



Merri Health
Healthcare that moves with you

Research + Innovation

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Merri Health

Inside this issue:

1.

Health Minister celebrates new equipment

2.

Australia-first research in improving health

3.

We're Game!

4.

Evidence-based pain care at Merri Health

5.

Participants recommend homicide support group

Inside this issue:

2 Welcome

3 Victorian Health Minister celebrates new equipment

4 We're Game!

5 Australia-first research to improve health for people in social housing

6 Evidence-based pain care

7 National Dementia Conference

8 100% recommend homicide support group

9 Farewell and thanks to HRAR

10 New Customer Relationship Model for NDIS

11 Hello, Fawkner!



Hello and welcome to the second edition of Research and Innovation for 2022!

Merri Health has a strong commitment to evidence-based clinical practice and contributing to sector-knowledge through participation and sharing of service innovations, research and evaluation outcomes.

Last month we welcomed the Victorian Health Minister, The Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas, to celebrate our new state-of-the-art clinical equipment improving service access and care.

Merri Health partnered with Swinburne University and four community health organisations in Australian-first research to improve health outcomes for people in social houses.

Find out more in this edition, along with 'We're Game!' a new program tackling violence against women through sports, outcomes from our Chronic Pain Service evaluation, engagement activities with 30,000 Fawkner residents and much more!

Happy reading!

Tassia Michaleas, Merri Health CEO.



Victorian Health Minister celebrates Merri Health's new state-of-the-art equipment improving community health outcomes

New and enhanced audiology, podiatry, rehabilitation and dental equipment, along with refurbished treatment spaces, are delivering better-quality health care and service access to the community.

Merri Health CEO Tassia Michaleas and Board Chair Julie McCormack joined Victorian Health Minister, The Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas, at our Coburg site in July to showcase new upgrades and health benefits.

Clients and clinical staff also shared their first-hand experiences of the upgrades, which include:

- improved child hearing assessments with a refurbished audiology testing booth and specialised audiology testing equipment
- two podiatry clinics with upgraded client treatment and clinician chairs, examination lights and equipment that will provide additional assessment and treatment options
- new physiotherapy and consulting room treatment beds, equipment and x-ray viewers
- new technology and rehabilitation equipment including exercise bikes, treadmills and patient chairs. These will improve comfort and rehabilitation access for groups and individuals.

Tassia Michaleas said, “These enhancements made possible through Victorian Government Metropolitan Health Infrastructure Fund Grants are improving access to best practice services, quality client experiences and positive health outcomes for our community, including children, older adults and people with complex health conditions like diabetes, osteoarthritis and chronic pain.

New technology improving service access at Merri Health is also enabling more people with chronic and complex medical conditions to be treated in the community, reducing the burden on hospitals.”

Merri Health sites at Bell Street Coburg, Brunswick, Glenroy and Fawkner have been upgraded with advanced equipment and refurbished spaces through \$661k received in Metropolitan Health Infrastructure Fund Grants.

Money Matters for Carers

According to Carers Australia, 50% of primary carers are on a low income and many find it hard to cover living expenses, save money or build up superannuation.

Caring families often have to find money for extra expenses like heating and laundry, medicines, disability aids, health care and transport.

On average, by age 67, primary carers will lose \$175,000 in superannuation and \$394,500 in lifetime earnings.

To assist carers with their financial worries, Carer Gateway delivered two webinars on supports for carers experiencing financial hardship in July. One provided information for service providers who work with carers and the other was for the carers themselves.

Speakers from several Victorian and national organisations shared the supports they can offer carers, including Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria, Financial Counselling Victoria Inc, Good Shepherd, Social Services Rights Victoria and Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman.

If you would like to view a recording of the webinars, visit our Youtube page:

 https://loom.ly/xA_DiSo



We're Game! New program tackles violence against women through sport

Merri Health has launched a new program 'We're Game!' to help tackle gender inequality and prevent violence against women through sport.

Under the program, Merri Health will support sport and leisure settings in Moreland to create an action plan to promote gender equity and tackle harmful behaviours and attitudes in their organisations.

Merri Health is partnering with Active Moreland (YMCA), Women's Health in the North, Moreland City Council, Tennis Victoria, Coburg Football Club and Swinburne University.

We're Game! is funded through Sport and Recreation Victoria's 'Preventing Violence Through Sport' grants program.

Jillian Dent, Merri Health Community Wellbeing Manager said, "We're Game! will harness the power of sport to drive change in Moreland, recognising that addressing gender inequity is key to reducing gender-based violence across our community."

