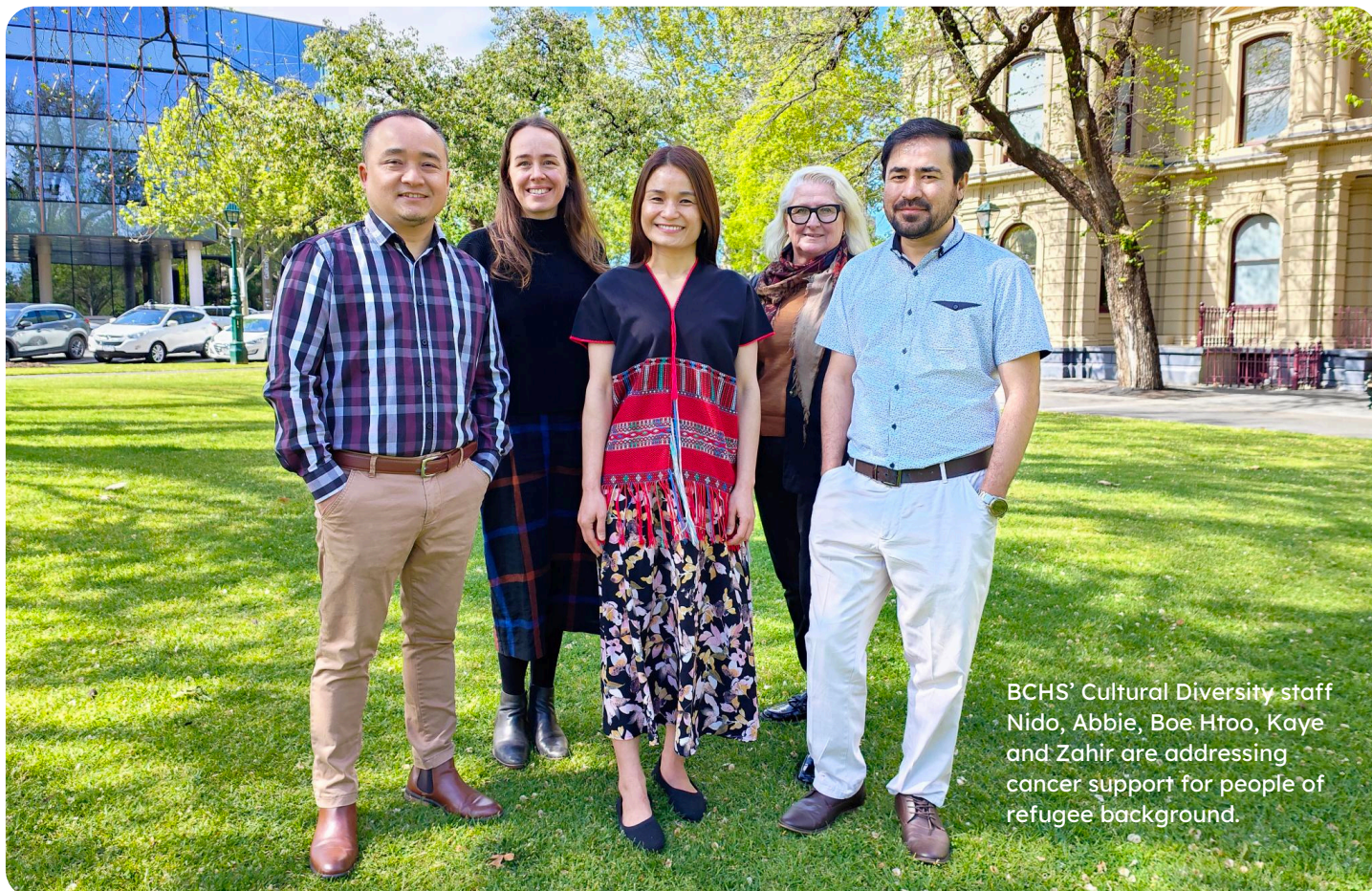


CANCER CARE



BCCHS' Cultural Diversity staff Nido, Abbie, Boe Htoo, Kaye and Zahir are addressing cancer support for people of refugee background.

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Two new GPs join the medical practice
- Be informed about the Gender Equity Coalition
- What's on in Bendigo in March
- Endometriosis clinic marks International Women's Day
- BCCHS on the state conference stage
- Health Matters column: managing pain mindfully
- ARC Justice hosts human rights lawyer

A program to prevent and prepare

Cultural Diversity Week, from March 21, is an apt time for BCCHS to take stock of the wins and losses of its Cancer Support for People of Refugee Background in Bendigo program.

