



Welcome to our annual report

Our **284-strong workforce** proudly offered more than **50 services** in 2024-25 to our valued clients across **eight locations** being Bendigo Central, Mitchell Street, Hopetoun Street, Holdsworth Road, North Bendigo, Kangaroo Flat, Elmore and White Hills.

"The nurse I saw to do my percept NIPT test was wonderful. She was on time, friendly and answered all of my questions in a kind and informed manner. I'd highly recommend this service."

"I would like to express my gratitude for the care and professionalism of Dr Louise Manning. She was generous with her time, thorough and had the capacity to communicate complex health messages. I cannot recommend her highly enough."

"I think this is a **great service for the community** and I hope it continues!"

"I greatly appreciate how helpful, friendly and knowledgeable Joel and Ash are. They encourage and support me to exercise regularly and consistently."

"I couldn't have asked for someone as nice and down-to-earth [as my mental health clinician]. She was never judgemental and I'm so lucky to have had help from her and your organisation. Thanks."

Feedback

Contents

CEO and Board Chair message	4
New initiatives	6
Community alliance	9
Internal news	12
Settlement Services.....	19
Refugee and Cultural Diversity.....	20
Health Promotion	22
Workplace and Health Wellbeing	24
Elmore Social Support Group.....	25
Allied Health	26
Family Services	28
Loddon Children's Health & Wellbeing	30
headspace Bendigo	32
Chronic Disease Management.....	34
Counselling & Mental Health	35
Alcohol and Other Drugs.....	35
Medical Practice	38
Corporate services.....	40
Student placements	41
Feedback and risk management.....	42

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.

From the Board Chair and CEO

At Bendigo Community Health Services, our daily commitment is one of compassion, equity and connection. Across 2024 and into 2025, we have continued to walk alongside community through challenge and change, always focused on what matters most: people, relationships and meaningful outcomes.

Living our values

This year, we have taken further steps to bring our values to life — through the launch of our Culture Statement, the rollout of our Strategic Plan, and the actions underway in response to our BCHS Wellbeing Survey. We were so pleased that 87 per cent of our staff participated in the survey and shared their reflections, ideas and concerns. Each team is now translating these priorities into tangible goals, supported by a whole-of-organisation approach to culture and care.

Our newly established Wellbeing Committee is playing a central role in this work. The committee provides a forum for discussion and influence across BCHS, and has also taken on stewardship of the Wellbeing Action Plans to ensure they remain visible, relevant and responsive to what matters most to our people.

The Strategic Plan itself was shaped by the people of BCHS — a staff-led, Board-supported initiative built over many days of thoughtful engagement, including contributions from those with lived and living experience. This strong foundation is helping to embed a culture of shared purpose, transparency and care.

A key step in aligning our strategy with our structure has been the recent organisational restructure. This was a robust and well-supported process, co-designed with staff and endorsed by the Board. It has resulted in a more fit-for-purpose structure that better supports integrated service delivery, strengthens leadership accountability, and reflects the needs and aspirations of the organisation and the communities we serve.

We know that a strong, respectful culture is the foundation for safe, inclusive care — and we are committed to building this from the inside out. This includes ongoing investment in leadership development, a focus on psychological safety, and dedicated time for team connection and collaboration through our monthly 10am late starts. These moments of pause and reconnection are already supporting a stronger sense of alignment, innovation and trust across BCHS.

Milestones and system influence

In 2024, BCHS proudly celebrated 50 years of community health. We also opened Wanyanimbik Wayawan, our new culturally respectful wellness centre for people experiencing alcohol and other drug issues. Our Together We Grow Fun Fair, AGM and launch of our new logo and website brought the community together to reflect, connect and imagine what the next 50 years might hold.

At the same time, BCHS has continued to help shape the future of rural health. From keynote presentations at the La Trobe Rural Health School Conference and National Rural Health Conference, to briefings with Department of Health, and the Community Health First network, our leadership and advocacy have been grounded in the lived realities of our clients and communities.

Our updated brand identity, designed with staff and client input, captures this evolving identity: grounded in history, growing with love and care, and ready for the future.

Enhancing equity and access

Our services have continued to centre dignity, inclusion and local voice. From the nationally-recognised work of our Refugee Health Clinic, and Family Day Care service to the vital support provided every day by our Children and Family, Primary Care and Allied Health, Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs and Partnerships teams, supported by our corporate expertise, we are proud to be delivering equitable care where and how people need it.

For example, the closure of the Women's Health Loddon Mallee Well Women's Clinic prompted a swift and compassionate response from our Sexual and Reproductive Health Hub, ensuring continuity of care for women and gender-diverse clients across the region. And, the InRoads Program has supported people experiencing homelessness to rebuild trust, connection and access to community health services.

We were also privileged to host the Board of the Department of Health at our Sexual and Reproductive Health Hub, a valuable opportunity to share our model of care, and to advocate for the infrastructure and funding required to sustain and grow this important work.



Partnerships with purpose

BCHS remains committed to partnerships as the cornerstone of integrated care. This year we deepened collaboration with Bendigo Health, confirming joint priorities in paediatrics, women's health and diabetes. BCHS contributed to region-wide planning with the Alliance of Rural and Regional Community Health, and with local governments such as the City of Greater Bendigo and Loddon Shire Council and other important health and social services partners.

Our Loddon Children's Health and Wellbeing Local is an emerging exemplar of how respectful place-based partnerships can transform access to much needed expertise.

Future-ready foundations

BCHS is building the infrastructure, systems and leadership capacity needed to thrive in a rapidly-changing environment. Key developments include:

- The new Eaglehawk site (opened August 2025) and a renovated Kidzpace (opened July 2025)
- Organisational improvements to IT and data capability
- A strengthened Senior Leadership Team supported through targeted training
- Governance improvements through our Board's updated skills matrix, governance pathway work
- Exploration of alternative sources of income, including fundraising.



Looking ahead

We acknowledge the challenges ahead, from workforce shortages and cost-of-living pressures to underfunding of community-based care. But we also see opportunity. With strong foundations, clear purpose, and the support of our staff, community and partners, BCHS is well-placed to lead boldly and compassionately.

We thank our staff, volunteers and Board for their continued dedication, professionalism and care. Together, we are shaping a health service and a community that listens, responds, and always holds people at the centre.

With appreciation,

Melanie Eddy and Mandy Hutchinson
Chair, BCHS Board and Chief Executive Officer

New initiatives

School's in on vape education

A new education session for primary school students is sending myths about vaping up in smoke.

Run by the BCHS Health Promotion team, the education program, Prevention of Vaping, is aimed at Grade 5 and 6 students. The session delivers essential information on the risks and harms of vaping, with the goal to give kids the knowledge and confidence to say no to vaping.

"Knowledge is power and that's what we want to give them," said Health Promotion Officer Lucy Linton. "Our program is not only age-appropriate it's interactive, which gives us the opportunity to have a conversation with the kids, respond to any questions and debunk some of the myths around vaping.

"We delivered our first presentation to about 120 Grade 5 and 6 students at Epsom Primary School, and it was really well received.

"We covered topics including: What is a vape?; Nicotine; Short-term and long-term effects; Strategies to say no to vaping; and Ways to get help.

"We're hearing from kids that they think it's not cool and it's not safe so now we want to support them by

"We have had overwhelmingly positive feedback from staff and students about your Prevention of Vaping presentation. The teachers would love to run it annually and were really impressed by the level of participation from our students."
– Epsom Primary School

providing the tools to make an informed choice which empowers them to say no."

Interest in the program from local schools has been significant, with the team set to deliver at least 10 more sessions in 2025.



Health Promoters
Lucy and Christine.



Making InRoads where it's needed most

Clare Woods has a passion for people... and data. It's an unusual pairing, but it may just be a combination that will change lives forever as she drives forward an ambitious program for Bendigo Community Health Services: the InRoads program.

Placing two Community Connectors – Karl and Rhiannon – on the streets of Bendigo's CBD, the program aims to improve healthcare access for individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness. By providing one-on-one support and addressing systemic barriers, Inroads seeks to enhance health outcomes through a non-judgemental, trauma-informed, opportunistic, and low-barrier model of care.

"The InRoads program is focused on building trust and working at an individual's pace to reconnect with health and social services," Clare says. "It's about meeting people where they're at."

"Our Community Connectors bridge the gap between a service's policies and an individual's day-by-day capacity. They also offer conversation, kindness and care when it's needed most."

"The health systems in place now are too rigid, set up for the few not the many. If we were to set up systems around the most vulnerable in our community and build out from there all services would be much more inclusive and accessible for everyone."

In the first six months of 2025, InRoads:

- Delivered 435 engagements
- Provided 498 hours of direct contact and referral management to 42 individuals
- Facilitated and supported 118 internal health appointments (64 with a Nurse Practitioner and 19 with a GP)
- Seen a drop in missed appointments; down to less than 20 per cent.

The team has supported more than 40 individuals so far and Clare was proud to report that they had an 80 per cent success rate of program participants attending appointments. This is no small feat given the day-to-day challenges an individual seeking support may be facing.

"The program's model of care is already showing strong results," Clare says. "State and local government services, NGOs and health services are all reporting improved engagement with their clients that are being supported by our team."

New initiatives



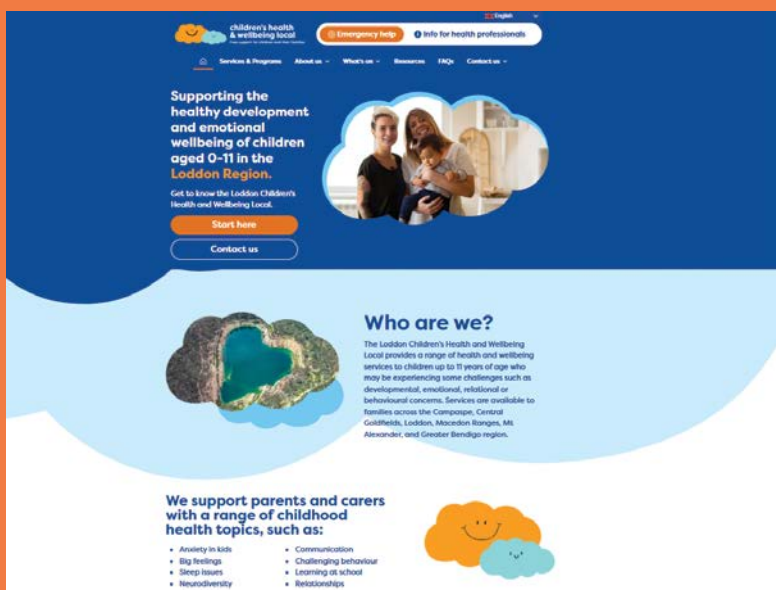
Trans and Gender Diverse Clinic opens

BCHS' Sexual and Reproductive Health Hub has expanded its inclusive health care options with the launch of the Trans and Gender Diverse Clinic in April 2025.

