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Merri Health

Healthcare that moves with you

MerriNews



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To receive this newsletter electronically, email communications@merrihealth.org.au

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Welcome.

A message from
Chief Executive Officer
Tassia Michaleas

Hello and welcome to MerriNews.

It's been a momentous year! We embarked on an exciting merger journey with Banyule Community Health. Our future is bright, following the unanimous decision by members of Merri Health and Banyule Community Health to merge in October 2024.

This month, we launched both the Banyule Community Health Quality Account and Merri Health Annual Report, sharing our impacts, achievements, stories from our community members, and what's next.

They also highlight our shared commitment to delivering innovative solutions and building a strong, sustainable organisation that provides world-class community health care.

In this edition of MerriNews, you'll find updates on Carers Week celebrations, our partnership with Vision Australia, heartfelt stories from our Home Care Packages and Social Support Program clients, advocacy to #ChangeTheDate, tackling family violence, and much more!

As we near the end of the year, I want to thank our partners, members, clients, our Board of Directors, staff, and volunteers for your incredible support throughout 2024.

This will be the last Merri Health titled newsletter. We look forward to launching our newly named organisation in 2025 and setting new benchmarks in care, innovation, and consumer experience.

Tassia Michaleas
CEO

-  Merri-Health
-  @MerriHealth
-  Merri Health

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land, water and skies where we work. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.



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Uniting for a healthier future – merger confirmed



Banyule Community Health and Merri Health staff joined brand merger workshops.

We are thrilled to announce that Merri Health and Banyule Community Health are merging!

Community, clients, and staff are set to benefit from new opportunities into the future, after members of both organisations unanimously voted to merge in October.

A new Board has been appointed to lead the merged 'New Organisation,' and has elected Tass Mousaferiadis as Chair.

"I am delighted to lead the board and build on the 50-year history of two great organisations becoming one. The new board is focussed on continuing to deliver high quality services and engaging closely with the community over the coming months," Tass Mousaferiadis, Board Chair.

The Board of the merged Banyule Community Health and Merri Health recently announced Tassia Michaleas as the inaugural CEO of the 'New Organisation', effective immediately.

Michael Geary, CEO of Banyule Community Health will be a member of the Executive Leadership Team in the New Organisation.

Together, Tassia and Michael will continue to lead their organisations through the transition and are firmly committed to the successful merger integration.

We can't wait to share our new name in 2025! Stay up to date by visiting our website, social media, and by checking the posters at the locations where you receive our services.

"Together, we are stronger. We will continue to provide our current services, delivered by the same trusted people, from our existing locations, with a focus on greater capacity to grow into the future."

Michael Geary
CEO Banyule Community Health

"The future is bright, and we're excited about the positive impact we will make together!"

Tassia Michaleas
CEO Merri Health



Our Annual Report 2024 is here!

We are delighted to share the Merri Health Annual Report 2024! It provides a glimpse of our impact, achievements and challenges in the 2023-24 financial year. Plus, stories from our community members and what's next.

This year's report theme is *A Healthier Future*. It highlights our dedication to delivering world-class community health care now and into the future. Read on to see our key achievements.

Our future is very bright after members of Merri Health and Banyule Community Health unanimously voted to merge in October 2024. This will be the last Merri Health titled Annual Report, and we look forward to launching our newly named organisation in 2025 following our merger with Banyule Community Health.

visit our [website](#) to read our 2024 Annual Report.

Our year



298,694
service instances provided



158%
increase in children receiving Smile Squad dental care, with **2,581** students supported



100%
of Chronic Pain Service patients reported improvement in their physical abilities, up 22.2% from 2023



17,667
carers supported across Victoria, with

14,485
new carers registered for support

71%
increase in carers receiving group In Person Peer Support (IPPS), and

101
unique IPPS carer groups established across Victoria facilitated by counsellors and psychologists



35%
increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carer registrations and young carer registrations



20%
increase in dental patients seen, with **5,862** patients receiving care



Reduced average dental wait times by 8 months



20%
increase in new Home Care Package client registrations



3
new social support activity groups launched to respond to community interests



Gold
Australasian Reporting Award for our 2023 Annual Report

at a glance



Finalist

2023 Victorian Public Healthcare Awards



New Palliative Care Pilot program launched to provide specialised support to unpaid carers



Launched NeuroQueer, a first of its kind group in Merri-bek to support neurodivergent queer clients build social and life skills, and self-advocacy



105

of the 133 commitments in our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan completed



