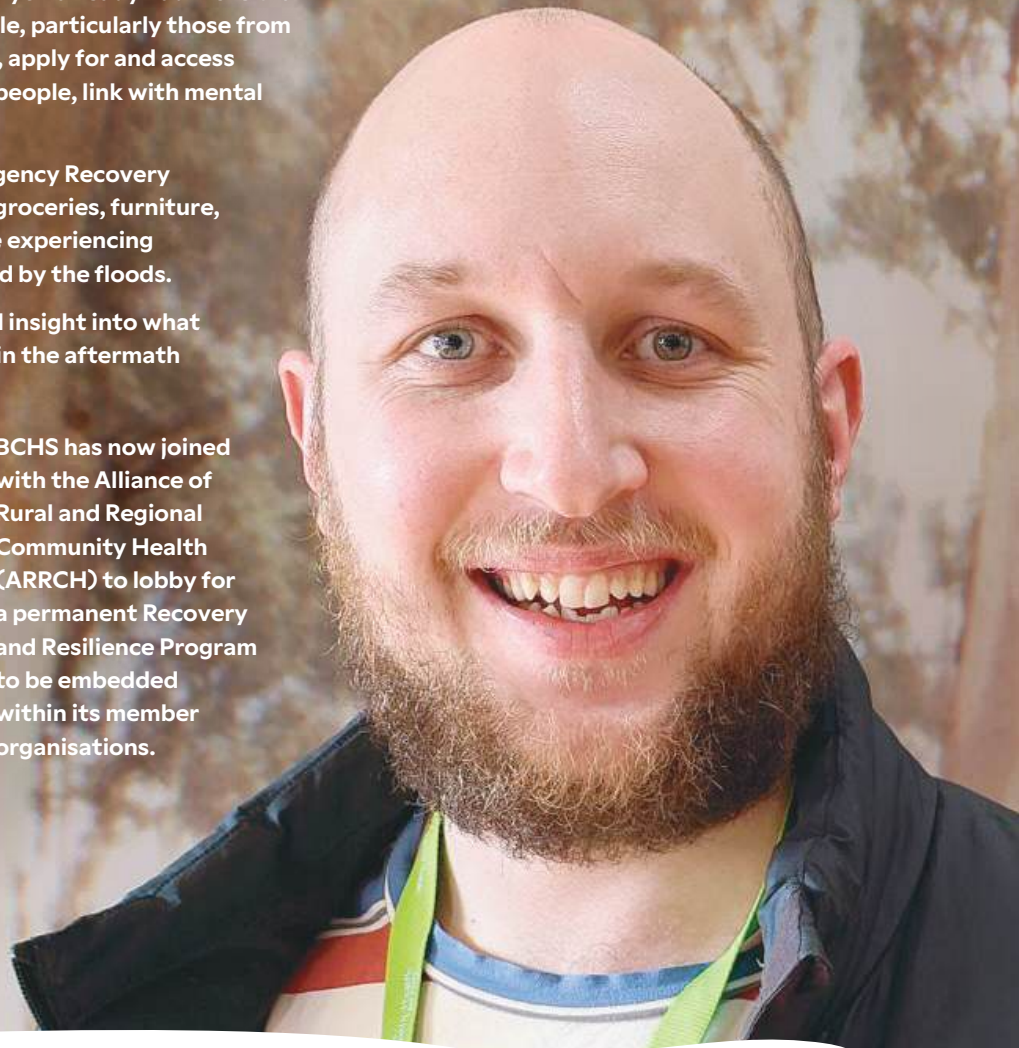
Officers Danielle Hanks and Oscar Malyon already had more than 12 months' experience assisting people, particularly those from Rochester, navigate insurance claims, apply for and access government grants, deal with tradespeople, link with mental healthcare and even find housing.

In collaboration with GIVIT and Emergency Recovery Victoria, the team sourced funds for groceries, furniture, fuel and farming equipment for those experiencing financial hardship after being affected by the floods.

The team's experiences also provided insight into what individuals and communities needed in the aftermath of a disaster.



BCHS has now joined with the Alliance of Rural and Regional Community Health (ARRCH) to lobby for a permanent Recovery and Resilience Program to be embedded within its member organisations.



A father's post-flood story

"We were recently flooded out of our last rental property and managed to walk out with a few clothes and some important paperwork and that's it. We had no insurance, and the rental property couldn't be fixed for 12+ months. We were given a \$900 EFTPOS card to get some clothes, food and to pay to get all my stuff out of the house and to the rubbish sites. We were also given three nights' accommodation and were left to fend for ourselves, I managed to get a single bed for my daughter and a \$50 gift card to spend in store at St Vincent's.

I thought I had been written off and was trying to figure out how I was going to build everything back up.

I then received a phone call from Oscar Malyon.

He originally tried to get me a couple of grants but was unsuccessful and rang me to let me know but told me he would keep trying. His persistence paid off in a big way and he got me a grant which will restore my daughter's and my feelings of self-worth. It will dramatically improve our quality of life and help me bring my daughter up in a nice relaxing environment again.

I'm so happy with the way in which Oscar has conducted himself ... he has changed my daughter's and my life, and more important than any materialistic things, is the positive outcome he has had on our mental health."

Services spotlight

A wealth of health promotion

BCHS' passionate health promotion team implemented a range of health and wellbeing outcomes for individuals across Bendigo **reaching over 106,000 people.**

The team's priority areas included increasing healthy eating; increasing active living; reducing tobacco and e-cigarette harm; improving mental wellbeing; improving sexual and reproductive health; climate health; and preventing all forms of violence.

Community education

BCHS delivered more than **70 community education sessions** across **25 settings.** We reached approximately **2,400 people** aged from eight to 90+. Some of the programs we delivered included:

- **Smiles for Miles:** 53% of early childhood services in Bendigo are registered to this oral health initiative with **3,976 children reached.** Seven trainings were delivered with **91 educators** taking part.

Take the First Step: This program was launched in March 2024 to increase healthy eating and physical activity. Engagement from the community was solid thanks to promotion of the initiative on TV, local radio, static and mobile billboards and screenings at Bendigo Cinema.