The clinic provides dedicated services that support LGBTQIA+ people to live healthy, happy and authentic lives. It runs fortnightly for anyone over the age of 16. No referral is necessary.

Services available depend on an individual's journey, but may include hormone replacement therapy, referral pathways and gender affirming sexual healthcare including contraceptive options, STI testing and treatment, and PrEP and PEP.

New website for Loddon Children's Health and Wellbeing Local



Families reaching out for help from Loddon Children's Health and Wellbeing Local can now find answers to some of their questions at the click of a button.

A new website quietly launched in May for referrers and families alike.

The Loddon Children's Health and Wellbeing Local provides free multi-disciplinary support for children and their families' health and mental wellbeing, dependent on needs and goals.

The team can help to navigate the healthcare system and coordinate family care, and includes speech pathologists, occupational therapists, psychologists, allied health assistants and specialist paediatricians.

The website features a blog, events page, details about services and programs, answers to frequently asked questions and more.

Visit: <https://loddonchwl.com.au>

Community alliance



A fun fair to mark 50 years

Premier Jacinta Allan called it – your community health service is one of the things that makes Bendigo such a great place to live, work and raise a family.

Our State Government MP spoke at BCHS' Together We Grow Fun Fair as part of our 50th anniversary celebrations, noting the time she spent as a BCHS board member, a couple of decades ago.

"I got to see up close the incredible work of the organisation," she said. "And it's on that point I want to thank CEO Mandy, and the staff, on the work they do ... the current staff and the previous staff. Keeping our community healthy keeps our community strong, and it's such important work that will drive this organisation for another 50 years, so thank you."

Board director Dr Andy Lovett also took to the lectern as approximately 1000 people enjoyed the activities playing out across the Garden for the Future, including children's games, good food, entertainers and a showcase of services.

"We are proud to be delivering over 50 services, from GP care, to podiatry, exercise programs to mental health, alcohol and other drugs to women's health, and much, much more," Dr Lovett said.

"In 1974, Bendigo was a much smaller and a much simpler community. Population growth, an ageing population, the cost of living, people facing challenging times; our pledge to you is that BCHS will continue to do its absolute best to meet your needs and will walk with you on your journey, listening deeply, offering support and expertise, allowing you to make the choices you want to make for your lives.

"To our community, staff, volunteers and partners here today – BCHS is ready to partner, ready to grow, ready to develop services for the next 50 years."

Thanks also went out to our other speakers, which included a Welcome to Country from Jackson, of Dja Dja Wurrung and an opening address from CEO Mandy Hutchinson, as well as local singer songwriters Emma Black and Nay Ye Thwey for the outstanding music, Bollywood dancers, Afghan dancers and Karen dancers, the food vendors, The Connected Circus, and our remarkable staff. It was an event to remember.



Endo education evening hears ‘it’s never just a period!’

More than 40 GPs from across the Murray Primary Health Network gathered in March 2025 to hear the BCHS Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic team present on understanding endometriosis, available services and referral pathways into the clinic.

The education evening came as the clinic marked its one-year anniversary during Endometriosis Awareness Month, and heard from doctor Karishma Kaur, nurse Mary-Anne McCluskey and psychologist Mary Sandilands, with a portion of the presentation dedicated to hearing from those with lived experience of endometriosis.

“We really wanted the evening to be as informative as possible and the feedback we’ve had is that it was, which is fantastic to hear,” Dr Kaur said.

“We covered a wide range of topics, from what endometriosis is, to what patients can expect when visiting the clinic, to best practices for GPs when it comes to women’s pain to myths we deal with on a daily basis at the clinic.”



“I felt heard. I felt seen. I had options.”

Rhiannan’s story:

Rhiannan’s journey began when she was just 10.

After years of pain and dismissal she realised while at university that it was likely she had endometriosis. Advised surgery was the only option, she underwent a laparoscopy, was diagnosed with stage 4 endometriosis and told to have kids as soon as possible. She was 23.

Rhiannan waited for the right time for her and now has two healthy children. It was only after her second was born that she decided she needed to face her pain again.

“When they announced the Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic I was so determined to get an

appointment that I wrote my own referral and sent it to my GP who then sent it to the clinic,” she said.

Her experience at the clinic was unlike any other.

“The staff at the clinic were so amazing. They took so much time with me – to listen, to understand, to explain,” Rhiannan said.

“I came in looking for a fix and Dr Kaur was very honest with me and she said, ‘There is no fix.’ That was okay though. I felt heard. I felt seen. I had options. I wasn’t just a number. I wasn’t just another surgery on the list.”



Coat drive revived

Bendigo Community Health Services and Pristine Drycleaners aimed to make the winter months more bearable for 1000 of Bendigo's most vulnerable people.

BCHS revived its winter coat drive after a two-year hiatus, thanks to the dedicated support of local business Pristine Drycleaners.

Together, we sought donations of quality, used winter coats to gift to those who need them most. In those six weeks the Pristine Drycleaners crew had to be one of Bendigo's hardest working teams! Every day for six weeks they set aside time to clean more than 850 donated coats.

We cannot thank Pristine enough for their vital part in our combined coat drive. Likewise everyone who donated. Our social workers, clinicians and other staff reported how lovely it was to give a coat to someone who needed one.

The Pristine team is pictured above with BCHS Executive Leader Dale, who presented them with a certificate and other goodies in recognition of their work and care.



Extra, extra read all about it!

Bendigo Community Health Services has a new community newsletter.

Launched in August 2024, the monthly lowdown features profiles and interviews with staff and partners; information about our services and locations; columns from our healthcare professionals while also spotlighting the latest news about the service.

"Community is at the heart of everything we do," said BCHS CEO Mandy Hutchinson. "Our newsletter is a way for us to keep the Greater Bendigo community up to date with news on the services we offer and how the wonderful and incredibly knowledgeable staff we have can help you live a happy and healthy life."

The newsletter is distributed via BCHS sites, Goldfields Library branches, Community Houses, a mailing list, the BCHS website and also staff email signatures.

Internal news



Wanyanimbik Wayawan: A new place for discovery, not just recovery

BCHS has a new, dedicated multi-million-dollar wellbeing centre for people seeking support with dependency issues.

Premier The Hon Jacinta Allan MP officially opened the centre in August 2024, marking a major milestone during community health's 50th year in Bendigo.

Services have been operating from the site, providing support and encouragement for people to make lasting lifestyle changes, in keeping with the site's name. Wanyanimbik Wayawan means 'finding myself' in the local Djarra language, based on the BCHS philosophy of discovery, not just recovery.

BCHS CEO Mandy Hutchinson said the building's unique design, and the services being delivered within, support this sentiment.

"This is a place where people can come to build self-care and resiliency skills that can then be transferred into everyday life," she said.

"Most importantly, it's allowing us to provide a multi-disciplinary service with better, patient-centred care and wrap-around support."

Wanyanimbik Wayawan is privately situated off Holdsworth Road and was established thanks to almost \$4 million from the Victorian Government's Regional Health Infrastructure Fund.



BCHS secures major grant to enhance opioid treatment

In a significant win for Greater Bendigo's most vulnerable residents, BCHS was awarded a \$750,000 Victorian Government grant in March 2025 to enhance its Specialist Pharmacotherapy Program.

BCHS AOD and Mental Health Services Operations Manager Cilla Boucher said the Department of Health funding, to be delivered over three years, will improve how opioid dependence treatment is delivered and address critical service gaps that have long challenged patients and healthcare providers.

"Now I have stability, I've reconnected with my family, and for the first time in 15 years, I have hope for my future. The staff here don't judge – they treat you like a person, not a problem." - John

"This is absolutely transformative," said Cilla. "For too long, we've had to turn away new clients due to limited prescriber capacity. Now we can open our doors again to those who desperately need this life-saving treatment."

The funds will support four major service improvements: a dedicated Long-Acting Injectable Buprenorphine clinic, an Integrated Care Clinic for primary health needs, a dedicated AOD Navigator to support clients with service access, and a telehealth partnership with Western Health's addiction specialists.

BCHS has delivered Opioid Dependence Treatment since 1992 and currently supports 173 clients.



All heart: 15 years of Settlement Services at BCHS

It's safe to say BCHS wasn't fully prepared when the first refugee Karen family touched down 15 years ago, bound for Bendigo. But our hearts were in the right place.

BCHS' Martine Street was at Tullamarine Airport, ready to take the family-of-six under her wing and steady the journey to peace and stability. She was joined by Buddhist monk Moonie and one other social worker, with then-manager Kaye Graves supporting.

"We had no idea what we were doing," Kaye recalls. "We didn't have a house for the family, who of course had no rental history. I went to my Rotary Club and begged for someone to rent them a house. Which they did, thankfully."

Kaye says it was clear they'd need bilingual staff, and so the Settlement Services team began to grow, and employ Karen and Dari-speaking people of lived refugee experience.

Since 2010, BCHS has delivered the federally-funded program in Bendigo, supporting people of refugee

"Fifteen years of supporting the positive settlement of new arrivals to Bendigo is the most rewarding work I have done in my life. It has been a journey in BCHS, shared with passionate staff, volunteers, community members and community leaders."

– Martine Street, Senior Leader Settlement Services

background to navigate life here, including education, employment, health and housing.

The team has had one of their busiest years helping to reunite and settle over 100 refugees. "There were many beautiful family reunions happening. These are the times that make our work so incredibly rewarding," Martine said.