27%

increase in community engagement activities reported by staff



92.7%

of clients rated the care they received from Merri Health as excellent in the Victorian Healthcare Experience Survey



\$250K

grant for building security upgrades through the 2023-24 Metropolitan Health Infrastructure Fund



Family Foundations funding extended for another 12 months to support new parents (until June 2025)



All 194

performance indicators met for Aged Care Standards



Well@Home service launched providing fast access to allied health services for Home Care Package clients



Successfully piloted Well @ Heart cardiac rehabilitation program to assist people who have had a recent cardiac event or surgery, or multiple heart disease risk factors



New 'Teacher Talk' program delivered to support the communication and social development of children in regional areas and Northern Metropolitan Melbourne



Our Chronic Pain Service was a finalist in the 2023 Victorian Public Healthcare Awards.



CELEBRATING CARERS WEEK

750,000 reasons to celebrate: honouring Victorian carers

In honour of the more than 750,000 carers across Victoria, a special family day event was held at Grazeland on October 12. The event gave carers the opportunity to relax, connect with others and enjoy a well-deserved break.

More than 1500 attendees joined in the fun, spending the afternoon enjoying multicultural dance performances, awe-inspiring stilt walkers, magicians, live music and endless food stalls.

The event opened with a moving Welcome to Country from Bunurong Elder Mark Brown, followed by a didgeridoo performance.

“We know the significant toll that caring takes on people, mentally, physically and emotionally, so the importance of taking the time to acknowledge and celebrate carers cannot be understated.”

Heleni Bagiartakis
General Manager of Carers

It was especially heartening to see many **young carers** at the event.

There are more than 391,000 young carers (aged 25 or under) in Australia who provide essential care to a family member, relative or friend - all while juggling the usual experiences of being a child or young adult.

Naomi and Alison, both young carers and members of the Carer Gateway Young Carer Advisory Group, took the time to connect with other young people at the event.

With little time for rest and relaxation, many carers can experience higher levels of stress and burnout.

The event was a fantastic opportunity to not only celebrate carers but also raise awareness about the importance of supporting their mental and emotional wellbeing.

“Sometimes you think your cup is half empty, today Carer Gateway allowed my cup to be half full.”

Valda, Carer

Merri Health leads Carer Gateway in Victoria in partnership with Alfred Health, Barwon Health, Bendigo Health, Family Care, Grampians Health and Uniting Victoria and Tasmania Ltd.



click [here](#) to watch video from the day.



National Carers Week in October recognises and celebrates the tireless work of 2.65 million Australians who provide unpaid care to a family member, partner or friend.



Alison and Naomi shared their experiences as young carers.



click [here](#) to watch Alison and Naomi's video with young carers – they're sure to bring a smile to your face!



Val, Valda and Patricia enjoyed the festivities.



Staff joined First Nations carers to celebrate Carers Week.

First Nations carers relax and recharge

On October 21, First Nations carers came together for an afternoon of dancing, food, and fun at the 12th annual Koorie Carers Lunch.

Over 60 attendees enjoyed an incredible live performance by The Stray Blacks, which had many guests hitting the dance floor. But the event was about more than just food and music – it was a special opportunity for carers to connect with others who truly understand the highs and lows of being a carer.

This Carers Week event wouldn't have been possible without the support of the Wandarra group. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who attended and helped make this event a success. We look forward to doing it again next year!

Here for carers this holiday season

The holiday season can bring added stress, especially for carers. Carer Gateway is here to offer support. If you, or someone you know, cares for a family member or friend with disability, medical condition, mental illness, or who is frail due to age, Carer Gateway can help with a range of free services and support.



For more information,



call **1800 422 737**, Monday to Friday, between 8 am and 5 pm, or



visit www.carergateway.gov.au

Research and

Older adults thriving with free education

Older adults in Melbourne's North are gaining valuable knowledge through our free education seminar series. These sessions offer practical tips on managing health issues like heart health, arthritis, osteoporosis, gut health, and circulation.

The series provides tailored advice for older adults led by health professionals from various fields, including dietetics, occupational therapy, podiatry, and more. It creates a safe space where people can ask questions and share experiences.

The initiative has been successful, with 100% of attendees reporting new knowledge and 97% rating the sessions as excellent or very good.

"I enjoyed all components and learned many new things today."

Participant

To join future sessions,

 Call us on **0459 341 442**

Each session runs for 1.5 hours and is held every two months at our Bell Street, Coburg site.

Redefining mental health for older adults

Mental health support for people over 65 is improving through a review of our Stepped Care for Older Adults (SCOA) program.

