

Playtime begins



The smalltalk playgroup grows

The smalltalk supported playgroup duo Tiffany and Rachel are looking forward to a big Term One of fun with Bendigo families, with an expanded program to cater for some of the city's newest arrivals.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families with pre-schoolers will gather for a special weekly playgroup at the BCHS Central site, with the support of bilingual staff.

Rachel said the aim was to support the learning and development of the city's CALD children, while building the confidence and social connections of parents and carers.

"We're looking forward to meeting and supporting our new families with our evidence-backed smalltalk strategies, which are designed to enhance learning at home for children from birth to school age," she said.

While the new CALD group is now fully booked, families can join one of four other groups at locations around Bendigo.

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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.



We support people to develop and maintain their personal, gender, sexual, cultural religious and spiritual identity.

Walking with you into a healthier 2026

By **BCHS CEO Mandy Hutchinson**

As we settle into 2026, Bendigo Community Health Services is focused on deepening its impact by strengthening services, supporting our workforce, and placing community voice at the heart of everything we do.

One of the most exciting developments will be the launch of our Community Advisory Committee. This group will ensure the voices of those with lived experience are guiding decisions that affect them.



It's a powerful next step in our commitment to walk with community.

Our 2026 priorities include focused work on client experience, system integration and sustainability. We are approaching this work with a clear set of values and everyday commitments:

- I am here to help you
- I will show you respect
- I will go with you on your journey.

These aren't just words, they shape how we design, deliver and improve care every day. They guide how we support our staff, reduce barriers for clients, and make our services more connected and person-centred.

We are also investing in our staff and their wellbeing and development, improving our systems and infrastructure, and continuing to advocate for equity — visibly and deliberately.

We want your experience at BCBS to be about more than just your health and wellbeing.

We want you to feel safe. To feel a connection. To feel trusted.

BCBS is proud of:



Quality
Improvement
Council

'Yes ... we are
a QIC accredited
organisation'



Get social with us:



www.bchs.com.au

DRIVING UP SAFE PRACTICE

Newly arrived Karen people buckle up with BCHS to learn road safety essentials

Bendigo Community Health Services is working to ensure newly arrived people from refugee backgrounds are safe on the roads, both behind the wheel, and on foot.

This year, BCHS will deliver its Road Safety for New Arrivals Program to 60 new Bendigo residents.

The sessions are specially tailored to Karen people who have previously lived in refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border; places with no formal road system.

Refugee Project Facilitator Nido Taveesupmai (pictured right) said often, these newcomers have never driven a car before coming to Australia.

“Life in refugee camps typically involves no formal road rules, signage or pedestrian systems,” Nido says.

“New arrivals often lack knowledge of road signs, safe driving behaviour and lawful road use.”

The BCHS program is based on Department of Transport and Planning materials, adapted for delivery in the Karen language.

The sessions cover:

- Key risk factors for road users
- Getting around safely as a driver and pedestrian
- Walking, cycling and using public transport, and
- Enforcement of road rules.



BCHS Refugee Project Facilitator Nido connects with Road Safety for New Arrivals Program participants in January.

Nido says providing road safety information in first language strengthens the participants' understanding of road rules, improves navigation of traffic, and supports lawful road use.

“Sessions are delivered by bicultural staff with refugee lived experience, which creates a culturally safe and more effective way for people to learn,” he says.

The program has been a key part of BCHS' education to new arrivals for the past seven years.

Nido says this long history has built a strong reputation and deep reach within newly arrived communities.

“Participants find the sessions useful, and they want all new arrivals to attend,” Nido says.

Eligible participants who do are rewarded with two free driving lessons with local Karen driving schools.



Child safety commitment

Bendigo Community Health Services values children from all backgrounds. We are dedicated to making our community a safe, nurturing and welcoming place for children to grow and develop. We are committed to making sure ALL children reach their individual potential. We will do this by supporting families to keep children safe, healthy, happy; helping families support children to reach their full potential; and effectively advocating for children and being a champion for quality outcomes in child health and wellbeing. Visit bchs.com.au to read our child safety commitment in full.

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2 smalltalk Supported Playgroup - Kangaroo Flat	3 smalltalk Supported Playgroup - Huntly	4 smalltalk Supported Playgroup - Heathcote	5 smalltalk Supported Playgroup - Central Bendigo	6 smalltalk Supported Playgroup - California Gully	7
8 	9 Healthy lunchbox week starts	10	11 Safer Internet Day 	12	13	14 National Condom Day 
15 Huntly Family Fun Day 	16	17	18	19	20 	21 Good Charlotte - Bendigo Racecourse
22 Spring Gully Family Dance	23 White Hills Wanderers walking group 	24	25 Eaglehawk Explorers walking group 	26	27	28

What's on in February...