Anniversary AGM honours new life members

BCHS' newest life members Paula May and Vicki Pearce were recognised for their outstanding contribution to community health at a special 50th anniversary Annual General Meeting.

After a record 45 years working in our Family Services team, Paula retired from BCHS in 2025. "It's an honour to be here and be recognised by community health," she said. BCHS Chief Operating Officer Naveen Tenneti presented Paula with her award.

"Anyone who works in health or community care knows that when you affect an individual, you affect a family, and when you affect a family, you affect a community," Naveen said. "I can only imagine the thousands of people effected by Paula's work and dedication over her time at BCHS."

The second person recognised as a life member was BCHS Board member Vicki Pearce. Vicki joined the board in August, 2016 and retired in 2025 after serving the maximum nine years.

Board Chair Melanie Eddy congratulated Vicki on the honour.

"Vicki has shown grace, insight and immense dedication to BCHS and its client community over nine years," Melanie said. "Her attendance and volunteering at events went above and beyond what was expected of a board member."

Vicki paid tribute to the staff, the board, and the past 50 years of community health in Bendigo.

"It's a great story and I look forward to seeing it unfold even further," she said.



And the award goes to...

Emergency Preparedness Program

BCHS' life-saving program preparing migrant and refugee communities for the dangers of fires, floods and heat waves was recognised in the 2024 Victorian Multicultural Awards for Excellence.

The team behind the Emergency Preparedness Program headed to Government House in December to receive a Highly Commended award from the Governor of Victoria, Her Excellency Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner.

BCHS has delivered the program since 2020, alongside partners the City of Greater Bendigo, CFA and VICSES.

"People who are new to our country

are really worried about fire, heat and flood events," said Refugee and Cultural Diversity Senior Leader Kaye Graves. "There are real fears. They need a tailored, targeted approach to safely living in Bendigo, in central Victoria.

"It needs to be embedded in settlement programs throughout the state, and we've now got it to a point where we know it's culturally safe, and it works.



The CFA's Paul Tangey and BCBS' Zahir, Nido, and Shee Lee at the ceremony with the Governor of Victoria.

"A real highlight of the program is that it's driven and delivered by our bilingual staff of lived experiences."

Bendigo Family Day Care



Bendigo Family Day Care was announced as the top service in Victoria and Tasmania at the Excellence in Family Day Care Awards in October 2024.

Recognised for providing outstanding support to educators, and for the wider impact they have on children, families and the local community, the award has placed the dedicated local team in the country's top four for Family Day Care coordination.

"The entire team is absolutely thrilled," BFDC coordinator Tamarra Tie said. "Top four in all of Australia is absolutely crazy ... We are here to do what we can to meet individual needs and not just offer a 'one size fits all' method."

The service has been supporting the community for 44 years.

"It's personal," Tamarra said. "Each educator and family meld into each other's lives and together ride the highs and lows of family life, but just like a family, they work through it all together."

Refugee Health Clinic

Nurse Veronica Steegs and Dr Michael von Bonin are the ultimate quiet achievers but the word on them is out now.

In June 2025 they won the Public Health Association of Australia's annual GSK Immunisation Award, thanks to their outstanding and unique efforts to reach a 100 per cent immunisation rate for all newly arrived refugees to Bendigo.

It's massive, national recognition for the small, hardworking team with a big community health heart.

The award is for improving access

to, coverage and timely delivery of the National Immunisation Schedule to hard-to-reach populations, in this case, people arriving from places of conflict, persecution and human rights abuses, being Sudan, Afghanistan and Myanmar. The clinic uses interpreters, they give out information in language, they draw on the support of bicultural workers, and they encourage their clients to ask questions.

"We get a 100 per cent catch-up for every individual within six months of their first visit. It's actually quite special because not everywhere achieves that," Veronica said



From buildings to our brand, together we grow

Preparing for our future

All eyes were on the Eaglehawk site as works continued and were on track to be finished by August 2025.

The multi-million-dollar refurbishment – designed by EBD Architects and constructed by local builders Franklin and Walsh – was possible thanks to a grant from the Victorian Government's Regional Health Infrastructure Fund.

As August neared, the new-look building's sleek, curved metal-clad façade was put

in place while internally light-filled spaces including clinical rooms, our allied health gym and the community room took shape.

Meanwhile, across town in Kangaroo Flat Kidzspace was also being transformed with renovations to rooms intentionally designed with children in mind. From the selection of books to the weighted elephants and sensory touches, every detail has been chosen to support safety, healing and joy.



New-look logo and website wows

In a beautiful homage to the past and present of community health BCHS launched a new brand and logo in October 2024. Developed over many months of consultation with staff and clients, the new branding retains a touch of green in a nod to our past while introducing a beautiful new colour suite that now features on uniforms, signs and resources.

It also inspired the design of a new website, a place to share inspiring stories while showcasing the incredible knowledge of BCHS staff and the amazing range of services provided.



Working together for a better BCHS

BCHS features several multi-staff working groups ensuring a more equitable, diverse and safe community, within and without of the service. It's been a productive year for the following groups:

Child Safety and Wellbeing

In October 2024, the group organised BCHS' first Child Safe Standards Week Blitz, highlighting everyone's responsibilities towards the 11 Child Safe Standards. Case studies on exemplary care of children were shared, and local kids were engaged via a fun colouring competition.

The group also:

- Established a community of practice for staff to share and workshop best practice child safety measures and outcomes.
- Developed a Child and Young Person's Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Procedure.

The group would like to acknowledge the People and Culture team for working to ensure every BCHS staff members now have a Working with Children's Check.



LGBTIQA+

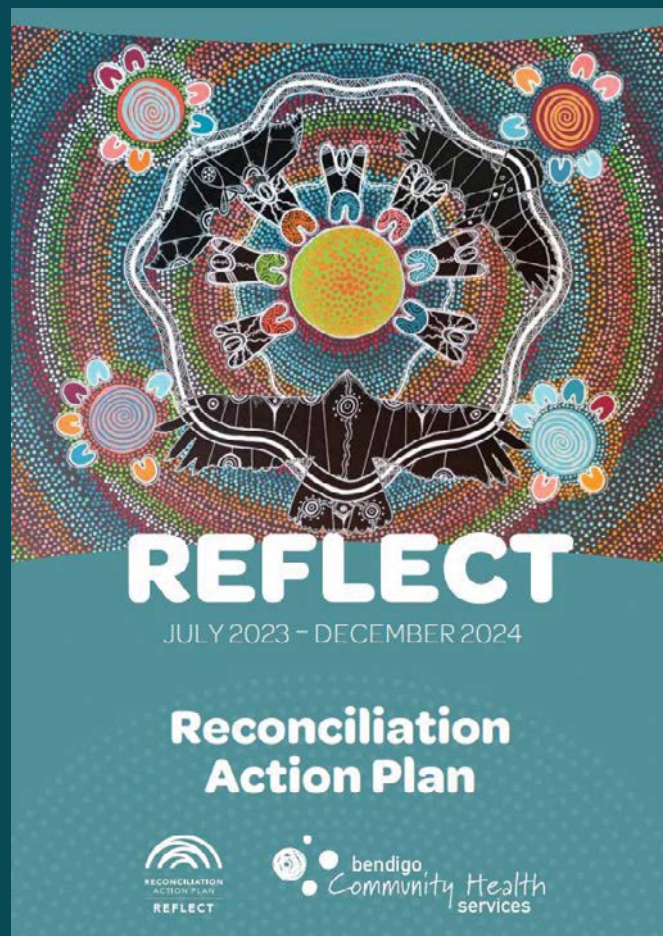
This passionate group of LGBTIQA+ staff and allies:

- Developed a communication statement for our social media for any LGBTIQA+ phobic events or responses in the community.
- Provided LGBTIQA+ training at the All Staff Development Day.
- Is working towards BCHS earning a Rainbow Tick.
- Is reviewing and updating the medical intake form to be more inclusive of gender diverse communities.
- Is working on a diversity and inclusion statement to be more inclusive of the community.
- Is building a working group of LGBTIQA+ individuals with lived experiences to provide insight into BCHS practices and work.

Reconciliation Action Plan

In December 2024 BCHS released its first Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan. This then informed the following actions:

- Development and promotion of knowledge and awareness-raising events.
- Partnered with Dja Dja Wurrung to name the new AOD Wellbeing facility Wanyanimbik Wayawan, which means 'finding myself (discovery not recovery)'.
- Partnered with Bendigo NAIDOC Committee and Bendigo Reconciliation Committee to support local events celebrating Aboriginal culture, heritage and knowledge. Events also highlighted the importance of truth telling, proactive anti-racism practices and allyship.
- 150 staff engaged in a range of structured cultural learning opportunities.
- Many of our services partnered with Bendigo District Aboriginal Coop and Njernda Aboriginal Corp to improve the quality and effectiveness of programs we support community with.
- All activities were accompanied by Healing a Community; the inspiring artwork created for the RAP by Paige Charles-Morgan.



Family Violence

This vital working group achieved the following:

- Organised activities for 16 days of gender activism, including a reflective walk.
- Participated in the MARAM Alignment Community of Practice organised through Centre for Non-Violence.
- Increased completion rates for MARAM and family violence training to ensure staff can identify and respond to family violence risk.
- Provided targeted support and MARAM training to various BCHS programs – this included identifying and supporting men who use family violence, who are accessing BCHS programs.
- Increased the use of both the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme and Child Information Sharing Scheme; BCHS received 39 requests under the Family Violence and Child Information Sharing Schemes, while BCHS staff issued 112 through these schemes to external agencies.

Wellbeing

This group looks internally to improve staff wellbeing. Over the year it:

- Instigated a Fitness Passport for staff to opt into for discount gym memberships.
- Placed health promotion messages on the back of all toilet doors.
- Organised new chairs for the boardroom.
- Purchased and placed beautiful indoor plants in staff areas.
- Framed and hung the BCHS Culture Statement in all sites.
- Placed suggestion boxes around sites to encourage the sharing of wellbeing ideas.
- Oversaw the wellbeing action plans of BCHS teams.

Settlement Services

Humanitarian Settlement Program

The Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) supports new arrivals to Australia to make Bendigo their home.