This free program is tailored to support older adults with mild to moderate mental illness or those at risk of social isolation and loneliness.

The evaluation engaged clients, referrers, and staff through focus groups, online surveys, consumer interviews, and group discussions to gather detailed feedback.

This feedback will help improve services, strengthen mental health support, and enhance social connections by incorporating insights from multiple perspectives.

Key findings included:

- ✓ **Consumer input:** Five participants shared their experiences in interviews, with interpreters or companions as needed.
- ✓ **Referrer feedback:** Referrers contributed through surveys and meetings, addressing updates in aged care services.
- ✓ **Staff insights:** SCOA staff explored challenges and opportunities through interviews and surveys.

The final evaluation report will guide us in refining SCOA to better meet the needs of older adults, reduce isolation, and improve wellbeing.

The evaluation is being led by North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network and facilitated by Larter Consulting.



visit our **website** to find out more.



Bernie, Stepped Care for Older Adults client.

Innovation

Impact Report launched in Parliament

As the community's need for local health services grows, we went to Parliament to launch the first-ever Community Health Impact Report.

The event featured a Community Health Services Showcase, where MPs could directly engage with the critical services community health organisations provide across Victoria.

Victorian Health Minister, Mary-Anne Thomas MP, launched the Impact Report alongside CEOs and representatives from all 24 Community Health First partners.



Merri Health's Shadi (third from left) joined fellow community health leaders at Parliament.

Key findings included:

- ✓ **Rising demand:** Client numbers increased by over 20% in just two years, with more than 608,000 Victorians now receiving support.
- ✓ **Improved access and outcomes:** 91.2% of clients say community health keeps them healthy, and 58% reported fewer hospital visits.
- ✓ **Need for more investment:** 94% of clients want more funding for affordable local care, with 80% saying community health influences their vote.

However, funding for the State Community Health Program has remained unchanged for over a decade, risking longer wait times and higher hospital pressure.

This collaborative showcase united Victorian community health organisations in calling for increased investment to strengthen local healthcare.

[read the full Impact Report](#) or visit [Community Health First](#) for more information.

Empowering consumer voices

Transformative training for consumer representatives is driving change within our community health services.

We recently delivered an engaging training program designed to empower Consumer Representatives across three key groups: the Consumer Advisory Committee [CAC], the Carer Gateway Carer Advisory Group [CAG], and the Active Living Community Champions.

The program began with a 'Training Needs Assessment,' where consumers identified the skills they wanted to develop.

The CAC members highlighted topics like effective representation, storytelling, public speaking, and document review.

Carer representatives focused on influencing decision-makers, governance, and becoming active CAG members. Community Champions chose advocacy, leadership, overcoming challenges, and public presentation skills.

The process involved personalised discussions and surveys to shape the training, ensuring it met the groups' preferences. Sessions were delivered in-person, enabling interactive learning and fostering connections between participants.

Additional resources were shared after the sessions, reflecting participants' feedback.

Semia (right) received training certificate from facilitator Tere (left).



This collaboration highlights the importance of listening to consumers and tailoring initiatives to their needs. We will continue to partner with consumers to enhance participation and develop impactful training programs that support their vital roles.

Want to get involved?

[visit our website](#) to find out more.

Home, health, and happiness: Lois's story

Whether you need a little support or a lot, our Home Care Packages team loves helping community members to continue to enjoy life at home. One of our valued clients, Lois, recently celebrated her 90th birthday. She lives with her daughter Cheryl and enjoys a good cuppa and a scone or two!

Three years ago, during the lockdown, Lois experienced a stroke and had to be hospitalised. Without visitors and limited recovery in hospital, Cheryl decided to bring her mother back home and contacted Merri Health for support.

"Merri Health took care of everything," Cheryl recalls. "They explained all the available services, and Mum received the help she needed, from physiotherapy to speech therapy and more, to support her recovery."

Cheryl adds, "She has a better quality of life at home, surrounded by her loved ones, her animals, and all the familiar things she cherishes."

Since returning home, Lois has thrived in her rehabilitation, with the support of her two cats and Merri Health's coordinated health and home services.

"This is Mum's home. She has her chickens in the backyard, a beautiful garden – everything she loves. Thanks to Merri Health, we're able to keep Mum here, with all the support she needs."

Cheryl, Lois's daughter

For home care that starts with you,



Call **8319 7430**, or



visit our [website](#) to find out more.