The program activities include:

- reviewing their culture, governance, leadership, facilities and practices
- engaging community members to inform what changes could be made within a setting
- co-designing new projects that address priorities or concerns in the setting
- training and building skills in preventing inequality and gender violence in sport for staff, volunteers or leadership
- creating new policies and a plan to sustain change into the future.

We're Game! will also promote shared learning between local sports and leisure settings and the broader sports, gender equality and violence prevention sectors.

Swinburne University will evaluate the project.

 <https://loom.ly/35m9ISc>



Australia-first research to improve health for people in social housing

Merri Health joined Swinburne University, Bendigo Community Health, Connect Health and Community, Peninsula Health and Star Health to launch a research study to aid health, equity and safety outcomes for people in social housing.

The organisations partnered to undertake research into the experiences of social housing residents and managers during the Covid-19 pandemic, to inform support service provision, communication and engagement.

The resulting report *'Actions to address health literacy and equity in social housing, Victoria'* provides recommendations to improve health literacy and equity for social housing residents.

The voices of over 800 residents in the report reveal the difficulties and fears they faced alongside the ever-present risk of COVID-19

infection. These include daily struggles with social, economic and physical conditions, including family violence, poverty, food insecurity, loneliness, drug and alcohol use, which took precedence for some people.

The study also worked with frontline community health workers supporting residents' diverse needs as part of the Victorian Government High-Risk Accommodation Response.

A key finding is that local community health services are critical for successful communication and engagement in these settings.

The recommendations for government and health services to respond and support people living in social housing include: improving the health literacy responsiveness of the system, reducing digital exclusion, ensuring proactive and flexible interactions and

improving the connections between government and services sectors.

Nessá Wright, Chief Operations Officer Merri Health said,

"The Pandemic called the community to action with swift and agile thinking.

Learnings from 'on the ground experience' and this research provide eight tangible actions for us to rethink and reimagine how we actively engage and communicate with community to reduce healthcare inequity."

The project has had immediate impact through enabling frontline workers to understand the needs of the residents, assess whether services were meeting their requirements, and realign supports while operating within a major public health emergency.

Find out more:

[www !\[\]\(7bc43b319a082987e20f7bf78f4bab80_img.jpg\) https://loom.ly/DPFZluw](https://loom.ly/DPFZluw)



Evidence-based pain care at Merri Health

Chronic and persisting pain affects 1 in 5 Australians aged 45 and over, with an estimated 3.2 million adults currently living with debilitating pain.

Alongside the daily challenges of dealing with chronic pain comes an increased risk of depression, anxiety, poor self-esteem and social isolation.

To combat this growing health gap, Merri Health has established a free Chronic Pain Service (CPS) to provide evidence-based, multidisciplinary care to help people self-manage persistent pain and recover.

Results from the first 14 months confirm the CPS' impact on reducing the burden of chronic pain for patients and hospitals still grappling with the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Exceptional community uptake has seen over 160 clients referred to the service since inception.

Data for Jan-Dec 2021 from the Electronic Persistent Pain Outcomes Collaboration (ePPOC), an Australasian initiative to improve outcomes for people with chronic pain shows:

- 91.7% of patients reported making at least some overall improvement
- 75% reported an improvement in their physical abilities
- 78% of clients made a clinically significant improvement in how pain interferes with their daily life

The CPS was designed especially for clients where high-intensity tertiary outpatient clinics are not appropriate. It includes individual and group therapy with allied health and medical staff, providing a variety of evidence-based approaches tailored to each person.

Antoinette Mertins, Merri Health General Manager Aged and Primary Care said, "Building strong links with the broader system has been key to the service's success. Through partnerships particularly with GPs and tertiary services, we've supported integrated care that is responsive to the needs of people with chronic pain."

The service uses a variety of treatment models, including pain medication and medical management, cognitive functional therapy, a range of psychological approaches, lifestyle coaching and exercise.

The success of the CPS has seen the program extended for a further two years to June 2024. Find out more:



<https://loom.ly/jc9gUlw>

The Care Mosaic

'The Care Mosaic, a fresh, engaging new podcast series showcasing the stories of carers across Victoria launches this September.

While making no attempt to gloss over the difficulties that carers experience, each episode of the podcast ends on a hopeful note, with Carer Gateway promoted throughout.

Each episode looks at a particular type of caring relationship, including young carers, carers supporting their ageing parents and carers who are partners - focusing on the nature of the caring relationship and how the care relationship features within other aspects of their life.