In this period our HSP team supported **123 new arrivals**. Most were Karen, followed by Hazara Afghans. Most arrivals came on Visa 202 sponsored by family. If they did not stay with family, then private rentals were secured. Housing has been a significant achievement by the HSP team, especially in the current housing crisis. Enormous work has been undertaken to secure long-term private rentals, which is a credit to the advocacy and relationships that have been developed and maintained by the team.

Settlement Engagement & Transition Support

Our Settlement Engagement & Transition Support (SETS) team have worked with **304 registered clients** who attend the service.

There have been almost **6000 client contacts** in this reporting period. These contacts may be in the form of case work, information sessions, groups, client queries etc and include infants through to seniors.

SETS client stats:

- **57 per cent** of clients are engaged in full time studies.
- **88 per cent** are born in Thailand or Myanmar.
- **88 per cent** are people of Burma, majority are Karen.
- **6.7 per cent** are Hazara.
- Most households are composed of related adults.
- Annual income shows no earnings over \$60,000.

Services Spotlight

To market to market with Bendigo Foodshare

The Grow, Cook, Share Food hub made a difference to the lives of 325 Settlement Services clients, who benefited from a new partnership with BCHS and Bendigo Foodshare.

Through the hub, the local food distribution charity gifted 75 vouchers to new arrivals for fresh produce from local growers and the Foodshare market garden.

Maung Aye Taw said the voucher assisted her to access healthy fruit and vegetables and exposed her to new places.

"I cooked and ate all of the food that I got from Foodshare," she said.

With their \$100 voucher, Ka chose long melon, eggs, juju and potatoes.

Saw Nay Ku said the voucher was a big financial help. "I don't actually have to spend my own money for the fresh veggies. I love the food that I got there such as eggs, pumpkin leaves and some other things for my family."

Paw Lar Er said, "The voucher was very useful, it helped me to buy healthy food for my kids and my family and also helped me financially during that time. It allowed me to support my family and myself with the help of healthy food."



Refugee and Cultural Diversity

Karen Energy Literacy project sparks behaviour change

Bendigo has become a destination of choice for many newly arrived former refugee communities. In response, Bendigo Community Health Services has facilitated a wide range of programs to support these communities in building self-reliance, improving health, services, English literacy, and safe sustainable living.

One area of critical need identified was a lack of an understanding of climate, its impacts, understanding energy sources and how to effectively manage energy in the home.

The Refugee and Cultural Diversity team co-designed a culturally safe and accessible program tailored for the Karen community around energy literacy. The pilot project aimed to:

- Build foundational knowledge of climate change and sustainability;
- Promote energy-efficient practices in the home;
- Increase energy literacy to reduce household costs and improve environmental outcomes; and
- Empower participants to take meaningful climate action.

Nine sessions were delivered, using clear and culturally relevant materials. These sessions were delivered in Karen and helped participants understand the link between energy use, climate change and health, and provided practical tools for managing household energy use effectively.

The programs targeted both newly arrived and those who have been settled in the community for five years or more. Energy Literacy sessions reached **39 participants**.

The evaluation data showed that prior to the program, participants did not know:

- Where their energy came from;
- How to use the Energy Compare service; or
- How to read their bill.

The post-program evaluation showed the following behaviour changes:

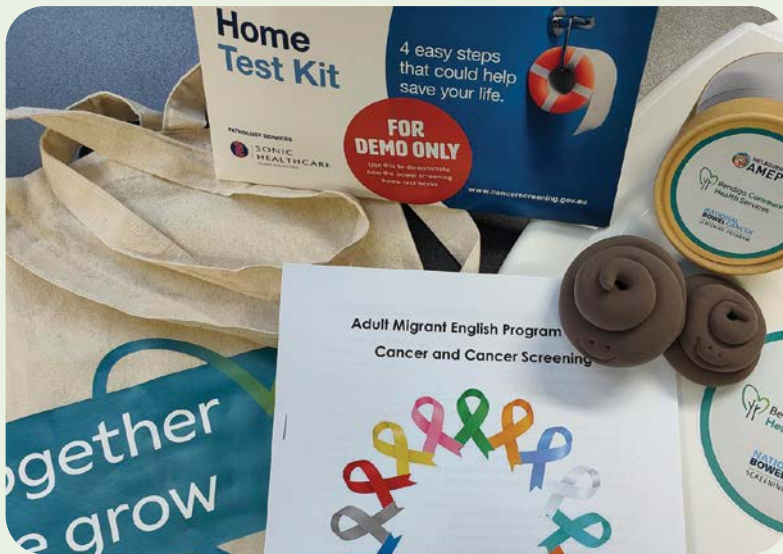
- Increased confidence in reading and understanding energy bills.
- Greater awareness of peak and off-peak electricity usage.
- More awareness to pay before due date to avoid extra charges.
- Households reported turning off appliances at the wall to save power.
- Increased knowledge of the process it takes to receive energy at home.

Three months post-program the evaluation program showed:

- Sustained improvements in energy bill understanding.
- Continued use of energy-saving practices at home.
- Participants reported helping friends or family understand their energy bills.
- Increased confidence in contacting energy providers to ask questions or request support.
- Some households had switched to more affordable energy plans based on knowledge gained.



Adult Migrant English Program Cancer Screening Awareness Pilot



Bendigo Community Health Services worked to improve understanding of cancer and Australia's cancer screening programs among newly arrived migrants and refugees.

In partnership with Melbourne Polytechnic, BCHS integrated cancer screening education into Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) classrooms across Bendigo TAFE, Chisholm Institute Dandenong, and Glen Eira Adult Learning Centre for 130 English language learners.

The program delivered five tailored modules - What is Cancer, Breast Cancer Screening, Bowel Cancer Screening, Cervical Screening, and A Healthy Lifestyle - within regular English lessons.

Culturally safe, accessible materials were designed to challenge myths and misconceptions, build familiarity with evidence-based information, and encourage conversations with health providers.

Lessons were supported by workbooks, teacher guides, interpreters, PowerPoints, and culturally relevant props including cervical and bowel screening kits, toilet seats, and even "squishy poo" characters to make learning engaging. Content was reviewed and endorsed by Australia's cancer peak bodies to ensure accuracy.

"From a cultural perspective, it can be a challenge for the students to talk about cancer," said Lisa from the Refugee and Cultural Diversity Team.

"But students have welcomed the knowledge with a willingness to learn. The hope is that this will bring cancer screening to a lot more people. For example, if people receive a bowel screening kit in the mail, they'll recognise its importance instead of throwing it away."

This project was funded by the Victorian Department of Health.



Health Promotion



Increasing healthy eating and active living, reducing tobacco and e-cigarette harm, improving mental wellbeing, climate health and sexual and reproductive health, and preventing all forms of violence, were the priorities of the Health Promotion team during 2024-25.

This long list of focus areas kept the health promoters busy and connecting with community, plus led to some great new initiatives.

Doin' it for the teens

Mental health, sex, friendships... being a teen can be tricky. That's why Health Promotion launched the Love Your Body Expo in 2024.

Year 9 and 10 students from two Bendigo secondary schools came together to learn about sexual health, respectful relationships, wellbeing and more from the HP team and other key stakeholders. The event is now a regular on the team's annual calendar.

Cooperation makes it happen

HP's first ever co-design survey prompted **234** community members to tell us what support they need to eat healthier, increase physical activity and reduce smoking and vaping. An additional **32** responses were collected to a tailored version for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, in partnership with BDAC.

This valuable information will inform the services and activities HP delivers to community.



Fostering good foodie culture

In partnership with **Bendigo FoodShare**, local secondary schools got busy in the kitchen thanks to **20 Cooking for Change** sessions.

Weeroona College reported the initiative has led to changes in the food culture and student knowledge at the White Hills school.

The program educates students on healthy cooking, nutrition, and the local food system.

This partnership has also strengthened relationships between BCHS and Weeroona's canteen manager, Rebekah Hughes. The Cooking for Change sessions helped her to see how she could work with students to cook fresh and healthy food using produce grown in the school garden, which could then be sold in their canteen to students and staff.

BCHS health promoter Sebastian Goscha then supported Rebekah to complete the **Vic Kids Eat Well (VKEW)** program which has ensured the canteen is following healthy eating guidelines and supporting students to make better choices. Some of the small changes Rebekah has made includes adding more fresh vegetables to existing menu items, swapping out items for healthier options and serving frozen fruit in place of sugary ice creams.

Other achievements and highlights of the team include:

- **33** early childhood services, schools and workplaces were supported to work towards **Achievement Program** priority areas.
- **56 per cent** of local early childhood services registered with dental health program **Smiles 4 Miles**.
- **37 community education** sessions were delivered to 825 people.
- **25 interactive and informative stalls** were hosted, inclusive of local and national awareness days.
- **175** local businesses were visited and provided with a total of **621 no smoking or vaping signage**, with an audit to come!
- **11 puberty sessions** and **6 sexual health sessions** were delivered across local schools.
- **Take the First Step** continued, with advertisements aired across APCO billboards, cinemas, four buses and social media, promoting healthy eating and active living.
- **57** health promotion **social media** posts reached **55,035** accounts.
- Targeted healthy eating, physical activity and reduction of smoking / vaping programs were developed for the **Karen and Afghan community**.



Workplace Health & Wellbeing

Fluent in vaccinations

The nurses once again organised and facilitated a region-wide workplace vaccination program to arm employees against a dangerous flu season.

McKern Steel was one workplace to take part. The Eaglehawk manufacturing business has welcomed Kate and Heather for at least the past ten years to administer the flu vaccine to willing staff.

"It just gives us so much value," McKern leader Emma said. "It's a really holistic approach to health for our staff, and it feels really good to offer them the program."

Fun flu jab facts!

- 144 businesses visited
- 2800 vaccinations given
- 123 BCHS staff vaccinated



Emma, of McKern Steel, receives a vaccination from nurse Heather.



Preventative work saves lives

Workplace Health & Wellbeing nurses Kate and Heather's attendance at the Municipal Works Australia conference began with an attendee making a bee-line for their stall to say the nurses saved his life last year. Literally.

When the conference goer dropped in to the BCHS stall for a free health check the year before, he learnt he had all the risk factors for a heart attack.

The 30-something said he couldn't wait to leave the conference to see his GP. He's since been on medication and is working to change his lifestyle.