- **Achievement Program:** This program saw a first in the Bendigo region with one workplace and two primary schools achieving **full health promotion status** by completing all health priority areas. Across the year:

- Sixteen schools were actively engaged, reaching **7,652 students.**
- Nine early childhood services were actively engaged, reaching **1,070 children.**
- Eleven workplaces were actively engaged, reaching **1,286 staff members.**



Pictured: Health promotion team members at the Take the First Step campaign launch

Community partnerships

We are excited to have struck up three new partnerships including:

- McKern Steel Foundation**
 Through their **Fresh Fruit Friday program**, BCHS sponsored **three primary schools** located in low socioeconomic areas to have fresh fruit delivered weekly for a year, increasing healthy eating and fruit exposure for the children.
- Healthy Loddon Campaspe (HLC)**
 A community need initiative – **the White Hills Wanderers Walking Group** – was developed in partnership with HLC for people aged 60+ in the White Hills area. So far 100% of participants have reported that they are 'likely' to continue to walk with the group. The group has transitioned to being a volunteer led group registered under the Heart Foundation and with the support of BCHS and HLC.

- City of Greater Bendigo (CoGB)**
 We have become a founding partner with CoGB on the **Greater Bendigo Climate Collaboration**, for three years. Working collaboratively will increase reach for BCHS and boost our voice when it comes to community health needs within the climate health and sustainable food system spaces.

“[I like] having a set day and time [to exercise] Also, walking with other people gives me motivation, I wouldn’t do it without the group.”

“My GP and physio are pleased to know I’ve joined the group.”

“[I like that] there are no expectations, the walking pace is whatever you’re comfortable with. Also, the people are friendly.”



Pictured: The White Hills Wanderers



Other programs and initiatives

Reducing tobacco and e-cigarette related harm

More than **700 people** were reached across **11 community education sessions** with a clear increase in knowledge evidenced through 76 entries from young people to a design competition held about the harms of smoking and vaping. Internally, **25 staff completed online Quit e-modules** and were supported through two training sessions. Since 2022, 47 staff have completed Quit training.



Providing support after The Voice referendum

As members of the Bendigo Reconciliation Committee (BRC), and supporters of a Yes vote, the referendum results greatly impacted the mental wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. To help the community move forward with reconciliation we participated in **two community forums** with **45 community members** attending. A key outcome from these forums was the development of a local BRC action plan, currently being drafted.

Introduction to puberty

Eleven education sessions of this program were delivered to 10 schools, three located in low socioeconomic areas, reaching a total of **842 students**.

Pictured above: Health promotion team members on the O'Keefe Rail Trail

United in hope

The Humanitarian Settlement Program welcomed **110 new arrivals** to begin their new life in Bendigo this year, while **Settlement Engagement and Transition Support saw 287 clients**. BCHS also held a poignant event to mark **Refugee Week** this year. The special day was held in partnership with Bendigo TAFE, Sisterwork, Bendigo Karen Youth Network and Karen Culture and Social

Support Foundation. It aimed to educate the community on life as a refugee and featured Q&As with settlement services staff, displays and demonstrations of Karen and Hazara crafts, an art exhibition, fashion parades and shared stories. A highlight was the chance to see and experience a typical home from a refugee camp, which was specially constructed on the day.





Pictured: BCHS settlement services team member Ku Htee with Zoo Zer.

Finding freedom in Bendigo

BCHS settlement services client Zoo Zer is Karen, a persecuted ethnic group from Myanmar. Her family fled the dangers of their home country and were placed in a Thai refugee camp. Zoo Zer was born in the camp, where she lived for 26 years before coming to Australia on a Humanitarian Visa.

Here, she became a valued BCHS client. For Zoo Zer, the arrival in Bendigo on September 8, 2022, meant three things: freedom, food and a future. “In the camp we are trapped behind the fence, and there are guards at the gates,” she said. “You can’t see outside to the world.”

Zoo Zer described having limited access to food throughout her life there; residents of the camp are mostly reliant on UN supplies. There is no electricity for most people, and their simple meals are cooked on a fire. The other rarity within the

fence is hope for the future. Zoo Zer said without education or job opportunities, people often give up.

In Bendigo, she has been able to complete the BCHS Orientation Program, plus English classes at Bendigo TAFE. She has learnt to drive through the help of Women Can’s ten free lessons. And she has studied and completed Bendigo TAFE’s Pathology Collection course.

On paper, these facts seem brief, however in reality, the achievements are immense, and a credit to Zoo Zer’s determination and commitment to make the most of local opportunities. Her aim now: “I want to work and sponsor my family to come here so we can be united in this country,” she says. “I also want to become an Australian citizen.”

“I want to work and sponsor my family to come here so we can be united in this country”

Supporting former refugees to continue fishing

BCHS partnered with the Victorian Fisheries Authority in 2023 to foster safe and sustainable fishing practices for newly-arrived Karen people.

The 12-month pilot program helped Karen people understand Victoria's fishing regulations and raised awareness amongst Fisheries staff about the pre- and post-arrival experiences of former refugees from the Thai-Burma border.

BCHS Refugee Project Worker Nido said fishing was an important cultural practice for Karen people, who traditionally fished for survival rather than recreation.

"As new arrivals, Karen people may unintentionally do the wrong things, therefore it's important to educate the community about these rules," Nido said.

BCHS developed and co-designed culturally safe resources and videos about fishing in the Karen language.

The project included in-person education sessions, the training of 20 'champions' to share their learnings with family and friends, and the production of a responsible fishing welcome pack for new arrivals.

"The resources and information sessions cover topics such as how to apply for a fishing licence, equipment use, water safety and respectful use of waterways," Nido said.

The BCHS website now features a Victorian Fishing Resources Hub.

*Pictured below: A community member fishing by the Loddon River.
Photo by Bwe Ku Sa*



Assistance through the cancer journey

The Cancer Support for People of Refugee Background aims to **improve health equity across the cancer continuum** by supporting former refugees to better understand cancer, prevention, early intervention, and care pathways that are culturally safe and easily understood. The program also supports clinicians and screening services to better understand and engage with communities of refugee background.

2023-24 activities included:

- Literature scope.
- Community needs analysis with nine focus groups.
- Bendigo Health staff consultations.
- Service provider needs analysis with **five focus groups and 33 survey participants**.
- Individual support for four Karen patients diagnosed with cancer.



Resources are now being developed and community sessions are being delivered in language, and hospital and cancer screening services are being trained and supported to better work with communities.

Preparing people of refugee backgrounds for emergencies

A BCHS Refugee and Cultural Diversity program has been equipping former refugee communities with the knowledge to survive Australia's extreme weather events.

The Emergency Preparedness Program has become essential for preparing new arrivals for potential disasters.