Who's up for a good walk?

This is a rare photo of a few White Hills Wanderers' members sitting still. Usually, their time at the beautiful Bendigo Botanic Gardens is spent looping the loops, stretching the limbs, often sharing the ups and downs of life.

Anyone is welcome to join the Wanderers, or their sister group, the Eaglehawk Explorers out at Lake Neangar.

These free, weekly social walking groups are coordinated by our Health Promotion team.

In the words of HP officer Christine: "If you're looking to enjoy the summer morning air, get moving and make new friends, this is the walking group for you."

In White Hills they wander each Monday, and in Eaglehawk, they explore each Wednesday.

For the details, email healthpromotion@bchs.com.au



DANCING TO SUPPORT BCHS

The Family Rhythm Dance Band is a favourite of the groovers out in Spring Gully, and this month they're playing for BCHS.

The floorboards at the Spring Gully Hall will get a good old-fashioned scuffing for community health this month.

The Spring Gully Charity Dance, which happens five times a year, is kicking off by raising funds for the BCHS Alcohol and Other Drugs service.

Organiser Joy said the Sunday afternoon charity events are in addition to the regular Saturday night and Monday night dances.

"The Sunday dances are very well attended, being in the afternoon, so people who travel can still get home at a reasonable time," she said.

"In recent years we have used the Sunday dances as fundraisers for charities.

"Other charities we have donated to are MADCOW, Foodshare, prostrate support group, Flying doctor transport, breast cancer nurses and more.

"We like to know our donation is used locally."

BCHS Operations Manager Mental Health & AOD Services Cilla Boucher said with the dancers' donation, the service will be able to support people who experience substance use disorders and addiction.

"These people are amongst the most stigmatised people we support," Cilla said.

"Extra funds that come into the service this year could help



support clients to access online services such as Centrelink and banking," she added.

"It could help purchase a washing machine and dryer, as many of our clients do not have reliable access to these everyday appliances. It could purchase art supplies and sensory tools to better support clients during their appointments, or purchase Hepatitis test kits."

Joy encouraged others to attend – and the benefits are vast.

"We are a friendly social group," she said. "Dancing supports both physical and mental wellbeing. It encourages gentle movement that helps with balance, mobility and heart health. It also helps with mental health through the music, and social connection.

"The dances bring people together, reduces loneliness, builds confidence, and creates a sense of belonging. On a personal level – it's like my retreat."

Groove to popular old time music musos the Family Rhythm Dance Band on Sunday, Feb 22, from 1.30pm to 5pm.

Admission is \$10. BYO plate of afternoon tea, at 135 Spring Gully Road. For more info call Joy on 0438 544 705.

Did you know we're a registered charity?

BCHS gratefully accepts donations all year round.

Whether it's cash to support our services, or quality goods to assist former refugees or people experiencing homelessness.

Make a tax deductible donation online, or contact us with your ideas to collaborate on a project to make a big difference to people experiencing hardship in Bendigo.

[Donate - BCHS](#)





Job vacancies

Paediatric Health Navigator

- Fixed Term Position - 12 months, 76 hours per fortnight (1.0 FTE). Part time negotiable
- Applications close Monday, February 9 at 10pm

Join our Pathways to Good Health program and help provide high-quality care and support to children and young people in out of home care. The Paediatric Health Navigator role is dynamic and works in partnership with Child Protection and our broader community.

The program includes allied health, nursing, care coordination and paediatrician hours. Servicing the Loddon catchment, the program ensures all children entering care will have their health needs reviewed to ensure they receive the recommended age-appropriate health checks.

To successfully apply you will need:

- Tertiary qualification with current relevant registration in social work, psychology, paediatric nursing or occupational therapy.
- Experience working in paediatrics.
- Knowledge and appreciation of working as part of a multidisciplinary team.
- Passion for advocating and working under a neurodiversity affirming framework.
- A current employee Working with Children Check and Driver's Licence.

Plus a number of other criteria.