"This is why Kate and I do this," Heather said, referring not only to their annual site at this conference, but the health checks and information sessions they do within workplaces around the region.

"We know we're making a difference," she said.

Elmore Social Support Group



Sowing seeds of social support

The Elmore Social Support Group rolled up their sleeves and pulled on their gardening gloves for a number of outings this year. They had a great start to the spring 2024 growing season, thanks to the delivery of some raised garden beds to the Christine Cumming Centre. Group coordinator Judy and Nat from the Health Promotion team got their hands in the soil to help prepare the beds, proving you have to be multi-skilled at BCHS.



The gardening adventures continued later in the year when the group visited the gorgeous Long Gully Community Garden. They enjoyed morning tea in the sun and a presentation by chief gardener Jonathan. During Exercise Right Month, the exercise physiologists at BCHS provided resources to the Social Support Group staff, who in turn incorporated exercise activities into that month's programming. Low-to-moderate level exercise session videos were shown and seated exercise handouts were provided to members as well information on how to get up off the floor if you have a fall.

Pam's love for pitching in

When Pam Rogers moved to Elmore from Mount Gambier in 2006 with her husband Ken there was no question in her mind when it came to what she would do with her spare time.

"It was a natural thing for me to continue volunteering," says the Elmore Social Support Group member, who was recently celebrated for 19 years of generous service.

From a local footy club in Millicent, South Australia to crisis support centre Lifeline to an aged care unit in Mount Gambier to Bendigo Community Health Services, it appears volunteer variety is the spice of life for the 86-year-old. A fact that group coordinator Judy Ryan is grateful for.

"We're lucky to have Pam," she says. "The community is changing; the group is smaller but what we do is still so important."

There's been birthdays, anniversaries, good times and bad, but Pam wouldn't change a thing. Connecting with others and chatting is her cup of tea. Throw in some delicious food and a sink full of dishes and she's in her element.

"Chatting and doing dishes are my main tasks," she laughs before continuing in all seriousness, "But I love it. The Friday outings are my favourite."

Love it she may, but Pam's thinking of retiring soon.

"It'll be hard to replace Pam," Judy laments. "She does a lot and knows so many people."

"And their secrets," jokes Pam.





Getting physical brings rewards for all

“If it wasn’t for this program, I’d hate to think where I’d be now – probably chair bound. This program has changed my life for the better.”

This is just one of the comments left by the **94 clients** who completed the **Physical Activity Program** client experience survey for 2024-25.

All reported they were **highly satisfied** with the program, it was meeting their needs, and they were gaining physical, social and mental health benefits from attending.

From the survey results, **86 per cent** of respondents felt their strength had improved from attending sessions and **73 per cent** reported their balance had improved. A fantastic **93 per cent** reported the program helped them to complete activities of daily living.

Exercise physiologists Ash and Joel provided **921 exercise group sessions** to clients at our White Hills site over their 12 months of action.

One client who completed a lung function test was surprised to learn the home exercise program set by the team resulted in a lung function improvement of 37 to 42 per cent.

“There is a large range of equipment and a variety of exercise activities to suit everyone at each stage of their development and needs. It’s a good exercise and social hub. Thank you!”

The team collaborated with the Refugee and Cultural Diversity team to offer a **six-week program to the Karen community**. From post program assessments, all six Karen participants saw significant improvements in their fitness, strength and health. The program helped to improve the participants’ upper and lower limb strength.

Physiotherapy is a valued community service

Physiotherapist Jackson had two fourth-year physiotherapy students attend placement at BCHS in the last financial year.

“I have thoroughly enjoyed my experience here at Bendigo Community Health Services,” said one student.

“I have felt welcomed by all the staff and supported with my learning. Week to week I have gained confidence with working in a community-based environment and developed a great sense of fulfilment meeting and treating patients with Jackson to see the positive impact we can make to their lives.

“Any future student would be extremely fortunate to have a placement here as the overall sense of community is friendly and welcoming and the level of supervision I have received has set me up really well for after I graduate.”

A client of Jackson’s says: “I have been a client of Jackson’s for some time now and have always found him to be very friendly and professional. As a sciatica sufferer I feel much better after he weaves his magic.”



Podiatrists go the extra mile

The Podiatry team have provided podiatric care to **1472 clients** over the past 12 months. Services were delivered at BCHS' Kangaroo Flat and Central sites and at Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-Operative (BDAC) via Bendigo Primary Care Centre.

Looking after little feet

The team's care extended to the Bendigo District Aboriginal Co-operative Kindergarten, after the Paediatric Podiatry team took the initiative to ask BDAC if they would like screening assessments for their young djimbaya kindergarten children.

The screenings focused on lower limb strength and foot health for children between 3-6 years of age. Two sessions were held to accommodate children who attend over different days.

The djimbaya staff were so welcoming and helpful to ensure all the children felt safe and heard during their screening. They're now keen to make this service an annual feature of the kindergarten to enhance the health and wellbeing of the students.

By the book

BCHS, Bendigo Health and Dhelkaya Health podiatry services collaborated and updated the Podiatry Diabetes Model: Best Practice Clinical Guidelines. The group reviewed and updated the guide in line with the most recent published literature. They reviewed the International Working Group on the Diabetic Foot Guidelines and Diabetes Feet Australia (and will continue to monitor for updates) to ensure they're working to the best evidence-based practice, in turn ensuring positive outcomes for clients.

Positive feedback

Consumer experience surveys were provided to clients, with 71 people responding. From the survey, 87 per cent of clients indicated the podiatry service made a difference to them.

"A valuable service, especially for diabetic patients."

"Well-mannered and genuine, I learnt a lot about myself."

"It's great, my feet have been so much better."

Allied Health in Aged Care Forum

Podiatrist Caitlyn and exercise physiologist Ash attended the Allied Health in Aged Care Forum in Melbourne in May 2025. This was presented by the Sector, Support and Development Connect Alliance, which is supported by the Department of Health and Aged Care. The staff collaborated with other health professionals and discussed the upcoming aged care reforms. They found the forum valuable, and a great chance to connect with other service providers and brainstorm ideas on how to run the service more efficiently.

Family Services

One big family for all

Family Services has continued the work of fostering safe spaces for children and families across BCHS, partnering with parents and carers to improve the lives of children and their families across our region.

Family Services programs connected with **300 families** delivering a total of **17,000 hours of service** in 2024-25. They coordinated the BCHS activities for the 16 Days of Activism, hosted the smalltalk Big Christmas Party and pop-up playgroups, and was part of the festivities at the NAIDOC Week Family Fun Day.



NDIS and disability

The Family Services Specialist Disability Program has achieved significant wins in 2024-25 supporting families to navigate the complex and often-challenging world of NDIS. Families were able to access OTs, paediatricians, mental health specialists, allied health and specialist nursing services. Strong advocacy has also ensured families have secured the right in-home, clinical and at-school supports, significantly improving educational outcomes and quality of life for the many children and families accessing our service.

Supporting families impacted by family violence

Family violence has a significant and often far-reaching impact in regional and rural communities across Victoria. Data from Crime Statistics Agency Vic (CSAV) found that incidents per 100,000 people in regional Victoria were 2,157 compared to metropolitan rates of 1,172 in 2023-24.

Family Services worked with many children and their families affected by family violence over 2024-25, strongly advocating for support, resources, and for their voice to be heard. Following the initial implementation of the MARAM framework, Family Services has continued to build on their knowledge through training in the areas of family and trauma and by leading the way in establishing a Community of Practice encompassing child safe standards, and close sector collaboration with community, police and justice services.



Building skills for school

BCHS' School Readiness Funding program connects with kinders across Greater Bendigo. Our team of passionate allied health professionals collaborates with early childhood educators and parents to build skills and knowledge across the areas of children's communication, wellbeing, access and participation.

In the 2024 school year, the team provided **852 sessions** in **43 centres** across the region – a mix of in-centre and online professional development sessions. The team did an array of tasks in the kinder setting, from sitting in on mat time coaching with educators around managing behaviour and coregulating with children, as well as coaching around referral pathways and supports for families and children. They also supported programs such as Kimochi's and Mat Man, running mat times or small groups, or supporting educators to run these, targeting specific skills like pre-writing or emotional regulation. The team also supported families by holding a number of informative and practical sessions such as literacy mornings, where families attended with their children and read books together one-on-one. Families then left with information around the importance of literacy for kinder children and what they can do at home. Drop in sessions were also held with families given the opportunity to speak with an allied health professional and ask any question they liked.

A highlight in 2024 was the development of a number of initiatives to support children of refugee background. The team partnered with Settlement Services to deliver Harmony Workshops that unpacked the refugee journey, and also developed some engaging, easy English resources to support conversations with children about healthy eating.

"The compassion, the friendships that can be formed and just having someone, that kindness, feeling really safe and comfortable to be yourself with them."

Voices from the May 2025 Family Services client survey

"Feeling like I wasn't doing it all on my own and that I had the support and help I needed."

Farewell to the fabulous Robbie

It was an incredibly busy 12 months for the Stepping Stones Program. The demand for our specialised groups continued to challenge the team, which this year ran five groups a week to assist with meeting the needs of the children and families.

Stepping Stones is for children aged from two to school age, who have an NDIS early childhood plan. As we prepared children to transition to school, we also welcome lots of new little faces to the program. We have explored and created together throughout the learning journey.

This year our much-treasured Robbie Knight decided to retire, saying farewell to the children and families in June.

Robbie had worked with young children for more than 31 years and specifically in early childhood intervention for 14 years.

She said she has loved helping children hone skills that will carry them through their life.

"I love how the children respond back with their laughter and hugs, and to see how parents have respected and welcomed our support," she said.

Robbie can now be found helping run her family's Black Angus cattle farm in Axedale.



Family services



Pathways to Good Health

BCHS received new funding in 2024 from the Victorian Department of Health to establish the Pathways to Good Health Program across the Loddon region. The service aims to ensure timely and culturally safe access to health screening, assessment, referral and health planning for children living in out of home care. The service also seeks to improve system integration between health and child protection systems and ensure that children are linked with the right intervention services to support continuity of care. The priority cohort eligible for the service is children and young people entering statutory care (for the first or subsequent time). The team has established positive partnership and collaboration with key stakeholders and in the first year of service has seen over 200 children triaged, screened and assessed, ensuring they have received or commence accessing all required health supports.