Since its inception in 2020, the program has hosted information sessions, trained community champions and produced fact sheets and videos in the Karen, Dinka and Dari languages.

It's led by our staff of refugee lived experience, in partnership with experts from the CFA, VICSES and City of Greater Bendigo.

During 2023-24 approximately 5000 people viewed the emergency preparedness videos online, 1000 attended information sessions and 15 community champions shared knowledge with hundreds more in their communities.

Learnings and recommendations

After four years of implementing the program, BCHS has learnt:

- Emergency warning systems need to be more accessible for all refugee community members, with a focus on a more accessible Vic Emergency App.
- The program model needs to be replicated for additional vulnerable ethnic/language groups and new arrivals.
- The model should be scaled up and tested in other regional and metropolitan areas.
- Emergency preparedness programs should be a core component of refugee settlement programs across Australia.

BCHS' dynamic duo

The exercise physiology team – Ash and Joel – were excited to receive a **4.9 out of 5 stars rating on their one-to-one and group sessions** through their consumer experience survey in May 2024. Of the 94 respondents, **100% said the program met their needs**, made them feel stronger, gave them a sense of improvement in their health and wellbeing, and allowed them to continue to complete activities of daily living independently.

The team partnered with BCHS' cultural diversity team to run a pilot program aimed at getting the Karen community to incorporate more physical activity in their daily lives. The intent was for participants to become healthier and improve common chronic health conditions prevalent in the



Pictured: Ash and Joel are our exercise physiology team

Karen community. The program ran for nine weeks, and preliminary post program assessments have showed improvements in balance, strength and pain levels for all participants. An added bonus was the creation

of recorded exercises in Karen that can be given to current and future participants to further engage people within the community who may not yet be comfortable in a group setting.

“[I receive] excellent care and attention, they are always on time and have a caring nature.”

“The exercise physiology team are very good and I am happy.”

Podiatry team put their best foot forward

BCHS' podiatry team received a resounding tick of approval from the Bendigo community in the consumer experience survey last year. A total of 83 consumers responded to the survey with 100% of respondents rating the service 5 out of 5 and saying they felt safe, welcomed and were treated with dignity and respect.

The team undertook a review of the clinical guidelines of Bendigo Podiatry Diabetes Model (PDM) in partnership with Bendigo Health. The review resulted in significant changes in how we communicate with other podiatrists in the region regarding clients with lower leg complications. The PDM guidelines have now been updated to include the most relevant evidence for our region.



“My feet feel amazing now and are pain free.”
“I walk a lot and do much better when my feet are treated.”
“They keep me out of hospital!”

BCHS Community Diabetes Clinic

The clinic has seen significant improvements in patients' management of their diabetes with noticeable reductions in HbA1c levels – 1.1% over six months. This is a significant clinical identifier attributing to a reduction of diabetes complications.

This GP-led clinic is a joint initiative between the BCBS Medical Practice and the Chronic Disease Management Program and provides short-term medical advice and support to people with Type 2

diabetes. It is supported by Bendigo Health Endocrinology and also assists local medical practices to support patients living with diabetes.

Six-month snapshot:

- **34 referrals from 12 different sources**
- **Referral reasons included poor diabetes control, deterioration of diabetes control and for ongoing support.**

Cara aims to close the gap

Our chronic disease clinical lead and diabetes educator **Cara Jamieson has added another credential to her resume, completing a Masters of Nursing (Nurse Practitioner) degree** with the support of BCBS.

Cara's decision to become a nurse practitioner, which involved completing a clinical internship with senior medical staff in the BCBS Medical Practice, came from her recognition that there are still gaps in care for people with diabetes and other chronic diseases in the Bendigo region. A nurse practitioner is a registered nurse with the experience, expertise and authority to diagnose and treat people of all ages with a variety of acute or chronic health conditions; they are some of the most senior and independent clinical nurses in our healthcare system.

In her time at BCBS, Cara has seen many changes to the way diabetes is managed, as well as the introduction of improved diabetes technology. Her new role will allow her to independently manage episodes of care for our clients living with diabetes, including advanced assessment, diagnosis, care

planning and treatment, as well as ordering diagnostic investigations and prescribing medicines.

With her new role, **Cara can now address the gaps in care for vulnerable people with diabetes and chronic disease** who may otherwise struggle to engage with health services by increasing

access to timely and appropriate care. She aims to do this by not only supporting other diabetes educators and clinicians at BCBS, but also through collaboration with other health professionals in the region.

Pictured from left: Debra Butcher, Cara Jamieson and Jessie Gladman.



Making a difference for 20 years

Along with marking **two decades of success and progress at Nova House**, we have also helped 152 clients complete their withdrawal journey in 2023-24.

The opening of Wanyanimbik Wayawan has been a bonus for our clients as they can now simply head up the drive to the new building to meet the staff there who can help make the transition to post withdrawal programs and supports easier.

Bruce, the cat, still reigns supreme.



Passionate people – and four cats – meet the need

Sheenah Van Eck had worked in Bendigo Community Health Services' Alcohol and Other Drugs service for ten years when Nova House opened in 2004.

"It was very, very, very bad," she said of the extent of substance use in Bendigo.

"There was very much a country mentality of people not wanting to go to the city to detox, and so people didn't get help and their lives just got messier and messier.

"Statistically, Bendigo uses the exact same percentage of drugs as Melbourne does. People often think just because we live in the country, we have different drug use than Melbourne. We don't. The difference is, we don't have the same support."

Nova House welcomes clients from far and wide. The five-bed unit is consistently booked, however the wait is short. People spend seven days here with 24-hour support to withdraw from substances.

It's less like a hospital and more like a group retreat. Although Sheenah explained that means the unit isn't suitable for clients with more complex medical and psychological illnesses, who still need to go to Melbourne to detox. "And we have the same problem in that they still won't go," Sheenah says.

"We now need a purpose-built facility, and one that's tiered, so we can take more complex needs clients, and then transition them down to the next tier, and then into support services such as rehabilitation or day programs, because it's a journey."

At Nova, that journey is made easier thanks to a staff of lived experience – either of addiction or supporting people with addiction – and one resident tabby.

There's always been a cat here. First Yogi, then Rusty and Peaches and currently, Bruce. There are three little plaques in the garden to honour his predecessors.