Keep an eye out for the launch in late September to early October!

Merri Health proudly presents at National Dementia Conference

Merri Health was delighted to be invited to speak at the 13th Annual National Dementia Conference in June.

The conference brought together a host of leading experts in the field of dementia who presented on new and leading research strategies and initiatives for improving dementia care.

Merri Health is passionate about improving dementia care through Dementia Carer Consultants which work to develop strategies to support and help with behavior changes.

The conference was an opportunity to showcase Merri's research processes in providing a support system to carers with dementia.

Evaluation of the support programs are utilised through case studies to highlight the information, education and support to continue to build skills and confidence.

The Conference was attended by over 157 delegates across Australia that are working to improve the health and psychosocial outcomes of people living with dementia and their carers.

“It was great to represent Merri Health at the 13th Annual National Dementia conference 2022. It is important that we all work together to raise awareness of the issues of people living with dementia and their carers and how we can support them.”

- Sandra

Cultural site audit to create welcoming space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

As part of our commitment to reconciliation, Merri Health ensures sites are culturally safe, appropriate and accessible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Cultural site audits were conducted across 8 Merri Health metropolitan sites.

Sites were rated a score out of 9 to determine if the site has a welcoming environment. Analysis found that the average score across all sites was 7.75/9 with 6 sites scoring 8 or above.

There were 9 categories overall in the audit. Merri Health scored 100% in two categories [Acknowledgement of Country plaque & areas beside reception displaying Aboriginal symbols of welcome, posters and Aboriginal artwork] and 87.5% in the remainder.

Cultural site audits are conducted bi-annually.

Merri Health has a commitment to close the health gap through initiatives that promote respect, equity and recognition.

We are constantly striving to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and want to ensure we continue to display this commitment at all levels of our practise. Find out more:

 <https://loom.ly/cYumE0k>





100 per cent of participants recommend homicide support group

The Northern Victims Assistance Program [VAP] identified an absence of a peer support group for people who had lost a family member due to homicide or culpable/dangerous driving.

To assist in closing this gap, Merri Health created the 'Finding Your Way' program that responds to this unmet need to assist people who have experienced this specific trauma.

The aim of the group was to increase connection and strengthen participant's understanding of trauma by:

- coping with grief and loss and to better manage difficult emotions
- connecting with the group and their community
- moving towards the future and some sense of hope.

A full evaluation research study showed 100 per cent of participants would recommend the program. Other key findings include:

- participation and retention was high
- participants consistently felt heard, understood and safe to express themselves
- participants had a better understanding of grief, resilience and their coping strategies
- there was a small reduction in Grief Intensity scores
- having a strong facilitation team helped overcome challenges in delivering a new program.

The group ran successfully in 2019, however due to COVID restrictions through the following year, the group was put on hold.

The program is set to run again in 2023 as staff undertake professional development to build their skills in working with related victims of crime during this time.

Merri Health's High Risk Accommodation Response supporting over 2,600 residents

A huge unmet demand for healthcare and social services was uncovered within high-risk accommodation. High-Risk Accommodation Response (HRAR) teams were created to respond by working hard to build trust with the residents and providing emergency relief, healthcare, social linkages and other supports.

HRAR was established in 2020 after the public housing tower lockdowns with the aim to reduce COVID-19 transmission and boost vaccinations by providing practical assistance to some of Victoria's most vulnerable communities.

The Merri Health HRAR team supported 2,633 residents over 1,160 dwellings within the community over the course of the two years.

This involved:

- undertaking COVID-19 risk assessments and developing COVID prevention and preparedness plans for each property
- distribution of emergency relief and PPE supplies, conducting infection prevention

control education sessions

- responding to over 650 individual isolation referrals
- supporting 43 whole of facility outbreaks
- establishing the Moreland pop-up vaccination hubs (with our Manager Vivianne Watson being the first person to get vaccinated at the hub)
- facilitating 82 in-reach vaccination clinics (resulting in 95% of high-rise residents being triple vaccinated and 90.7% of SRS residents being triple vaccinated)
- distributing 2,824 care packs and providing over 200 active service linkages promoting social and economic recovery for HRAR residents.

After two years supporting vulnerable public housing residents in high-risk shared accommodation, the High-Risk Accommodation Response (HRAR) program ceased on 30 June 2022 as the Victorian Government winds back COVID-19 initiatives and supports across the state.



New customer relationship model (CRM) for NDIS services

The new CRM for NDIS services streamlines the customer journey from enquiry through to delivery of service and billing within one environment.