Community Paediatrics

The demand for this fully Medicare funded clinic is high, as it connects families who do not have the option of accessing private practitioners with the care their children need. We have seen significant growth in our team over the past two years, with the team now employing 5 Paediatric Consultants, 2 General Practitioners with a special interest in Paediatrics, 2 Paediatric registrars, 1 physiotherapist and 1 Paediatric Nurse. This is a key achievement over the last 12 months as it has allowed for a review of practice processes supporting the effectiveness and efficiency of the program. Increased efficiency has allowed us to see over 170 new patients and progress towards reopening our wait list, that has been closed for over five years.

“Working as long as I have in the department, I know that accessing quick and easy health care for any diagnosis to assist a child has always been a huge barrier. [But] Your team has made my day. Thank you so much for your help with this family.”

Loddon Children's Health & Wellbeing Local



Support for children grows across region

Since opening in 2023, the Loddon Children's Health and Wellbeing Local's team and funded partners have been working toward some key goals to ensure the service was connecting with families who most needed it. One of these goals was to enable access for families across the Loddon Region to the suite of supports and services provided by the Loddon Children's Health and Wellbeing Local.



In the first year of operations, 21.74 per cent of children seen lived outside the Greater Bendigo region. We are so proud to report that in 2024-25 our reach has grown and 55.7 per cent of children accessing services live outside the Greater Bendigo region, in the shires of Loddon, Campaspe, Central Goldfields, Mount Alexander and Macedon Ranges.

Another priority was to provide a safe and accessible service for First Nations children and families. In 2024-25 16.3 per cent of children accessing our services identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Both of these outcomes have been supported through the dedicated leadership and engagement of the funded partners: Bendigo and District Aboriginal Cooperative, Njernda Aboriginal Corporation, Echuca Regional Health, North Central LLEN, Maryborough District Health Service, Dhelkaya Health and Sunbury & Cobaw Community Health. Through these partnerships, we have been able to employ staff located in each Shire, and design bespoke approaches for each community.

After taking the time to understand the needs of children and their families, the range of services provided this year

“The Loddon Children's Health & Wellbeing Local program provided timely, accessible and compassionate support to my family struggling to navigate the health system. After months of inaction and long wait lists through traditional pathways, my family experienced a fast, well-coordinated response, including personal outreach, home visits, and clear pathways to relevant supports. The program not only addressed my immediate needs but also gave us a renewed sense of hope, reassurance, and a practical way forward.”

includes supporting families to navigate the service system; allied health sessions; mental health and wellbeing support; individual and group sessions for both children and parents/carers; paediatric health care; and culturally supported engagement with First Nations families and families from refugee backgrounds.

headspace Bendigo



Community engagement fast facts

- 40 community events attended with 10,900 community members in attendance
- 39 school connections with 4,499 students engaged
- Attended meetings with contacts and networks with 1172 people in attendance
- 25 Youth Ambassador meetings with our 10 Youth Ambassadors
- 5 Family and Friends meetings with headspace clinician Sarah Dal Santo

Among those we engaged with were:

- 1420 First Nations young people
- 5258 young people in rural communities
- 885 young people who use alcohol and other drugs
- 1570 young men.

From Lindsay Rose, Senior Leader headspace Bendigo

As a team we are very proud of the achievements we have accomplished over 2024-25 through connections and engagement in our community. Particularly of note is a reduction in wait times for first appointments and also the beginning of a pilot outreach program model to Castlemaine Secondary College which is allowing us to travel to where young people are and remove barriers that might stop them from reaching out for help. We also marked a special milestone: celebrating 13 years of helping local youth by holding a community open day on headspace Day 2024.

With support from staff, Youth Ambassadors and Family and Friends Reference Group members, we have been able to connect and engage with over **16,600 people** in our communities via the Community Awareness and Engagement program.

With support from the BCHS



Communications team we have finally created the headspace Bendigo newsletter to keep our community informed about all things headspace, launching our first issue in Autumn. It is available online, at BCHS sites and our Pall Mall location.

We have worked hard to build relationships with local service agencies, sporting groups, schools and businesses and over the next financial year we would like to increase these connections so together we can become more responsive to community needs.

Our leadership team has had a positive influence on our community engagement work and we appreciate that support to ensure we continue connecting with our communities.

Individual Placement & Support Program

Over the past financial year, the Work & Study team has **supported 71 young people** through the Individual Placement & Support program. During this period, they successfully secured **20 employment placements** and **11 education placements**.

They have provided extensive support in key areas such as resume and cover letter writing, interview preparation, guided tours of educational institutions, career-focused site visits aligned with young people's aspirations and facilitated meetings between young people and potential employers, totalling **624 occasions of service**. Young people have also engaged with Vocational Peer Support during this time.

Alex's road to headspace

"Here I am, sitting at my desk trying to figure out how to condense 10 years into a single post," writes Alex. As a result of my own mental ill health challenges, I left school halfway through year 12. I completed a bridging course called the Tertiary Enabling Program and begun studying a Bachelor of Business majoring in Marketing and Event Management.

"At 21 I got my first job, and by 24 I was working in middle management at a supermarket. At 26 I finally completed my degree, to prove a point more than anything else. At 26 I was also finally diagnosed with ADHD.



"At 27 I realised I hated my job, so I made the decision to resign and return to studying.

"I knew I wanted to help people, but I didn't know what that could look like, so I decided to enrol in the Diploma of Community Services at Bendigo TAFE. As part of my Diploma, I completed 400 hours of student placement, half of which was spent here at headspace, supporting the amazing work done by our HEY Diversity and Community Engagement Worker. During this placement I was able to see firsthand the direct impact I could make in the lives of young people and how by stepping out of my comfort zone and sharing my lived experiences, I could become a beacon of hope.

"The universe must have been listening as not long before my placement at headspace finished, a position at headspace had been advertised, and now here we are."



HEY Diversity worker Maree with staff from BCHS at Bendigo's Pride in the Park festival.

HEY, we've had a big year!

We have had a wonderful year in the HEY Diversity Program. Our diversity groups are still running weekly, and this year we introduced our new POND group for 12-14 year olds.

For the financial year, our diversity worker facilitated a massive **111 diversity groups** with **950 occasions of service**. This demonstrates the need to provide these groups for our LGBTQIA+ young people, providing them opportunities to connect with others on a similar journey.

Our support group for parents/carers of trans and gender diverse young people has now been running for just over eight years. It is a pleasure to work with not only our young people but also their parents. We have also been working collaboratively with Bendigo Health's Carer Support Services to deliver the LGBTI Carers Project, now in its fourth year.

Over the 12 months we have worked collaboratively with other organisations/ services to provide amazing events for our LGBTQIA+ young people, including Pride in the Park, Wear It Purple Day, IDAHOBIT Day, Fruit Punch Dive in Movie, HEY Day, and a gender affirming make up session. We are excited to see what we can do in the next 12 months.

Renovations complete!

August 2024 was an exciting month as we officially showed off our newly-renovated office space in Pall Mall. headspace Bendigo would like to acknowledge that these works would not have been possible without a "Waitlist & Demand Management" grant from the Commonwealth Government and Murray PHN. Special mention to Agnico Eagle Australia Community Partnership Program (right with headspace Bendigo staff) for providing us with additional funds which have allowed us to build bigger and better than our original plans.

We have created a space to allow for more clinical placements, which in turn will grow the mental health workforce in central Victoria. We are excited to welcome more students into our centre that will definitely appreciate the wonderful space that the team from BLR Provincial Construction has created.





Chronic Disease Management

It has been another busy 12 months in the Chronic Disease Management team with our ever-increasing workload. Our team of three Diabetes Educators has over 825 clients registered; mostly Type 2 diabetes management clients and some Type 1 diabetes management clients, from newly diagnosed to complex, long standing diabetes. We bid a sad goodbye to our team

lead/ Nurse Practitioner Cara in March 2025, after a wonderful 15 years of service with BCHS.

In April 2025, we warmly welcomed a new member to the team, Joyana, a Diabetes Educator who is working toward becoming a Credentialed Diabetes Educator with the assistance of her mentor Deb.

In June, Deb, Jess and Joyana

attended the Australian Diabetes Educators Association state conference in Melbourne with a variety of speakers providing information on a range of topics.

We look forward to the next 12 months, as we continue to provide a valuable service to our community.

Forensic Mental Health

Care that creates change

The Forensic Mental Health team provides holistic care options for people in the justice system by undertaking comprehensive mental health assessments and developing plans to support their clients to improve their lives.

Case study

A recent client arrived in the service regularly self-medicating with ICE and alcohol to cope with pain and anxiety. This person did not have a GP, yet

was suffering the effects of a severe back injury after a road accident. They were also going through a relationship breakdown.

The client attended their Forensic Mental Health appointments, which in turn led to them making big changes in their life. They linked in with a GP at BCHS. They worked on sleep hygiene, identifying personal values, conflict resolution and interpersonal skills. They underwent family therapy. They received a diagnosis and medication for ADHD.

The team reports this person is now sober, compliant with their medication and no longer experiences suicidal or self-harming ideation thoughts or plans. They have achieved an amicable co-parenting arrangement and completed mediation with their former partner, among other achievements.

When leaving feedback for their clinician, they stated "I was extremely happy with my care. The worker was always punctual and professional at her job."

Counselling & Mental Health

Torture and trauma counselling honours each person

Our torture and trauma services strive to provide best practice care with culturally responsive mental health support. Utilising the Foundation House Integrated Trauma Recovery model, the team consists of counsellors and community capacity building workers.

Bendigo has a large population of people of refugee background, and our service employs community workers from relevant backgrounds who bring both professional expertise and profound cultural understanding to their work, which includes running Karen and Hazara advisory groups to support the team to work with community to enhance mental health literacy.

This approach goes far beyond translation or cultural interpretation. When people of refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds first connect with the team, it is with a bilingual intake worker who provides a linguistically and culturally appropriate explanation of counselling and mental health, then commences a trauma informed intake and facilitates a warm handover to the counsellor once allocated.