"They're absolutely important," Sheenah says (who qualifies she is NOT a cat person). "People will sit with a cat purring on their lap for ages and just cry. People will say they slept so well because the cat was at their feet all night, and must have known they needed the company. And the cats have a great life. They always have someone's attention – just not mine!"

Cats aside, Sheenah is a fierce advocate for the staff. "I would say Nova House staff come from such a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences that it's a little bit like a jigsaw," she says. "We all fit together to make a whole that can meet the needs of every single person who comes through that door. I say to people, I have a staff member for you ... We're a real mixed bag. We so are."



Harriet's specialised support

BCHS welcomed Harriet Storrar to the role of specialist alcohol and other drugs (AOD) family violence advisor at the end of 2023. The role, based out of our beautiful new building Wanyanimbik Wayawan, encompasses supporting AOD practitioners across the whole of the Loddon region to identify and respond to family violence.

The year's highlights saw Harriet present at the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) AOD Regional Forum to talk about her role; be involved in a working group to review AOD assessment tools;

promote resources on substance use coercion; and provide secondary consults with both AOD and family violence practitioners.

With a background in the family violence sector, Harriet focused on learning about, building relationships with and making regular visits to AOD services around the region. Harriet has identified some challenges that both the AOD and family violence systems face when working with family violence and co-occurring substance use.



Harriet Storrar – specialist AOD family violence advisor

Collaboration partners for the last year have included, but are not limited to:

- The Salvation Army
- Bendigo District Aboriginal Co-operative (BDAC)
- The Orange Door
- Centre for Non-Violence
- Sunbury and Cobaw Community Health
- Maryborough District Health Service
- Australian Community Support Organisation (ACSO)
- Annie North.

The hope is to improve collaboration between local services so we can better support our clients and reduce the devastating harm family violence is having in our communities.

Pharmacotherapy welcomes new practitioners

The 2023-24 year saw **187 clients** helped, with the team also welcoming two talented practitioners – Dr Michael Pearson and Nurse Practitioner Nomusa Napier. On-site Hepatitis C testing and treatment is now available for clients after we completed a one-year project with the Burnet Institute.

Our long-acting injectable buprenorphine (LAIB) numbers have increased from last year and are now at 78.

Local kids learning from the best

Bendigo Family Day Care celebrated an award-winning educator in November 2023. Casey Seidel, of Eaglehawk, was named the Family Day Care Australia Regional Educator of the Year for the Bendigo, Goldfields & Macedon Ranges region.

The awards recognise the educators, coordinators and services who deliver high quality early childhood education and care across Australia.

Casey chose to establish her own home-based business with the assistance of Bendigo Family Day Care IN 2022, after 20 years as an early childhood educator.

She was nominated by one or more of the families that attend her home-based service, then chosen as winner out of more than 5000 nominations.

Several Bendigo Family Day Care educators, coordinators, and the Bendigo FDC service itself, received nominations for 2023. In 2024, the service has received its biggest number of nominations yet.



Pictured: Bendigo Family Day Care coordinators Bec Fitzpatrick and Tamarra Tie, with educator Casey Seidel, centre.

Elmore Social Support Group returns home

In May 2024 the Elmore Social Support Group moved back to its original home in the Christine Cumming Activity Centre behind Elmore Primary Health.

The group had spent the previous few years meeting in a larger community hall in Elmore due to the social distancing requirements of COVID-19.

The move coincided with long-term Kamarooka resident John joining the core group of 17 members. John was a full-time carer for his wife, who passed away two years ago.

“There’s nothing worse than sitting around out there by yourself,” he said. “This is my support group. I don’t have any family support locally.” John had recently applied for My Aged Care support and learnt about this group.

“It’s been a life saver really,” he said. “It’s good to be here with these guys. It’s necessary.”

The group supports people over the age of 65, or those with a disability, to remain social, independent and well in



Elmore. It’s run by Judy Ryan with support from Christine Kirby-Miller and Sue Locke.

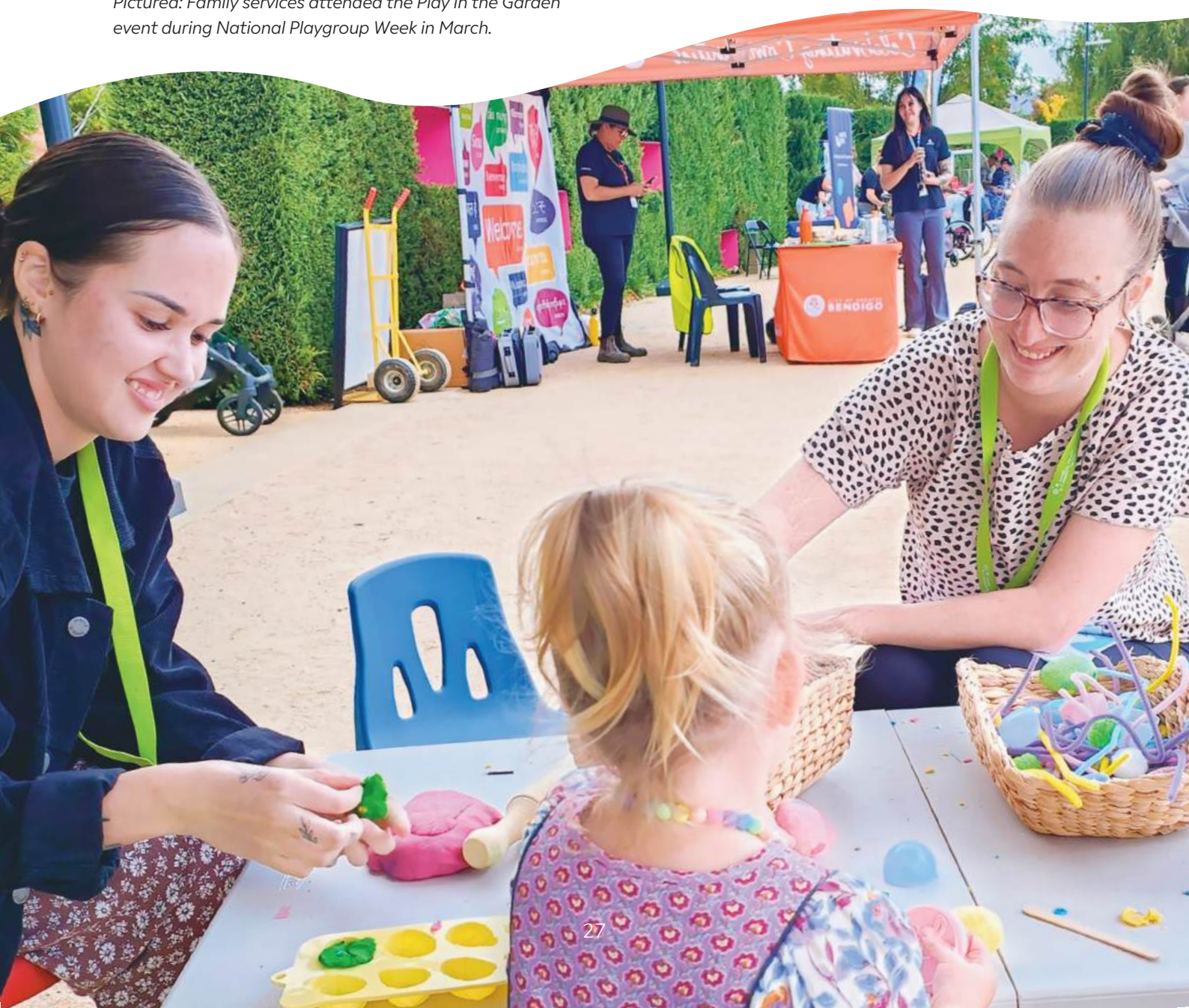
The weekly program of activities includes a day out, and 2023-24 featured day trips to the Murray River, Bendigo Botanic Gardens, Rosalind Park, Redesdale Hotel and more.