Merri Health is responding to the changing environment by investigating an updated CRM that will fit our status and be adaptable to our future needs to have integrated client care.

The systems update will ensure we can:

- have access to high quality data
- make informed business decisions
- deliver high-quality support
- mitigate the risk of information being lost
- having all the data contained in one system.

Ultimately, this will be beneficial for consumers as the intake through to service delivery will be much smoother as we will be able to view their journey at a glance.

Merri Health's NDIS Allied Health team, the Healthy Mind Hub and MerriKids have integrated into one Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, Lumary.

Maryanne Tadic, Merri Health General Manager Healthy Communities said, "We are excited to see how Lumary will improve day to day processes for our NDIS teams, and ultimately a better customer experience and quality service to our NDIS clients."

We are also researching to see if this CRM can be utilised within other areas of Merri Health.

Merri Health awarded SILVER in the 2022 Australasian Reporting Awards (ARAs) once again!

The award acknowledges transparent, balanced reporting and communications in our Annual Report, benchmarked against world best practice criteria.

This is the second year Merri Health has achieved silver status for its Annual Report in the ARAs, after receiving bronze in 2019 and 2018.

"We are delighted to be recognised for sharing our stories, achievements and challenges authentically and transparently," Lisa Knott, Merri Health Marketing and Communications Manager said.

"We are proud of the positive health and wellbeing outcomes achieved in our community through the dedicated work of our teams, clients and partnerships with community and like-minded organisations."

The national awards were announced in a presentation ceremony in Sydney in July. This is the 72nd year of consecutive annual ARA Awards.

Read our 2021 annual report:

 <https://loom.ly/4QDaB9w>

Keep an eye out for the 2022 report coming out later this year!





Hello, Fawkner! building social cohesion, connection and respect for diversity in Fawkner

As the population of Fawkner has changed, social, economic and environmental challenges have occurred. Research found some community members were feeling disadvantaged, isolated and discriminated against.

To respond to these challenges, Hello, Fawkner! (HF) was set up to build community leadership and capacity of local residents to develop, implement and share initiatives that strengthen their community.

The project outlined four key initiatives including a leadership program, grants for community-led celebrations and online and print community news.

Research evaluation of the program found:

- following their participation, 86% of participants in The Great Idea Program felt they had the skills they needed to take on a project in their community
- 75% of participant in The Harmony Day Party Program said they learned about new cultures and traditions
- over 80% of readers said the e-newsletter and/or newspaper had increased their feelings of connection to the Fawkner community
- over 80% of readers said the e-newsletter and/or newspaper increased their knowledge/ understanding of the diverse cultures of people who live in Fawkner.

Between 2018 and 2022, across all four programs (as well associated community engagement activities), HF has had the following reach in the Fawkner community:

- 82 participants
- a direct reach of 16,550
- an indirect reach of 14,815
- 160 community-led events supported
- over \$90,000 provided directly to community.

HF was established in 2018 with funding from the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) and supported funding from the Victorian Government and Moreland City Council.

“I learned that having a friend from different country and different culture gave you a chance to learn new things in your life”

– **Fawkner resident**

“As an immigrant in Australia, I’ve gained confidence and improved my writing skills in English a lot. I always loved to write and dreamed to write to a newspaper and The Fawkner Times was a wonderful opportunity for me! I also gained a strong sense of community through the e-newsletter, I’ve connected with my neighbours who read my articles and I’m now much more involved in my community”

– **Fawkner resident**



Merri Health proudly leads sector in leave agreements

Merri Health has introduced a new enterprise agreement with leading leave provisions that support and respond to the needs of our diverse workforce.

The outcomes include:

- paid parental leave extended, now available for all staff regardless of how long they've been at Merri
- personal/carer's leave for "immediate family member" expanded to include near relative, member of household, close personal friend
- compassionate leave increased to five days
- two days paid leave per annum to engage in community or charitable volunteering
- four weeks' paid Gender Transition Support Leave
- career break - up to 12 months unpaid leave
- five days paid cultural/ceremonial leave per occasion.

The Merri Enterprise Agreement now includes employees who were previously under three separate agreements and awards.

Merri Health CEO Tassia Michaleas said "moving to a Merri Health Agreement means we can negotiate directly with our staff ahead of expiration of an agreement.

It ensures we don't have the historical long delays with negotiating a new agreement, and we can also have staff involved in negotiations as to what's important to them at Merri."

Quick contacts

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