For more information visit the Careers page on bchs.com.au.

smalltalk playgroups

Join a playgroup in Term One, 2026

We're highlighting one of BCHS' popular services: smalltalk, and just in time for another year of growth and learning.

smalltalk supported playgroups are a free service for local families. Groups run during school terms and include a healthy morning snack for the children. In Term One, 2026, they will occur on the following days and locations:

- Kangaroo Flat: Mondays, 9.30–11.30am at Kidzspace, 19 Helm Street.
- Huntly: Tuesdays, 10am–12pm at the Huntly Primary School.
- Heathcote: Wednesdays, 10am–12pm at Holy Rosary Primary School.
- Central Bendigo: Thursdays for culturally and linguistically diverse families (booked out)
- California Gully: Fridays, 9.30–11.30am at the California Gully Primary School.

Why attend?

"It's one of the best things," says mum and playgroup member Renee.

"Tiff is great with my boys and helping me if I have any questions."

There are some eligibility requirements to joining, which can be found on the smalltalk page of the BCHS website, via [this link](#) or this QR code. Contact the team on 5406 1200 or smalltalk@bchs.com.au



smalltalk facilitator Tiff.

CHOOSE ENDURING CARE FOR YOUR KIDS



Did you know, the most popular kids toys in the early 1980s are still entertaining the masses?

We're talking Cabbage Patch Dolls, Transformers, My Little Ponies and the eternally frustrating Rubik's Cube...



Something else that hasn't dated for the kids is Bendigo Family Day Care (BFDC) – it's been providing quality care and education to little locals since the Autobots first versed the Decepticons – for more than 45 years.

BFDC coordinator Tam said: "We work with and support a valued network of Early Childhood Educators who open their homes and hearts to children.

"Together, we strive to instil a sense of excitement, curiosity and wonder in children; we respect, care, value and nurture children as individuals and help light their way to happiness, security and joy."

If you're seeking the same for your child, perhaps 2026 is the year to become one of our day care families.

Our award-winning service has vacancies with qualified and passionate home-based educators in the following locations:

- Epsom
- Jackass Flat
- Longlea
- California Gully
- Goornong
- Heathcote
- Wedderburn

Contact the team on 5406 1382 or fdc@bchs.com.au to enquire about vacancies and bookings.

More educators needed

If you're a qualified Early Childhood Educator looking to be supported to run your own home-based business, we would love to hear from you.

Simply start by filling out the [prospective educator enquiry form](#) on our website, via this link or QR code.



Find Local back-to-school resources online

The Loddon Children's Health & Wellbeing Local – which is managed by BCHS – has a host of great resources to support families with children heading off to school in 2026.

Learn how to best prepare and support your Foundation student, or any reluctant school goer, with expert advice and gentle hints at www.loddonchwl.com.au

Supporting your mental health pillars after the summer fires



When danger has passed and you begin to process events after a disaster, prioritising sleep, diet and exercise is key to managing your wellbeing, says psychologist Oriane.

When there's a threat to our lives, our bodies kick into gear to help us get through the immediate danger period. A danger like a bushfire can keep us on alert for an extended period of time, which is exhausting.

After the immediate threat to our safety has passed, our minds can shift to thoughts of worry, frustration and grief.

These are normal reactions. Some people find it helpful to talk. While others do not, and they should not be forced to talk about it. Many people find it helpful to be with others, whether that's getting together to talk or to just have a hug and a cry. That way you know you're not alone.

The foundation of good mental health when you are physically safe is sleep, diet and exercise.

These three things are necessary to recharge your battery. If you can't access these, you'll be as flat as your phone if it also went without a recharge. You need to be fully charged to help others too.

It may be hard to sleep under the circumstances, and you may not feel like eating. These are essential and they deserve to be top priority.

Many people find it helpful to focus attention on what is in their control, and what choices they have today - lousy, or limited as they may be, tomorrow will offer new chances and new choices.

Often, people also find it helpful to focus on their values, and remind themselves of the actions they took today to live in alignment with their values.

If kindness is something you value, for example, spend time thinking about an act of kindness that you performed today.

Many people find daily gratitude practice helpful. It's a simple way to start and end the day. For example, saying to yourself, 'I'm grateful for this cup of coffee'. It doesn't have to be big, it can be very simple.

If you have trouble sleeping, if you find you're not coping or feel overwhelmed by the road ahead, or if you feel yourself being drawn towards unhealthy coping strategies, including drugs or alcohol, please reach out to speak with a mental health professional.