These community capacity building workers and counsellors work together to provide a holistic, warm environment for people to start their healing journey. They create bridges between worlds, helping clients navigate trauma recovery while building new lives in Bendigo. They understand the nuances of cultural grief, the complexity of maintaining identity while adapting to new systems, and the unique strengths that people bring to their own recovery journey.

The team also run a variety of groups, from psycho-social groups to psycho education, to psychotherapeutic. Often in partnership with a counsellor and a community capacity building worker, this assists individuals to engage with the team on the level they feel comfortable and ready for, and provides a way to develop connection and engagement with the different levels of therapeutic intervention. This model demonstrates that truly effective trauma care must honour the whole person, including their cultural identity, lived experience, and community connections.



In October 2024 the advisory groups joined forces to walk for mental health. Together they covered a combined 170kms along the O'Keefe trail, accompanied by friends and family, to raise funds for mental health support via the Black Dog Institute's One Foot Forward campaign.

Connecting with older people

BCHS began delivering psychological therapy services to residents in two aged care facilities from August 2024. The services include one-on-one counselling sessions and a weekly social group, The Men's Group (with The Women's Group to follow in September 2025). Within this space, the practicing clinician is often tasked to review clients' current mental state and provide secondary consultation to staff, GPs and family. This service continues to soar in the aged care mental health space.

Alcohol and other drugs



New trainees change careers

AOD trainees Martin, Aysha, Brohgan and Jacob joined the team early in 2025. The four new recruits answered the call to change careers and, in turn, bolster the AOD workforce in central Victoria. With backgrounds in factory work, administration, retail and security, each has embarked on a journey of discovery via a new role at BCHS.

They will spend 12 months undertaking a formal qualification in Alcohol and Other Drugs while gaining hands-on experience in residential withdrawal, the needle and syringe program, pharmacotherapy, counselling and family drug support.

Change of leadership builds on care at Nova House

At Nova House, our 24/7 residential service provides medically supervised withdrawal support for people detoxing from alcohol and other drugs. In a safe, comfortable environment, people can withdraw from substances with specialist nursing care, medical and wellbeing support that helps them through what can be a challenging physical and emotional process. The team also provides support for people who are able to withdraw at home.

Leadership transitions have shaped the year while preserving the heart of what we do. Sheenah Van Eck stepped back from senior leadership to focus on what she loves most: providing direct nursing care to clients as a much-adored part-time team member. Her decades of compassionate, non-judgemental care continue to inspire and guide our daily practice.

Amanda Gould has stepped into the leadership of AOD Clinical Services, already driving thoughtful growth while preserving what makes Nova special: a place where people can heal without shame, surrounded by care teams who celebrate every small victory.

As our region's only 24/7 residential withdrawal service, Nova remains a beacon of hope for families watching their loved ones struggle. The outstanding feedback we receive reminds us that when people feel truly cared for, recovery becomes possible.



Operations Manager Mental Health & AOD Services Cilla Boucher and AOD Clinical Services Senior Leader Amanda Gould

Pharmacotherapy Clinic celebrates innovation and impact

The Pharmacotherapy Clinic continues to evolve in response to the changing needs of people experiencing opioid use disorder, delivering high-impact, low-barrier care through innovation and strong clinical leadership.

LAIB growth

The nurse-led Long-Acting Injectable Buprenorphine (LAIB) program has grown significantly, allowing this service to be offered two days a week. It provides safe, trauma-informed access to evidence-based treatment, supported by nurses who are skilled at patient engagement and relapse prevention. This model has increased client access and reduced pressure on prescribers.

Future direction

To ensure we are building resilience into local pharmacotherapy provision, work is beginning on a Community of Practice. It is hoped this will assist with knowledge sharing and strengthen the pharmacotherapy workforce.

Adapted service delivery models

The Pharmacotherapy Clinic has expanded access to specialist prescribing via a weekly telehealth session with Western Health Addiction Medicine Specialist, Dr Thileepan Naren. In the first three months of its operation, Dr Naren was able to assist 25 people, including eight who were new to service. It is now a core part of the clinic's service provision, improving access for clients and ensuring continuity of care.

Research and partnership

The clinic is partnering with Western Health on a research project, Expanding Access: A Regional Telehealth Model for Opioid Agonist Treatment. The aim of this is to strengthen the evidence base and inform improved service models across Victoria.

“Our goal is to reduce stigma, increase access, and improve the long-term health outcomes of individuals experiencing opioid use disorder. Together, with our community partners, we envision a future where every person can access the care and support they need to rebuild their lives.” – Carlotta Standen, Practice Manager Community Pharmacotherapy

“Love the staff... [they] always listen and assist as much as they can.”

“The staff love everyone like family.”

Using data to change culture

Senior Leader Insights and Analytics Jo Rasmussen and Senior Leader AOD Wellbeing Services Lisa Walklate held a captive audience at the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) conference in Melbourne in February 2025, sharing our outstanding results of drawing on data to change culture.

Jo has developed an innovative system to use data from our AOD services. Senior Leaders can now see at a glance the who, what, where, when and how of their team, and it's motivating big and positive changes.

It's also highlighting AOD trends and changes within our community so we can better advocate and care for people now and into the future. It's been so positive, Jo is now developing like systems for other BCHS services.



Medical practice

GPs hard work pays off

We are proud to recognise the achievements of Dr Shivawn Stevens and Dr Gaurav Movalia. Dr Shivawn completed her training with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners in April and is now a fellowed GP, while Dr Movalia was awarded accredited GP supervisor status in May. Congratulations to you both.

The team has also welcomed new registrar in Dr Joshua Columbus (below), who shares that he feels a deep calling to community health thanks to his own lived experience.

Born in the remote jungles among the Karen Resistance Group, on the border of Thailand and Myanmar, BCHS' newest GP understands better than most the complex needs some people face.

"Medicine is not just about knowledge – it's about compassion, dedication and the ability to connect with patients on a human level," he said.



DiSS demand grows

The past year has been one of consolidation and growth for Doctors in Secondary Schools (DiSS). The program is engaged with five local schools and their wellbeing teams to ensure high-quality and accessible primary health care is provided to students.

The last year has seen a number of staff movements including two departing the program; Amanda Kingma began at Weeroona College; Dr Shivawn Stephens joined the team; and Dr Johanna Dennis increased her coverage from three to four schools.

Clinic hours have been expanded to keep up with increasing demand. Three schools are now approved for six-hour clinics while the remaining two operate four-hour clinics with the flexibility to extend to six hours if need be.

The program has also seen a key development take place with a stronger collaboration with the BCHS paediatrics team. Referrals are now more streamlined with clear and comprehensive referral documentation. Dr Johanna is working one day a week within the paediatric team which is helping to reduce delays and unnecessary appointments. Students are also benefiting through continuity of care with the ability for cases seen in paediatrics able to be followed up in the school setting.

Feedback for DiSS continues to be positive from students, families and school wellbeing teams who all say they value the accessibility, holistic approach and time taken to understand and support student health needs.

Sensitive community care

Clients and clinicians alike have reported positive feedback to a new initiative put in place by the Community Health Nurse at the Bendigo Multidisciplinary Centre. The Sensitive Practice Request Form is a confidential, optional tool that allows patients to communicate their needs, preferences, and potential triggers to the clinical team before their appointment. It is designed to empower patients by giving them a voice in their care, particularly concerning sensitivities related to past trauma, anxiety, sensory issues, or physical and emotional comfort. It is promoting safety, trust and collaboration and reducing the potential of re-traumatisation.

"The form gave me the voice to say what I wanted to without needing to speak."

Sexual and Reproductive Health Hub

Hub expansion helping to meet surging needs

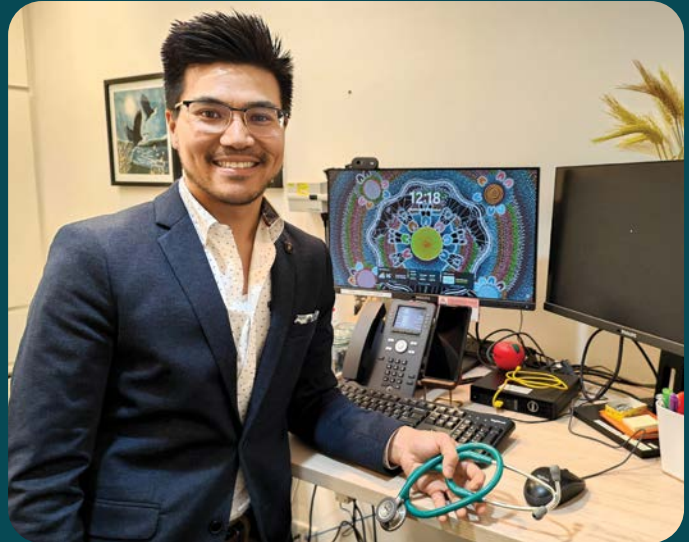
The SRH Hub has had another eventful year, firstly marking the Endometriosis & Pelvic Pain Clinic one-year anniversary. It also launched a Gender Clinic and an unplanned pregnancy support hotline.

Clients can now call a mobile number, speak directly with a nurse about their options and book an urgent appointment. This is now a valued part of our Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTOP) service.

One MTOP client said:

“This service is excellent and met my expectations, from the first Google search, to finding a contact number and information, to making the call and booking in; it was a straightforward process. I felt so welcomed and comfortable with the nurses in the clinic and felt cared for listened to by staff. All my follow up appointments ran smoothly and on time. Handouts and emails were helpful. I felt supported, educated and informed.”

BCHS GP Dr Haris Noor joined the SRH Hub one day a week. His arrival meant the clinic could expand to offer more appointments and more services.



“We’ve seen a consistent increase in the number of men coming in for health check-ups – ranging from routine assessments to more complex health concerns,” he tells.

“Since my arrival, we’ve expanded our range of services to meet the diverse needs of our male patients.

“We now offer more comprehensive medical assessments and are managing increasingly complex sexual health issues. Minor procedures and surgeries involving male genitals are also now available in-clinic.”