Prioritising safe spaces for families and children

We have taken a deep dive into how BCHS provides safe spaces and services for children and their families. Using the Victorian Child Safe Standards as our reference point, we have taken a fresh look at what we are doing well and opportunities for improvement. Action priorities for us include:

- **Reviewing our existing policies to ensure appropriate focus** is given to the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children with diverse needs.
- **Updating our staff Code of Conduct** to include a greater focus on child safety and wellbeing.
- **Building on the implemented Multi Agency Risk Assessment and Management framework (MARAM)**, Child Information Sharing Scheme and Family Violence Information sharing schemes across BCHS, to ensure we meet the continual evolution of the family violence service sector reform.
- **Continuing to create child friendly places of welcome, and specific resources** designed for children to receive information and share their ideas and feedback with us.
- **Improving the way we share staff expertise in working with children** across the organisation, including establishing a staff community of practice that promotes this skill sharing.

Pictured: Family services attended the Play in the Garden event during National Playgroup Week in March.





Building strength through support

The family services team connected with more than **300 families** in 2023-24 and took part in a number of community events including the Eaglehawk Dahlia and Arts Festival, NAIDOC Family Fun Day and 16 Days of Activism, leading a walk against family violence. Families who engaged with the team provided positive feedback including:

- **93% reported they had good experiences working with Family Services**
- **93% felt heard and supported**
- **92% saw a positive improvement for their child/children as a result of Family Services involvement**
- **92% felt stronger and/or more positive as a parent.**

“There was reassurance that we were doing all we could and (we were) on the right path.”

“I felt safe and supported.”

“They’re very supportive and they showed me skills on how to support my family.”

PROGRAMS:

- Family Services
- Loddon Children’s Health & Wellbeing Local
- smalltalk Supported Playgroup
- Family Services Practitioners in the Loddon Children’s Health and Wellbeing Local.

Pictured: BCHS staff participating in the 16 Days of Activism walk

Holding space for Bendigo youth

The passionate and skilful staff at headspace have been busy this financial year and their hard work has meant: the access and response time has dropped from 6-8 weeks to under **4 weeks**; the waitlist for our Therapeutic team has dropped from 6 months to within **2 weeks**; and our general **waitlist numbers have decreased from 140 to 12** young people.

4,269 services provided to young people (an increase of 347 from last financial year)

481 new young people sought help from headspace for the first time

81.9% client satisfaction

Community engagement

Youth ambassadors

Our team held **25 youth ambassador meetings** this financial year and were involved in the creation of the Suicide Prevention Awareness Network (SPAN) crisis support card, which was presented at state parliament.



Education, training and events

Across **17 schools in four local government areas** headspace ran **43 in-school events, reaching 3631 students**. Within the community, headspace ran 43 events, reaching **6,020 people**.

Work and Study Program

Over the last year we attended many events, engaged with local employers, education providers and other community stakeholders. The program was able to support 89 young people, with **77.1% achieving a positive work or study outcome**.

Pictured left: Haylee from headspace with the SPAN crisis support card

Pictured below: The headspace team at a community event presenting to the Sandhurst Football and Netball club



HEY Diversity program

HEY Diversity is an initiative aimed at improving the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ young people. Our HEY Diversity worker runs activities, events and education sessions as well as facilitating support groups.

A busy year saw an increase in requests for LGBTQIA+ 101 training, with 21 sessions

delivered to three headspace centres in the Loddon Mallee region; three sessions to social workers and staff at Bendigo Health; as well as other sessions at State Trustees, NDIS providers, the headspace national graduate program and many other Bendigo organisations. An evaluation by CERSH of the three headspace trainings showed excellent feedback.

*“All participants reported an increase in knowledge and:
65% strongly agreed their sexual health knowledge increased.
60% strongly agreed their LGBTQIA+ health knowledge increased.
90% of participants believed they were given ideas they could implement into their own headspace centres.
65% of participants were very satisfied with the delivery of the session.”*

883 young people accessed the program
92 diversity group sessions
16 parent support group sessions
49 community events, reaching 20,180 people
24 training sessions, reaching 693 participants

Events and programs

- **Wear It Purple Day:** Our young people participated in four panels for the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing; Spiire; State Trustees; and the City of Greater Bendigo Council.
- **Trans Day of Remembrance:** In collaboration with others, we set up an art installation at Charring Cross to raise awareness and remember trans and gender diverse lives lost.
- **Bendigo Easter Parade:** Falling on Trans Day of Visibility, more than 50 members walked in the parade with our PRIDE dragon.
- **Frogs and tadpoles:** Held weekly.
- **YPARC:** Held fortnightly.
- **Parent support group:** Still runs with the LGBTI Carers Project set to go for another 12 months.
- **headspace National Forum:** Our HEY Diversity worker presented at the annual conference in Brisbane in the Gender Affirming Care section.

Hey Maree, we're proud of you!

When Maree Dixon convened the first headspace support session for parents and carers of trans and gender diverse young people in Bendigo eight years ago, she wasn't sure if it was only going to be the manager, her husband and herself attending.