Where to seek further support

Lifeline Loddon Mallee

Providing phone and online crisis support.
Phone: 13 11 14 | Web: lifelinelm.com

Mental Health and Wellbeing Local

Phone: (03) 5497 5600 | Web: mindaustralia.org.au

Bendigo Community Health Services

General Counselling Service
Phone: (03) 5406 1200 | Web: bchs.com.au

headspace Bendigo (For ages 12-25)

Drop in 78-80 Pall Mall, Bendigo.
Phone: (03) 5406 1400 | Web: headspace.org.au/Bendigo

BRUCE BRINGS THE HOPE



Congratulations to Bili Anthony, aged 10, of Bendigo! Bili's soft pastel on paper artwork was the winning entry of The Bruce Art Award, launched November 2025 at BCHS.

We challenged local creatives to submit work on the theme of Bruce - our much-loved therapy cat at Nova House.

In December, clients at the residential withdrawal centre gathered to choose a winner from the many fantastic entries we received.

Bili's beautiful work was selected as our clients felt it depicts Bruce "reaching for the light at the end of the tunnel, showing that there is hope".

Bili's work now features on a correspondence card for Nova House clients to use to write to their loved ones while they receive the care and support they need to safely withdraw from alcohol or other drugs.

Thank you to everyone who entered, we were all so inspired by your work. And thanks to Bili for gifting us a little of your very special creative spirit.

The competition included a call-out for art supplies for our clients to use during their Nova House stay, and we also thank those who kindly responded with some amazing donations - including from a caring former client, passing on the love.

Join us at the 2026 ARRCH Conference

BCHS will join fellow leaders in healthcare, community services, academia and policy for the Alliance of Rural & Regional Community Health (ARRCH) Conference in March, 2026.

The national gathering focuses on improving health equity and wellbeing across rural and regional Australia.

It will feature two days of practical insights, case studies and collaboration that celebrate innovation in community health.

The conference is open to anyone working to improve the health and wellbeing of rural and regional Australians, including CEOs and executives, clinicians, community health professionals, academics, researchers and government representatives.



Organisers say it's more than a conference - it's also an opportunity to network, exchange ideas and contribute to a vision for a stronger and more equitable health system across rural and regional Australia.

For details on the March 12 & 13 event in Ballarat go to www.arrch.org.au

FOR LITTLES WHO LUNCH

National Lunchbox Week from Feb 9-15 encourages families to open the lid on their school snack habits and up the ante for the year ahead.

The annual Nutrition Australia initiative aims to inspire enjoyable and nourishing lunchboxes that support children's wellbeing and help build a positive relationship with food.

Here at BCHS, we've checked out the www.lunchboxweek.org website to find a quick and easy weekday recipe we think even the fussiest of foodies will love - and, it's adaptable to your little one's likings.

Pizza Jaffle

Ingredients - makes 1

- 1 slice of pineapple
- 2 slices of tomato
- 1 mushroom
- 1 slice of capsicum
- 2 slices of wholegrain bread
- 2 teaspoons of tomato paste
- ¼ cup grated cheese
- Spray oil



1. **Slice or dice** tomato, pineapple, mushroom and capsicum.
2. **Spread** tomato paste on each slice of bread.
3. **Top** with the veggies.
4. **Cover** the toppings with cheese, close the sandwich and spray a small amount of oil on the bread surface..Toast sandwich in a pre-heated jaffle press.
5. **Allow to cool** before cutting and placing in a lunchbox.

COMING SOON

Kudos to the BCHS Health Promotion team, which has created a definitive go-to guide to Greater Bendigo's parks, playgrounds, pools and more, all in an effort to get us moving.

HP Officer Tegan Hartley has collated a host of free or low-budget options for all ages and abilities to enjoy getting active in some amazing places and spaces - from the city centre to our rural suburbs.





Our services

We run a wide range of services for people of all ages, backgrounds, genders and lived experiences. How can we help you and your family?

Doctors & Specialists:

- GPs & nurses
- Sexual & Reproductive Health Hub
- Endometriosis & Pelvic Pain Clinic
- Trans & Gender Diverse Clinic
- Doctors in Secondary Schools
- Chronic Disease Management

Allied Health:

- Exercise Physiology
- Physiotherapy
- Podiatry
- Paediatric Podiatry

Youth:

- headspace Bendigo

Children & Families:

- Family Services
- Children's Health Services
- Loddon Children's Health & Wellbeing Local
- Bendigo Family Day Care
- Stepping Stones Early Childhood Intervention program
- School Readiness Program
- smalltalk Supported Playgroups

Former Refugees & Migrants:

- Settlement Services
- Cultural Diversity programs to build health and wellbeing literacy
- Community Harmony Program to build refugee & migrant-sensitive practice

Counselling & Mental Health:

- Counselling
- Culturally Sensitive Counselling
- Forensic Mental Health

Alcohol & Drugs:

- Counselling
- Family Support Group
- Residential Withdrawal
- Home-Based Withdrawal
- Pharmacotherapy
- Needle Syringe Program

In the Community:

- Health Promotion in schools, workplaces, clubs and at events
- Workplace Health & Wellbeing Program
- Elmore Social Support Group
- InRoads Community Connections program for people experiencing homelessness
- Community Health Nurse at the Bendigo Multidisciplinary Centre



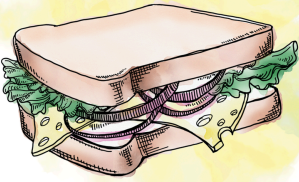
5406 1200



bchs.com.au

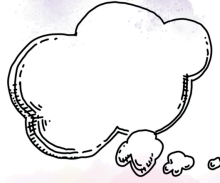


SHARE A SNACK.

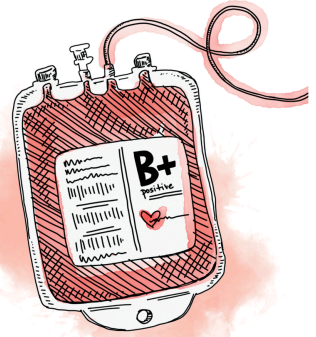


PICK UP LITTER.

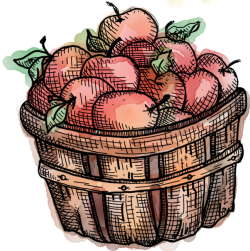
GIVE OTHERS THE
BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT.



DRINK A GLASS
OF WATER.

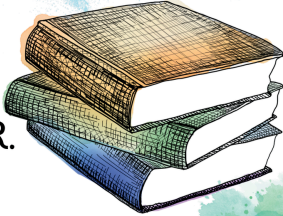


DONATE BLOOD.



THANK A TEACHER.

READ WITH A CHILD.

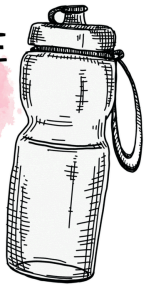


COMPLIMENT WITH
RECKLESS ABANDON.

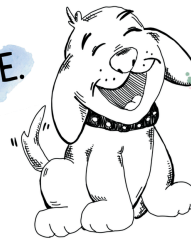


ACKNOWLEDGE
SOMEONE WHO
DESERVES PRAISE.

USE A
REUSABLE
WATER
BOTTLE.



SMILE.



OPEN DOORS
FOR OTHERS.



SUPPORT LOCALLY
OWNED BUSINESSES.

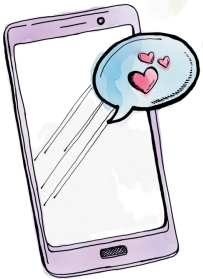


MAKE
KINDNESS
THE NORM.



SHARE YOUR
FAVORITE SONG
WITH SOMEONE.

TEXT SOMEONE A
POSITIVE MESSAGE.

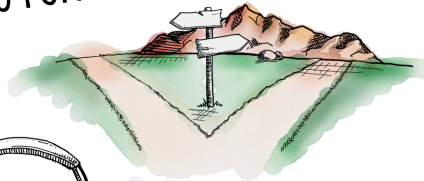


PLACE ENCOURAGING
STICKY NOTES IN
PUBLIC AREAS.



GO FOR A LONG WALK.

LEAVE AN EXTRA BIG TIP.



GIVE AN
UNEXPECTED GIFT.



ENCOURAGE
A FRIEND.



PUT AWAY YOUR
PHONE AND LISTEN
WITH YOUR HEART

CELEBRATE
SOMEONE ELSE'S
ACCOMPLISHMENT.

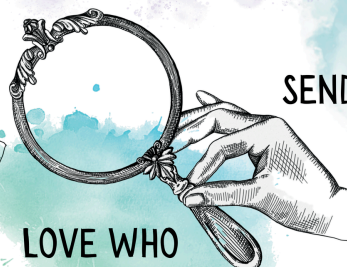


SEND A THANK YOU NOTE .

LAUGH UNTIL YOUR
BELLY HURTS.



LOVE WHO
YOU ARE.



**RANDOM ACTS
OF KINDNESS**
FOUNDATION®