The wins have been encouraging, with hundreds of people of refugee background now equipped with knowledge of and access to culturally-safe cancer prevention, screening, treatment and care.

The losses, well they've been profound, says Cultural Diversity and Relationships Facilitator, Abbie Lockwood.

"We unfortunately started seeing late-stage diagnoses exclusively within our Karen community. Really poor engagement with health services and just really tragic outcomes," Abbie says.



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.

Vital cancer program must continue for good

FROM PAGE 1

Approximately three years ago, BCHS partnered with Loddon Mallee Integrated Cancer Services to implement the State Government program.

In that time, the team has developed resources for both community members and health professionals. They've delivered in-person sessions, and they've held many hands, for a major aspect has been supporting people to navigate cancer treatment and end of life care.

"Everything about our health service, everything about our systems, everything about medication, pharmacies, scripts – it's all new for them," says Abbie.

"There's a whole lot of assumptions that we make about people's ability to understand their bodies. We can't just put out a call to screen – that doesn't work. If you don't understand what's happening in your body and you don't believe cancer can be treated, why are you going to screen? Why would you want to know?"

Much of the program's achievements are due to the bi-cultural staff who help drive it – such as Boe Htoo.

Before arriving in Bendigo, Boe Htoo spent 32 years living in a refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border, where for nine years she worked in the camp hospital. Her lived experience allows her to provide impactful emotional and spiritual support, and to advocate for others as she supports them to navigate the complexities of cancer care.

"When we lived in the camp in Thailand, we couldn't refer people for treatment, and they died," says Boe Htoo. "That's why when they hear the word 'cancer', they believe it's a disease that can't be treated."

"To help my community, I would like the health worker to understand a bit of our background. Because some people are so quiet when they attend their healthcare service – they don't want to ask or they worry the GP doesn't have time to answer the question."

For now, this vital work of the Cultural Diversity team continues, on limited funding, while they search for avenues to fund a permanent model.

Cancer Council Victoria recently highlighted the team's work. Read the full story here [Restoring hope to a community](#).

BCHS is proud of:



Quality
Improvement
Council

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



Get social
with us:



www.bchs.com.au

NEW GPs' VALUES ALIGN

Our Eaglehawk medical practice welcomes two new doctors into the fold

Bendigo Community Health Services has warmly welcomed Dr Deleema Devasia and Dr Sadia Ahmed to the Eaglehawk medical practice.

Dr Deleema is a GP Registrar with more than a decade of experience in medical practice and a passion for rural healthcare.

Graduating from Southern India with a Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery, Dr Deleema went on to complete extensive specialist training in Ophthalmology, teaching students and serving in rural and disadvantaged communities.

After moving to Australia she joined Bendigo Health, gaining close to three years of experience working across medical and surgical specialties within the hospital.

Dr Deleema can communicate fluently with speakers of Malayalam, Hindi, Kannada and Tamil.

She enjoys the quiet, beautiful life in Bendigo with her family, and has a love for martial arts, nature, gardening and reading.

"I'm at community health to give back, because I'm part of the community, and to build long-term connections with people," she says.

Dr Sadia is a GP registrar working towards her fellowship with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.



Dr Deleema Devasia and Dr Sadia Ahmed have followed their community health hearts to Eaglehawk.

She has experience in general, respiratory and emergency medicine, in psychiatry, infectious diseases, blood and bone marrow cancers at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Werribee Mercy Hospital and regional Victorian hospitals, being Ballarat, Warragul and Latrobe regional Hospital.

Dr Sadia is interested in all aspects of general practice, particularly aged care, palliative care, mental health and skin cancer.

Outside of work, she enjoys travelling, Pilates and strength training.

"I am truly excited to be part of Bendigo Community Health Services," she says.

"I'm excited to be part of the lovely community here and to do my best for people."

BCHS CEO Mandy Hutchinson said Dr Deleema and Dr Sadia bring a depth of clinical expertise and rich international and life experience that will greatly benefit our patients and the wider community.

"Importantly, their commitment to health equity and person-centred care strongly aligns with the values of community health, and we are thrilled to have them join our team," Mandy said.