New partnership with Vision Australia

Caring for someone with vision loss can deeply impact a carer's mental and emotional wellbeing. To address this, Carer Gateway is now offering support to carers through a new partnership with Vision Australia, an organisation that supports people with vision impairment.

Both organisations share a commitment to providing carers with vital information, advice, and reassurance that help is available.

Parents of vision-impaired children participated in a webinar series to find out about free Carer Gateway support services and officially launch the partnership.

A new podcast episode is also out focusing on avoiding carer burn-out and mental health support through Vision Australia's Hindsight Podcast.

Merri Health's General Manager of Carers, Heleni Bagiartakis, shared personal insights from her own caring journey with host Jason Gipps. It offers a heartfelt and thought-provoking perspective.

Next up is exploring initiatives like peer support groups and family events. Stay tuned!



click [here](#) to listen to the podcast.



"This partnership with Vision Australia presents a fantastic opportunity to reach those carers supporting their family and friends through the journey of vision loss."

Heleni Bagiartakis
General Manager of Carers

Champions changing lives

We are passionate about celebrating our employees' achievements and the positive difference they make to people's lives.

Working in healthcare can be challenging. By celebrating successes, we build positive workplace culture, improve job satisfaction, and retain skilled employees, which supports exceptional patient care.

This year, we proudly celebrated our Changing Lives Award winners:

David received a Changing Lives Award.



Philippa Bourke (Care Coordinator), Joanne Hardy (Diabetes Educator), Julie Lew (Dietitian), Erin Poznachowski (Exercise Physiologist), and David Thompson (Physiotherapist).

David's client, who sent in the nomination, saw an 80% reduction in phlegm and much clearer airways. The client told us, "David is the most helpful person I've dealt with in my 30-year journey with bronchiectasis."

Do you know a Merri Health employee who has made a big difference to your life?

Nominate them for a Changing Lives Award now!

Winners are honoured with a certificate of achievement and a well-deserved \$250 gift card.



visit our **website** to find out more.



Get ready for Midsumma Carnival!

Join us in celebrating LGBTIQ+ pride and health at the annual Midsumma Carnival! Look out for the joint Merri Health and Banyule Community Health stall to discover how we can support you.



**Sunday 19 January
11am – 9pm
Alexandra Gardens**



visit Midsumma's **website** to find out more.

Taking action against family violence

Merri Health's goal is to create a future for our communities that is free of violence.

There is no excuse for gender-based violence and yet more than 1 in 3 women are victims of male aggression.

To help create a future where all families are safe, seen as equals and respected, we joined the 16th Annual Walk Against Family Violence held in Melbourne CBD.

This walk marked the start of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based

Violence – a global campaign led by UN Women.

Together, we can work towards a safer community by joining together from around the world to stand in solidarity with victim-survivors.



Our family violence counselling service helps women and children recover from family violence.



visit our **website** to find out more.

Staff united with Banyule Community Health team members to stand in solidarity with victim-survivors.

Building friendships and staying active: Lovie's story

Are you looking to explore new hobbies? Our Social Support Program can help! Just ask Lovie, a regular participant who decided to get moving after retiring last year.

"I said, I have to do something! After working for so long, your mind is always working, and then you suddenly stop."

That's when Lovie joined our Movers and Shakers group, after seeing it on Facebook.

"This is great because I don't need very intense exercise. It's really enjoyable," she says. Just a week later, she invited some friends to join too.

Now, Lovie not only participates in various programs but has also made a circle of new friends.

"We're all talking and sharing our experiences with each other – it's so much fun!"

Lovie

Through the program, Lovie has found a new lease on life, "This is like a family to us. It gives me the motivation to get up early in the morning to get here."

Our Social Support Program is a great way for people over 65 to have fun, make friends, and connect with others in your local area. There is a variety of social groups and activities you can join!

Lovie,
Social Support
Program client.



Enjoy a social life, your way.



Call **9386 3575**, or



visit our **website** to find out more.

Quick contacts

T: 1300 637 744
Carers 1800 422 737

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Wangaratta

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#ChangeTheDate for January 26

Merri Health has joined the #ChangeTheDate movement to support a National Day of Celebration that is inclusive and respectful for all.



We acknowledge January 26 is not a celebration for everyone. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it is a day of mourning, marking the start of colonisation, dispossession, and profound changes to life, culture, and health.

Respect and equality are vital for health and wellbeing. That is why we support initiatives that promote respect, recognition, equality

and inclusion; and listen deeply to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people advocating for change.

To support this movement, Merri Health staff can swap the public holiday for another workday.



visit Reconciliation Australia's **website** to find out more.