“That wasn't the case at all,” she said. “We had a room full of parents and carers. I knew then how much this group was needed.”

Since then, the group has continued to meet twice a month – once for specific support, and once for a meal out, helping smooth the path for – and celebrate the lives of – local LGBTQIA+ young people and their families.

“My name is Maree and I use she/they pronouns,” is how Maree introduces herself. “I have an amazing supportive husband, and we have a beautiful trans daughter who we are extremely proud of.”

Maree said when they first moved to Bendigo, she didn't hear much about the Queer community, until it affected her personally.

“I started to do a lot of research and learning to build up my knowledge and skills,” she said. “There wasn't really a lot here at the time and it felt rather lonely, not knowing where to go or who to talk to.”

Maree is now the all-smiling, all-loving, all-embracing HEY

Diversity worker at headspace Bendigo and presented on Bendigo's unique support offerings at the national forum in May 2024.



“With the introduction of the Pride Festival and other events, Bendigo has become such a welcoming and inclusive place to live and work,” she said.

“I love being part of the Queer community here, from volunteering, to attending the events, meeting new people, making new friends and making life-long connections with my chosen family. It really is a great place to be, and I have found my tribe.”

Creating connections during NAIDOC Week

The headspace team were proud to celebrate and honour the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples during NAIDOC Week. The theme was **For Our Elders** and paid tribute to elder knowledge, strength, resilience and the passing down of cultural art, stories and wisdom to young people.

We participated in a number of activities and marked the week with the launch of two works by local artists and proud Palawa Trawlwoolway women **Josie and Emily Gower**, who first connected with headspace via our **Take a Step** campaign. The sisters created twin works, one for a thoroughfare at Bendigo Senior Secondary College and the other for the foyer at headspace Bendigo's Pall Mall location.



Pictured right: Proud Palawa Trawlwoolway women Josie and Emily Gower with one of their artwork pieces at headspace. The other artwork (above) can be seen at Bendigo Senior Secondary College.



GPs year of high-quality hard work

During 2023-24 the medical practice was certified by **Quality Practice Accreditation (QPA)**, meaning the service demonstrated compliance in the delivery of safe and high-quality primary care services with a commitment to continuous quality improvement. BCHS was also successful in being re-accredited as a Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) accredited training site and RACGP extended skills post (sexual and reproductive health). These three accreditations are a credit to the hard work of staff and the service.

Congratulations!

With the support of BCHS and after dedicating many years of training to become general practitioners, we are proud to say **Dr Gaurav Movalia** and **Dr Mehwish Riaz** have completed their fellowships. Well done!



Dr Gaurav Movalia



Dr Mehwish Riaz

New registrar: Dr Shivawn Stevens

The medical team welcomed Dr Stevens in January 2024. She is working towards her fellowship with RACGP and her special interest areas include paediatrics, preventative healthcare and emergency medicine.

Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) lays building blocks for the future

In addition to the opening of the BCHS Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic in March 2024, the rest of the sexual reproductive health hub has been busy as well. The team is working towards the goal of being a regional leader in the SRH space, supporting our rural colleagues with mentoring and training, and building our relationships with universities to take students from a range of disciplines.

“Mary-Anne is an angel nurse who is the best and on the ball! Dr Kaur is an absolute beaming gem! Huge thanks, you are amazing!”

“Dr Louise Manning has been so good; an understanding and caring doctor right from the start. She’s the only doctor I’ve met that actually listens and tries to resolve the issue instead of just throwing medicine [at me] to take.”

In the last financial year the team has:

- Completed 310 IUD insertions
- Supported 176 medical terminations of pregnancy
- Seen 294 at the Men’s Health Clinic.



Pictured: Dr Kaur in the Sexual and Reproductive Health Hub.



Meeting the mental health needs of our community

During the last financial year our team of 15 provided more than 6000 hours of general counselling, with the Primary Health Network (PHN) Psychological Treatment Services providing further support to 505 clients on mental health treatment plans.

- **884 referrals for adults**
- **58 referrals for children (up to age 12)**
- **100% of respondents to an anonymous feedback form 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that our service met their needs and that they felt understood and supported by their clinician.**

“Simone is amazing. I would not be as well as I am today without her help. She has given me all the tools, advice, encouragement and strength to manage my anxiety on a daily basis.”

“Anika is a very caring person who I immediately felt comfortable with – she is very approachable and I feel she is there for me if I need help.”

“My only suggestion would be to employ more staff in order to reach more people.”

Culturally Sensitive Counselling

Funded by Foundation House, this program provides **torture and trauma counselling** to refugees and saw a huge increase in funding. This allowed for increases in staffing for both counsellor advocates and bi-cultural workers. Over the last year the team has supported **73 individuals in one-to-one counselling**, as well as overseeing a number of programs and initiatives including:

- Walking group
- Men's yoga
- Emotional regulation support group
- Advisory groups with Karen and Afghan communities
- Unity program
- Meditation and mindfulness videos in language
- UCan2 program.

Head to Health

This program, brought in as a response to COVID-19, has ended due to a cessation of funding. The community and referrers have expressed an outpouring of disappointment at this. The program sat within BCHS and operated with the advantageous position of being able to easily connect to the array of other services offered by BCHS, including medical practice, family services, AOD services and allied health programs. Approximately 30% of referrals received for the program were for community members aged under 25, and over the life of the program clinicians delivered **14,024 services to 1750 clients.**

Partnerships and placements

BCHS placements 'eye-opening'

Supporting and developing future health and community services professionals is important to BCHS. Our student placement programs provide students with first-hand experience in a regional community health service setting.

Education providers we partnered with include:

- Australian Catholic University
- Australian College of Applied Professions
- Bendigo TAFE
- Deakin University
- Eastern College Australia
- La Trobe University
- Monash University
- Partners in Training
- Holmesglen Institute of TAFE.

In the 2023-24 financial year 54 students spent time with our teams:

Student Placements	Numbers in 2023-24
Art Therapy	1
Community Services	10
Counselling	5
Exercise Physiology	2
Nursing	3
Forensic Mental Health	5
Occupational Therapy	1
Public Health and Health Promotion	2
Social work	3
Psychology	4
Medical	18
TOTAL	54

"My experience in the GP clinic has emphasised the crucial role of a patient's social background in their care. While clinical knowledge is essential, I've learned that economic factors often influence treatment decisions profoundly. For instance, I've seen first-hand how affordability can outweigh therapeutic efficacy for patients facing financial hardships. This balance between economic feasibility and medical necessity has become a central consideration in my approach to patient care. I've realised that genuine communication, devoid of mechanical procedures, is key to building trust and rapport. By engaging in more casual conversations, I've been able to view patients not just as medical cases but as unique individuals with distinct needs and preferences."