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 Clean Up Australia Day 	2 White Hills Wanderers walking group 	3	4 Eaglehawk Explorers walking group 	5	6 	7 Harcourt Applefest
8 International Women's Day 	9	10	11 La Trobe Bendigo Rural Health Jobs Expo	12	13	14 Red Hot Summer Tour - Bendigo Jockey Club
15 Bendigo SPAN Suicide Awareness Walk 	16	17 Play in the Garden community day - White Hills	18	19 	20 International Day of Happiness	21
22 Eaglehawk Dahlia & Arts Festival Family Day	23 Cultural Diversity Week starts 	24	25 Eaglehawk Explorers walking group 	26	27	28
29 Bendigo Sustainability Festival 	30	31 	March is Endometriosis Awareness Month			

What's on in March...

Lunchtime gets even better

Mrs Trish and co at Camp Hill Primary School are all smiles after receiving a brand spanking new microwave, courtesy of our Vic Kids Eat Well program.

The program rewards schools, out of school hours care and early learning centres for promoting a healthier community where nutritious food is the hero.

The BCHS Health Promotion team actively works with school communities to shift habits and help make healthy lifestyles fun.

Congrats to all at Camp Hill who've contributed to the cause.

Want to learn more?

Discover our Health Promotion programs here
<https://www.bchs.com.au/.../bchs-in-the.../health-promotion/>



PLACEMENT IS KICKING GOALS

“I chose to come to Bendigo for my final placement,” said Melbournite Sonia Sajan – who is a welcome visitor in our Health Promotion team until April.

“I wanted an experience in regional Victoria.”

Sonia is in her final semester of a Master of Public Health at Australian Catholic University.

She says after some experience in clinical health settings, witnessing people seeking help for preventable conditions, she decided her efforts were best placed in the preventative space.

“I’m interested in health promotion and how it can make the biggest difference to society.”

Her task on placement at BCHS is to write a project brief for a new program called Active Schools.

“I’m looking at data analysis and how to design the project. It’s really exciting for me,” Sonia says.

Student Sonia and Health Promotion Senior Leader Nat.



“It will be delivered in schools, and aims to increase students’ activity levels during recreation and classroom time and when travelling to school.

“I’m excited about the broad influence that can make. It’s a behaviour change program, and is designed to stay in people’s minds, so maybe we can create a better future for these students.”

Sonia says she’s also enjoying the twice-weekly return train trip to

Bendigo, especially the landscape and wildlife views.

“I’d never seen kangaroos before travelling here,” she says.

“Bendigo is very peaceful, and the team here is very nice and very supportive.

“The BCHS Health Promotion team’s enthusiasm and commitment to the community truly motivates me.”

Let’s get equitable!

The Gender Equity Coalition is holding an information session for anyone passionate about building a safer, fairer, more equitable Greater Bendigo.

Come along to:

- Share and learn about current projects working to advance gender equity.
- Share new gender equity project ideas.
- Join a Community Engagement Group.



The session will include:

- An introduction to gender equality
- An overview of prevention of gender based violence.

It’s happening at the Bendigo Library on Thursday, March 12 at 5.30 - 6.30.

[Book here](#) or scan the QR code.





Enrol in our smalltalk program

There's nothing small about the talk that happens at our smalltalk Supported Playgroup sessions.

Designed to help parents be their best selves, the basis of this free program is a set of evidence-based strategies that can be used to provide an environment for kids to thrive in.

Run by a qualified facilitator for two-hours a week during school terms, each session focuses on a different parenting strategy to promote learning and development for your little one. Sessions can be in the comfort of your own home or in a group setting.

"Our sessions provide the time, space and resources for families to come along and have quality time together, all while meeting other people and potentially making lifelong friendships," smalltalk program facilitator Tiffany Holschier says.

"There is so much to learn in the supported playgroup - not just for the children but for the parents too," agrees parent and participant Asmaa.

"Anyone who feels lonely, overwhelmed or simply needs someone to listen should come and join one of the groups.

"They are genuinely supportive, welcoming and make a real difference for families like ours."

To register your interest simply fill in our [online referral form here](#).

COMMUNITY CALL OUT

Join our weekly walking groups



You can hear the Eaglehawk Explorers before you see them. At least that was the case one morning in February, when seeking out the BCHS walking group for a quick catch up and a photo.

After following the glorious, melodic sound of laughter and chatter, there they were, looping beautiful Lake Neangar before the heat of the day.

The seven members present didn't mind briefly stopping in the shade to explain what motivated them to join and commit to the BCHS Health Promotion weekly community walk.