**In the last financial year,
the SRH Hub team has:**

**Completed 345
IUD insertions**

**Supported 238
MTOPs and 370
MTOPs counselling
sessions**

**Seen a total of
2244 clients**

**Seen 181 clients at
the Endometriosis &
Pelvic Pain Clinic**

Corporate services



Fleet and Facilities team leader Sean and IMT officer Mark with Leanne Oberin, who retired from BCCHS in 2024 after 15 years of service. Pictured at the 50th anniversary fun fair.



Strong support for a busy year

The Organisational Support Team plays a vital role in supporting the delivery of high-quality health and community services at BCCHS. During 2024-25, the team continued to provide strong governance, systems, infrastructure, and support across Finance, Information Management and Technology, Quality and Risk, People and Culture, Fleet and Facilities, and Client Services.

Finance

The Finance Team processed more than 37,000 transactions, delivered a comprehensive budget build across 55 programs with a capital budget of over \$9 million, and led the successful external audit with the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office. Over 40 funding acquittal reports were completed, alongside daily financial support, banking provider transition, cashflow forecasting, and compliance activities including GST and FBT lodgements. Finance also supported statistical reporting and modelling to strengthen organisational performance and accountability.

Information Management and Technology (IMT)

IMT delivered two major system transformations. The redevelopment of SharePoint created a modern, user-friendly platform to strengthen records management and collaboration. The upgraded graphical user interface introduces streamlined navigation, intuitive dashboards, and advanced file management tools, ensuring staff can locate and collaborate on documents more efficiently. The migration from the Avaya phone system to Microsoft Teams Calling has streamlined communication, improved client connectivity, supported hybrid working, and provided a scalable foundation for future growth. This shift has already delivered significant improvements, with intelligent call queues, auto-attendants, and skill-based routing ensuring clients are connected to the right service quickly and efficiently.

People and Culture

As BCCHS continues to grow, so too does the complexity of our workforce needs. To ensure our people are well supported, we have commenced a comprehensive review

of our HR systems, including payroll and recruitment/onboarding platforms, with the goal of enhancing the staff experience and aligning our workforce capabilities with organisational strategy. Alongside this, we have reviewed our policies and procedures to ensure they reflect who we are as an organisation and provide a safe, fair and consistent working environment. Areas of focus have included our Code of Conduct, Professional Development, and the Annual Staff Review and Development process.

To strengthen workforce governance and planning, we are developing a comprehensive workforce report to provide greater insight into our people, capabilities and opportunities ahead. This work will improve decision-making, enhance staff support and identify key workforce trends. We continue to review our Workplace Gender Equality Outcomes for opportunities for growth, leadership and recognition and drive better outcomes. Equity strengthens our performance and helps us better serve our communities.

Fleet and Facilities

The multi-million-dollar Eaglehawk redevelopment was on track to be completed and opened in August 2025, with the aim of delivering a modern, purpose-built health and community services hub. It will also have a community hub space that will be available to be hired externally with its own kitchen and bathroom facilities.

Client Services

The Client Services Team continued to provide a welcoming, client-focused experience across BCCHS sites. Notably, team members at the Central site began learning the Karen language to better connect with Bendigo’s Karen community, reflecting BCCHS’ commitment to cultural inclusion and client-centred care.

Contributing to the stories of students



BCHS fostered 40 talented students from a range of disciplines over 2024-25; from medicine to mental health to professional writing.

We value storytelling at BCHS; for its power to inform, educate and unite community. We know that we are stronger when we share our stories. That's why we sponsored the 2025 Bendigo TAFE Professional Writing and Editing Student of the Year Award.

Bethany Knight received the award for her dedication to her craft, and for using her skills to amplify the voices of her hometown of Rochester.

Bethany had spent her diploma year largely writing the stories of her community in the aftermath of the 2022 flood event, while re-building her own home and life post the disaster.

"You gave me the opportunity to learn so much about communications, including how to engage with others in an interviewing process; create and write top-quality articles; observe computer programs you use like Canva and Wordpress; and observe meetings that require the input of the Communications department," Bethany reported.

"The gift of internship working in BCHS Communications has been a rare gem that was offered to me. BCHS has such friendly, welcoming people and I am fortunate to have met and worked with the staff."

The BCHS Communications team enjoyed fostering a rising storyteller with community at heart.

Bethany is pictured here between our People and Culture Officer Sophie and our Communications Officer Lauren at the TAFE awards night.

"My confidence in general care was significantly improved as I got to treat many patients over my placement. My patient communication skills have also improved through the guidance and feedback of my supervisors. Getting to change between different podiatrists as they got more interesting or complex cases was the highlight of the placement. I got lots of hands-on experience and incredible support from every podiatrist at BCHS."

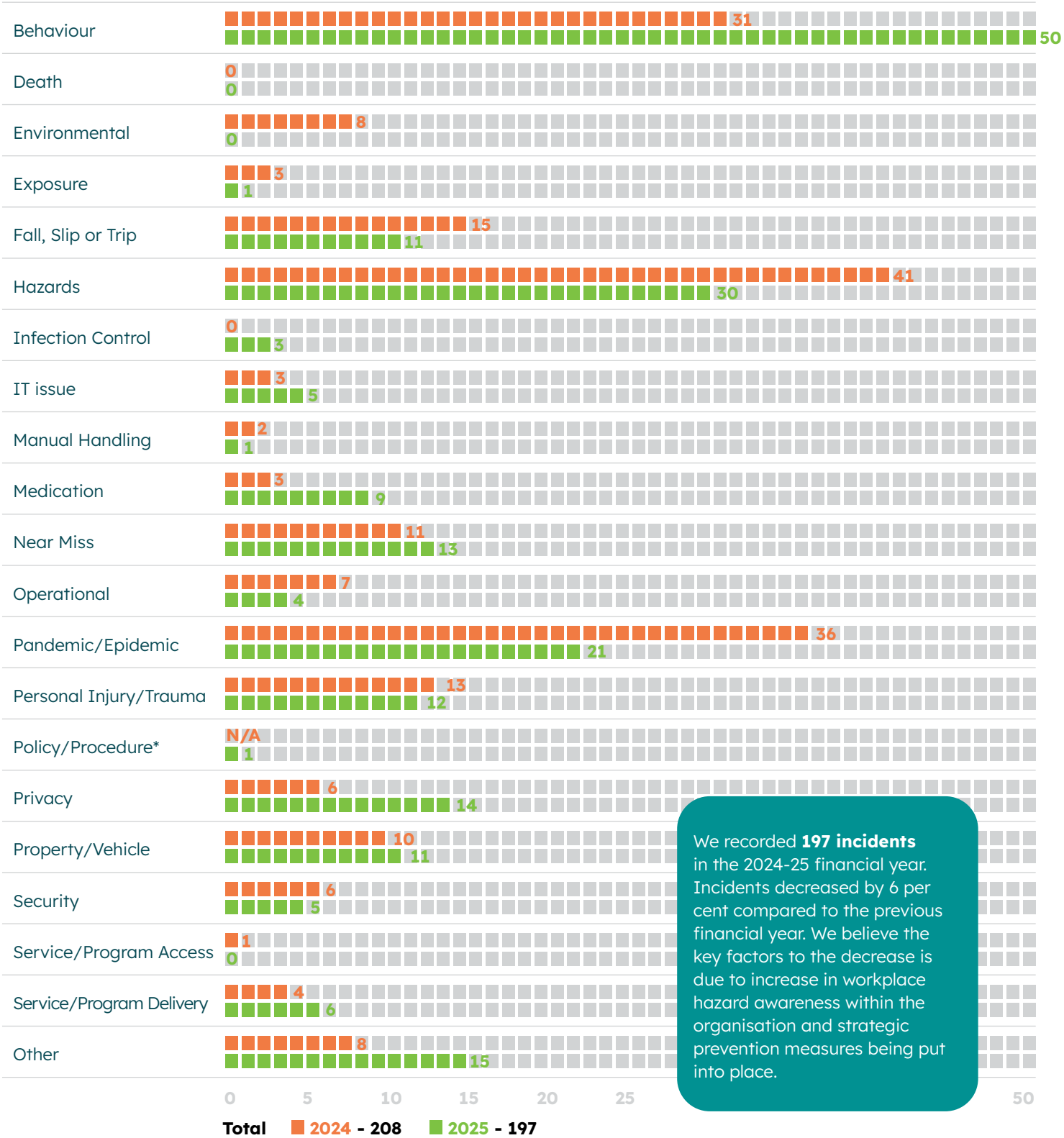
Education providers & disciplines	Number of student placements
Bendigo TAFE	5
Community Services	3
Community Services - AOD	1
Professional Writing	1
Deakin University	1
Occupational Therapy	1
La Trobe	19
Forensic Mental Health	1
Health Promotion	1
Nursing	4
Nursing (Mental Health)	1
Physiotherapy	4
Psychology	3
Social Work	3
Speech Pathology	1
Master of Prof Psychology	1
Monash	12
Medical	9
Paediatrics	1
Podiatry	2
Torrens University	1
Counselling	1
University of Melbourne	1
Medical	1
Australian College of Applied Professions (ACAP)	1
Health Promotion	1
Grand Total	40

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 and Quality 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 BCHS' Health and Safety Committee, Board Clinical Governance Safety and Quality Committee and Board Finance and Risk Committee. 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 2024-25

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 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.

Number of complaints 19
Number of compliments and/or suggestions 25

Risk, quality and accreditation

The Risk and Quality Team maintained strong systems to ensure safe, high-quality services and compliance with multiple accreditation standards.

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.

Worth noting in 2024/25:

“Staff are amazing. Very professional and attentive to my needs.”

“BCHS workers are friendly and understanding. I am very happy with my care.”

 **8%**

BCHS saw an 8% increase in the number of individuals accessing our services.

2506

clients were supported with a translation service, provided in 16 languages, including Auslan.



Close to 1 in 10 clients were born outside of Australia.



We continued to provide care across the lifespan, with clients ranging from 0 to 100 years old.

 **13%**

Our referrals for service increased by an average of 13% per month.

 **16%**

of our clients came from as far away as Albury, Mildura and Warrnambool.

Disclosure Statement:
The data presented in this report is based on the best available information at the time of analysis. However, due to potential limitations in data collection, reporting inconsistencies, or estimation methods, there may be inaccuracies or gaps.

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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