"My time at BCHS was definitely the most eye-opening experience of the week. It was an absolute privilege to be able to work with Dr Karishma at the sexual health clinic, as I was exposed to an aspect of healthcare I had little knowledge about. I was unaware that many sexual health clinics existed, and definitely did not expect to find such a specialised one in Bendigo. On Tuesdays (the day I was on GP placement), BCHS runs a specialised endometriosis clinic which they offer free of charge to patients who severely suffer from the chronic condition. I learnt so much about endometriosis and how debilitating it can be."

Nova House nurtures Aaron's affinity to help

Nova House took Bendigo TAFE student Aaron under their wing during a five-week work placement last year.

After a career in the fitness industry, Aaron began pursuing a fresh start with a Diploma of Community Services, inspired by his family and friends' belief that he'd do great work out in the community.

"I've always had an affinity for helping people, even when I couldn't help myself, I was always able to help others, and it brought me joy to do that," he said.

The aim was to perhaps work with young people, but he also jumped at the opportunity to experience life at the coal face of our drug and alcohol withdrawal facility.

"This instantly piqued my interest. Personally, I have a bit of a history with drugs and alcohol, so it's definitely something I feel I can relate to. I'm interested in helping people to help themselves."

Nova House welcomes an average of six students a year, from TAFE and also the La Trobe University nursing program. We know students who complete placements in a regional area are more likely to stay and work in a regional area so we're proud to foster the careers of local people, all for the benefit of our community.

"I've always had an affinity for helping people, even when I couldn't help myself, I was always able to help others, and it brought me joy to do that."



Creating connections through collaboration

Teamwork makes the dream work! Hear from some of our partners on what it's like to work with BCHS:

Student placements

"Your time and teaching is greatly appreciated and discussions with the students at the end of their week-long program highlighted that the opportunity to spend a day in a GP clinic expanded their awareness significantly. Thank you again for generously opening your doors to and giving your time for our students."

– Monash University

Community wellbeing

"We're really excited to have Bendigo Community Health Services on board as a sponsor which not only supports the Foundation, but our staff too."

– McKern Foundation

"The Community Connections Project Worker is having a significant positive impact on staff wellbeing, with the majority of staff reporting that his work with the library makes their jobs more manageable and gives them confidence in working with visitors with high social needs. There is a strong belief amongst staff that his work is improving what the library is able to offer its most vulnerable visitors."

– Bendigo Library

Diversity and inclusion

"Sports Focus has been working in partnership with Bendigo Community Health Services to deliver the Sports Inclusion Project over the past four years. This collaboration has seen some fantastic outcomes... The knowledge, expertise, passion and dedication of BCHS staff has been instrumental to the project's success. The involvement of bi-lingual staff of lived experience has brought an authentic element to the project. Sports Focus looks forward to continuing to collaborate with BCHS in the future"

– Sports Focus

First ARRCH conference promotes initiatives and impacts

BCHS joined its ten fellow Alliance of Rural and Regional Community Health members for the inaugural **ARRCH conference** in October 2023, in Creswick.

The two-day event showcased the innovative work of the member organisations, alongside keynote speakers, workshop sessions, research presentations, and addresses from ministers and key public policy figures. The conference highlighted the impact of ARRCH members on communities across 82.5 per cent of Victoria.

BCHS representatives presented on its Sexual and Reproductive Health Hub and its health support programs for people of refugee backgrounds.

The focus of ARRCH is to **reduce health inequity in rural and regional Victoria** by addressing the social determinants of health.



Pictured: The BCHS team who attended the conference

Feedback and risk management

Monitoring client and community experience

Feedback about client and community experience with BCHS is always welcome and is highly valued. This feedback supports us in further improving the services and programs we provide to clients and the community. At no time will feedback reflect negatively on a client's continued use of our services and programs.

The following options are available for clients and the community to provide feedback in relation to their experience with BCHS:

- By completing a 'Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints' form available from reception at any BCHS site
- By providing feedback through BCHS' website
- By emailing.

Where requested or required, a BCHS staff member will respond to feedback either in person or by phone, e-mail, or letter within 30 days.

 **20 Complaints**

 **46 Compliments and/or suggestions**


"I'd like to nominate [BCHS staff members] for employees of the month for providing connected care right from the first appointment. It led to a much better and faster health outcome. Thanks for going above and beyond."

Victorian Healthcare Experience Survey


BCHS participated in the 2024 Victorian Healthcare Experience Survey. Approximately 140 clients across BCHS were invited by the department to participate in the Community Health Program survey, and 35 clients completed the survey providing a response rate of 25%.

These results were received by BCHS in May 2024, and are currently being reviewed and actioned. This feedback represents only a very small proportion of clients accessing BCHS services and programs, however, will support us in further improving the services and programs we provide to clients and the community.


A summary of the 2024 results included BCHS scoring:

 **97.1%** Overall, how would you rate the care you received from the service?


Similar to the overall Victorian score of 93.4%

 **94.3%** Did you feel that you were listened to and understood by staff?


Similar to the overall Victorian score of 84.2%

 **100%** Did you feel cared for?


Similar to the overall Victorian score of 89.8%

 **75.8%** Do you think using this Community Health Service has assisted you in being able to do the things that are important to you?