Here's a smattering of the answers:

"Exercise, meet new friends."

"Can you say gossip without saying gossip?"

"It's the social interaction. Yes, that's important."

"It's the highlight of the week."

"Join us! We're wonderful people."

"You don't get up the next morning aching."

"It's especially good to get out and talk to people because most of us live on our own."

The Eaglehawk Explorers meet Wednesdays at 9.30am at the exercise equipment by the lake, off Simpsons Road. The White Hills Wanderers meet Mondays at 9.30am at the entrance to the Garden for the Future.

Register to join one or both free walking groups, or simply find out more information by contacting our Health Promotion Officer Christine on 5406 1200 or healthpromotion@bchs.com.au

EMPOWERING ENDO CARE

The BCHS Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic is officially two years old, and its existence is making a huge difference for regional women.

Women's experience of endometriosis and pelvic pain is not a one-size-fits-all condition, says Bendigo Community Health Services GP Dr Karishma Kaur.

Nor is their care dependent on postcode, with the BCHS Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic seeing clients from as far north as Swan Hill and as far east as Albury/Wodonga.

"Having our clinic in a regional setting is making a big difference for women living with pain both psychologically and physically, especially when it comes to attending appointments," says Dr Karishma.

"We have clients travelling but it's different when they're going from regional town to regional town, instead of metropolitan, for help.



"We are closer to home, and we often go out of our way to look for what services would be even closer to home for clients.

"I think it feels like there's a kind of equity in care when you know your care is not dependent on your postcode."

March 8, International Women's Day, marks two years since the Clinic opened and Dr Karishma estimates they've received over 400 referrals.

"Women don't need to endure all this pain, and we are seeing a shift towards that thinking [as evident in the referral number].

"And I can count on one hand the number of times we've said no because they were beyond the scope of this clinic," she adds.

Dr Karishma (pictured left) features in the latest episode of the BCHS podcast and discusses how the Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic is constantly trying to adjust to the needs of the community based on their feedback, how the conversation around validating women's pain and endometriosis is changing, why multidisciplinary care is the best approach, and the impact education can and is having for future generations.

Look out for the episode on the BCHS website.

March is Endometriosis Awareness Month. For more information visit endometriosisaustralia.org.



Rewarding inspiration

Congratulations to Tricia Crosbie - winner of the Bendigo TAFE Most Inspirational Student: Community Services.

We're proud to sponsor the award this year, and thrilled to invite Tricia to experience a placement in our Alcohol and Other Drugs Wellbeing team.

Tricia will spend a week within our triage, intake, assessment, residential withdrawal, pharmacotherapy and outreach programs, and we can't wait to welcome her.

Pictured here are AOD leaders Cilla and Lisa, with Tricia (in centre) at the beautiful award ceremony at the All Seasons in late February.

Spring Gully Dance delivers for AOD services

A Spring Gully Dance raised \$3000 for our alcohol and drugs services in February.

BCHS AOD leaders Cilla and Carlotta had a great time scuffing up the Spring Gully Hall floors to the Family Rhythm Dance Band, and accepting the lovely donation.

Cilla said the funds will support people through some of the most challenging times of their lives, knowing their community stands behind them.

"Also, it was truly a lovely afternoon," said our Mental Health/AOD Operations Manager.

"This group is the epitome of community."



A MINDFUL APPROACH TO PAIN



Our Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic psychologist explains how mental health matters when managing pain.

While many think that my role as a psychologist in working with pain is to focus on the relationship with pain and mental health, I see it as much broader than this given that a bio-physical model of chronic pain is rarely the whole picture.

Eighty per cent of women presenting with pelvic pain at our clinic have a component of neuroplastic pain, so even if endometriosis is found, there is some amplification of the pain, and if no endometriosis is found, then the body is most likely misinterpreting safe sensations as dangerous.

What amplifies or misinterprets the signals that come from our body are a combination of our beliefs, emotions and expectations, which are essentially part of our nervous system.

At the Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic, I aim to help people better understand what pain is, and what factors in their lives may have or be contributing to their pain, other than biological causes.

This could include childhood experiences, traumatic events or cultural expectations. We know ongoing stress can also be a significant driver of pain.

The fear of pain can also be an ongoing driver of pain. In the same way that the fear of anxiety/panic can be an ongoing driver of panic.

There are simple, although not easy things, people can do to look after their nervous system, including improving sleep, adopting an anti-inflammatory diet, exercise/activity, relaxation and pleasurable activities.