Similar to the overall Victorian score of 78.1%

 **74.3%** Could you get an appointment when you needed one?


Similar to the overall Victorian score of 65.6%

 **88.6%** Do you think using this Community Health Service has been helpful to your health and wellbeing?

Similar to the overall Victorian score of 88.2%

 **88.6%** Did staff work as a team to care for you?

Similar to the overall Victorian score of 78.8%

 **89.7%** If you had any questions or concerns, were you able to discuss these with staff?

Similar to the overall Victorian score of 83.7%

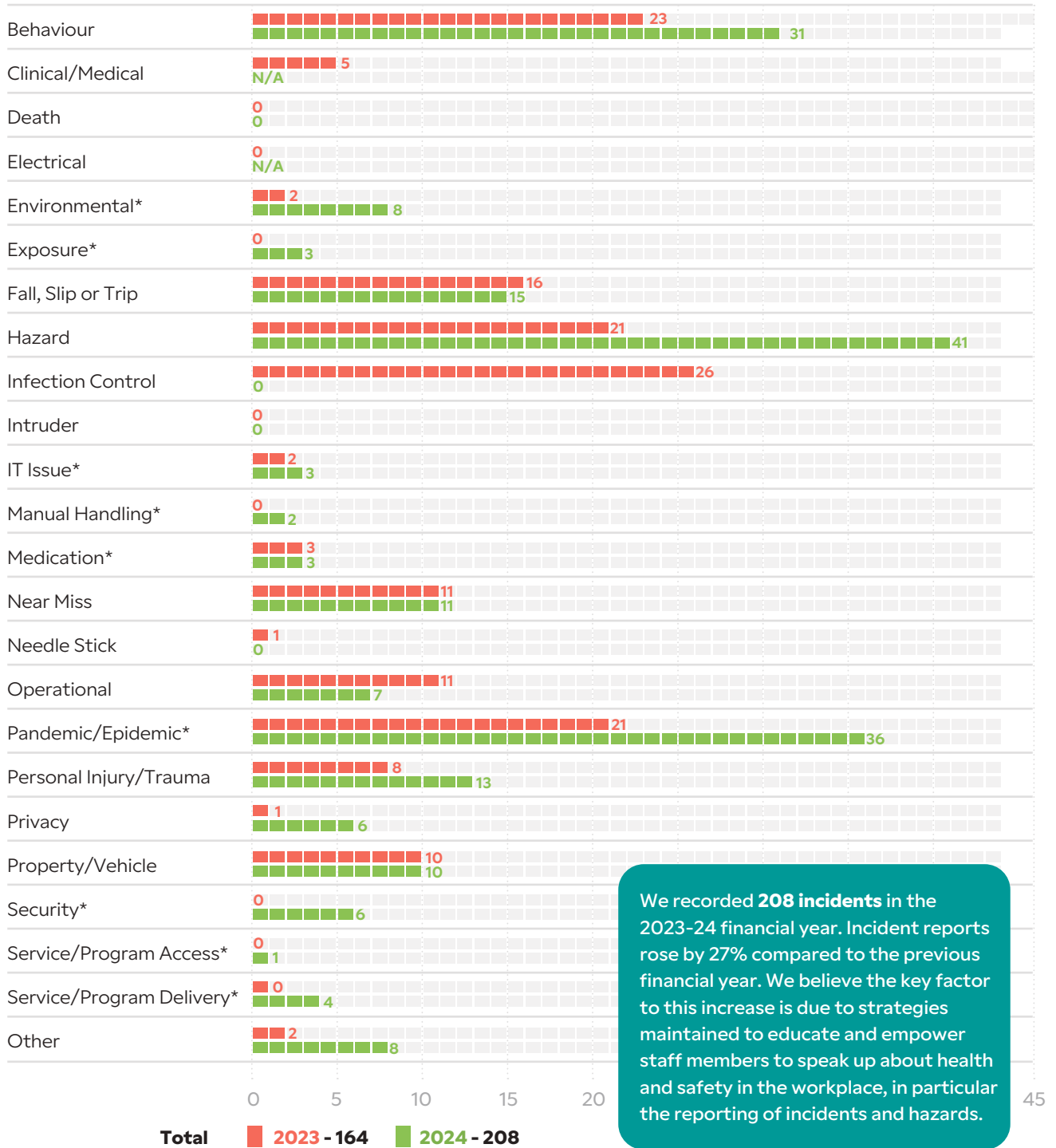
Empowering staff through education

Incident and hazard reporting

BCHS uses a custom-built system for reporting and managing incidents and hazards. When a staff member lodges an incident or hazard, a notification is triggered to our Risk, Quality and Compliance team where it is processed and then sent to the appropriate executive or senior leader/s to review, action and record details of the incident or hazard review and end result/outcome.

Our Risk, Quality and Compliance team oversees incident and hazard investigations and regularly consults and provides reports to BCBS' health and safety representatives and board of directors. Our health and safety representatives are active in reporting incidents, identifying hazards, and providing recommendations for controls.

Incident Type



*Represents new incident type introduced through 2022-23. * N/A – incident types removed through 2023-24 (these would now come under other incident types).

Accreditations

BCHS is committed to ensuring healthy and safe working, and service and program delivery environments for all employees, clients and visitors.

Our quality and safety systems are integrated into service and program delivery and are supported by our commitment to maintaining accreditation under the following quality and safety standards:

- QIC Health and Community Services Standards
- ACE&CQA National Quality Standards (Family Day Care)
- Aged Care Quality Standards (Podiatry, Physical Activity Programs, Social Support Group)
- headspace Model Integrity Framework (headspace Bendigo)
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) Standards (Medical Practice)
- Social Services Standards (Family Services)
- Child Safe Standards.

New safety system for Central site

During the 2023-24 financial year, BCHS had a new medical duress system installed at our Central site for the medical and allied health practice. There is now a button located in each of the medical and allied health rooms which can be pressed during a medical emergency. This means the staff present can attend to the client while other medical staff will hear the alert and proceed to the room to assist. Prior to this the situation had to be relayed through the phone system. BCHS staff have been provided with training and resources to support the rollout of the medical duress system.



11%

In 2023-24 BCHS saw an 11% increase in the number of individuals accessing our services.



27%

Our commitment to providing culturally safe care means we saw a 27% increase in individuals who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander accessing services.



45%

Thanks to the opening of the new Loddon Children's Health & Wellbeing Local we saw a 45% increase in clients under the age of 10.



16%

Of the clients accessing our services, 16% were from outside of Greater Bendigo, coming from as far away as Mildura, Portland and Albury.

Vision, purpose, values

Our vision:

Better health and wellbeing across generations.

Our purpose:

Supporting you and your family to live healthy lives.

Our values:

Lived and Living Experience: We listen to understand our communities, their backstories, lived and living experiences and cultures, and learn from them to tailor our services.

Equity: We provide equitable and inclusive health and wellbeing services, ensuring they are culturally responsive and accessible.

People: We maintain a skilled, engaged and professional workforce, including people with lived experience, and enable a culture of continuous learning.

Partnership: We listen, learn and share our knowledge and expertise in collaboration and co-design with our community, ensuring we are providing local solutions to community need.

Integrity: We uphold the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and approach all we do with kindness and respect.



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