Having an awareness of thoughts and feelings can help people better manage those thoughts and feelings, as can having knowledge of what can sooth the nervous system, which includes music, touch, and movement.

It is possible to change the relationship participants have with their pain and recognise that it's just their body trying to keep them safe.

Taking a more mindful approach to pain, rather than fighting it, helps sensations to become less dangerous, and allows people to more often recognise: I'm sore, but I'm safe.

Of course, changing someone's relationship with their pain doesn't happen overnight, but women can be empowered to better manage their pain with knowledgeable and empathic support.

In order to validate women's pain, a biological cause is not required, they just need to be heard and understood.

Learn more about the approach of the BCBS Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic on our [website](#), or via this QR code.



REPRESENT ON THE STATE STAGE

Six BCHS staff will present their work and insights alongside health heroes from across the state at a sector-wide conference this month.

The Alliance of Rural & Regional Community Health event will showcase the breadth of ground-breaking, community-building work at its nine member services.

The sessions by Bendigo experts highlight the many facets of our region that community health impacts, from families to people receiving treatment for opioid addiction, to those experiencing homelessness.

Carlotta Standen will present on developing a regional telehealth model for opioid agonist treatment, which is allowing Bendigo people to access an addiction medicine specialist from the city.

Natalia Smith will co-present on building a movement to influence healthier food choices in schools.

Chantelle Ramsey will also co-present, on partnering with other services to deliver integrated health and wellbeing supports to rural children.



BCHS' Carlotta Standen, Natalia March, Chantelle Ramsey, Clare Woods, Mark Abernethy and Jo Rasmussen will share their work at this month's ARRCH Conference.

Clare Woods will share what changes when community health plants itself where people already are. Her session will cover practical insights from a place-based, trauma-informed model that quietly shifts access for people experiencing homelessness, plus will offer leadership reflections for services ready to rethink their role in accessibility and integration.

Mark Abernethy and Jo Rasmussen will put the daring

into data; their work integrates workforce and consumer data to powerful affect for all.

In addition, Nido Taveesupmai will contribute a poster outlining how the Cultural Diversity team is partnering with emergency services to prepare newly-arrived migrants and people of refuge backgrounds for severe weather in a new country.

It's happening in Ballarat, March 12-13.

ARRCH Conference is ready for March blast off



NASA astronaut Jeanette J. Epps is proving a unique drawcard for this year's Alliance of Rural and Regional Community Health Conference.

The space woman will be joined by a host of guest speakers and expert presenters over two days, on March 12 and 13, in Ballarat.

The conference brings together nine Victorian community health services - including Bendigo. Services will be joined by other health professionals, policy makers, movers and shakers for what is set to be an inspiring networking opportunity.

For tickets and further details go to <https://au.entegy.events/arrch2026>

ARC JUSTICE BRINGS HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER TO BENDIGO

ARC Justice - a trusted friend and partner of BCHS - is bringing Talking Justice to The Capital, Bendigo on Saturday, March 21.

The event features internationally recognised human rights lawyer Jennifer Robinson, widely known for representing Julian Assange and Amber Heard, and for her global advocacy on press freedom and accountability.

Jennifer will deliver a keynote address followed by a live in-conversation discussion and audience Q&A moderated by journalist and broadcaster Karen Percy.

The evening will examine justice, power and accountability in Australia today, with a regional lens.

Discussion will include housing insecurity, family violence, disaster recovery and access to services — issues that directly affect communities across central and northern Victoria.

Saturday, March 21 The Capital, Bendigo.
Tickets: bit.ly/talkingjustice26



Real-world experiences continue for trainees

The BCHS Alcohol and Other Drugs trainees – Jake, Broghan, Aysha and Marty – have had a host of unique experiences over their past 12 months with the service.

Last month, the rookie recruits spent a day at the Melbourne Magistrates Court and County Court, to gain some knowledge of the kinds of circumstances their clients may experience.

The day provided a great insight into what it takes to support someone in court, plus the struggle between the needs of the individual verses the safety of the community.



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



Cultural Diversity Week

#CDW2026

21 - 29 March 2026

Get involved

Culture connects us all



**Victorian Multicultural
Festival** 27-29 March 2026

LEARN MORE



VICTORIAN
GOVERNMENT
DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
AND
CULTURE
**multicultural
commission**
strengthening our community



GRAZELAND