

MEDIA RELEASE

Rural Healthcare Hubs funded

15 February 2024

Six communities across Buloke, Loddon and Gannawarra Shires will soon have new Healthcare Hubs to complement existing GP services, with nurse practitioner and allied health services much closer to home. The first four Hubs will be located in the communities of Kerang, Quambatook, Pyramid Hill and Boort.

The Integrated Health Network Alliance is one of six successful applicants selected from 80 submissions nationally to receive \$1.4 million in funding through the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care's Innovative Model of Care grant.

Northern District Community Health is leading the four-year primary health initiative, with partners Murray PHN, Inglewood & District Health Service, East Wimmera Health Service and Boort District Health.

Murray PHN Project Lead, Dr Nerida Hyett, says the original Healthcare Hubs pilot had been built on the back of local co-design research and ongoing community engagement.

"In 2022, we spoke to 44 healthcare professionals and 21 healthcare consumers and carers, who told us what the communities of Buloke, Loddon and Gannawarra needed.

"For health professionals, it was more attractive job roles that include local training and career paths and being part of a bigger health team.

"For consumers and carers, it was access to a range of different health services by a regular team of professionals, closer to home and who work closely with one another," Nerida said.

The six new Healthcare Hubs will support local doctors, or fill gaps where there are none, helping to reduce workload pressures and create more supportive work environments to recruit new health and medical professionals more effectively.

Working groups will be established through the broader Buloke Loddon Gannawarra Health and Wellbeing Executive Network, including North Central Local Learning and Employment Network, Mallee District Aboriginal Services and Shire Councils, to lead this health system improvement project and promote service collaboration. Peak bodies including the Rural Workforce Agency Victoria, and university training providers including La Trobe University, Monash University and Charles Sturt University.

The new Hubs will be led by general practitioners and nurse practitioners and staffed with multidisciplinary team members, potentially including physiotherapists, occupational and speech therapists, podiatrists, dieticians and mental health counsellors.

Together, they will provide a one-stop-shop and comprehensive care for people with chronic conditions including chronic pain, diabetes and cardiovascular disease and mental illness, plus those needing palliative care.

Hubs will provide multidisciplinary services onsite, initially starting with one day per fortnight per Hub. Telehealth will be available to help patients access specialist appointments. Outreach services will be provided into schools, residential aged care homes and hospitals to address service gaps.

Murray PHN CEO, Matt Jones, said the aim of these new multidisciplinary primary care models is to reduce chronic workforce shortages and improve patient access in rural locations.

“We are already learning from pilots underway and incorporating our findings into these new trials. Each one of them is evaluated to help us determine which models work, where they work and whether they are financially sustainable,” Matt said.

Northern District Community Health (NDCH) interim CEO, Margaret McDonald, said it was important to find solutions for the long-term difficulties that health services were experiencing in recruiting workforce into rural environments.

“We are really excited about the prospect of Hubs, which will provide a pooled workforce, improved access to supervision and the sharing of healthcare resources between services.

“Ultimately, they are creating a more attractive employment proposition for clinicians, which can only be for the benefit of our communities,” Margaret said.

The trial will be evaluated and adapted each year as needed. It is anticipated that the Hubs will be more financially stable by year-three and then be able to offer more clinic days.

At the end of the four-years, an independent evaluation led by Monash University will produce high-quality evidence to support the application of Hubs in similar rural regions with small, isolated communities and thin workforce markets.

The partnership would like to acknowledge the commitment of former NDCH CEO, Mandy Hutchinson, who played a major role in helping the funding application be successful and providing long-term benefits for local communities that she served.

About the IHN Alliance:

The Integrated Health Network Alliance (IHN) was formed in 2019 to focus on addressing the health needs of the Buloke, Loddon and Gannawarra region. These include chronic conditions like diabetes, heart, respiratory, mental and oral health, and other needs of our ageing population. In 2022, the IHN Alliance launched its Sustainable Rural Health Project to begin addressing the gaps caused by workforce shortages. Using up-to-date research, the project is helping health services work with community to create and trial new services and strategies that encourage doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals to live and work in rural areas over the longer term. The IHN Alliance includes Boort District Health, Inglewood & Districts Health Service, East Wimmera Health Service, Northern District Community Health, and Murray PHN.

About Murray PHN:

Murray PHN is one of 31 Primary Health Networks around Australia working to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of primary healthcare and service systems. Across our region, we work with general practitioners, community health, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, pharmacy, aged care and allied health practitioners, and with acute services such as hospitals, specialists and emergency care. The role of PHNs is to help to support and integrate the work of these important services to ensure that the people get the right care, in the right place, at the right time. In the Murray PHN region, which covers almost 100,000 sq km of regional Victoria, we work to develop and maintain sustainable models of primary healthcare for our communities.

Photo:

- IHN Alliance - Pictured L to R: Dr Nerida Hyett (Murray PHN Integrated Health Network Project Lead), Dallas Coghill (Inglewood & Districts Health Service CEO), Donna Doyle (Boort District Health CEO), Mandy Hutchinson (Former Northern District Community Health CEO), Trevor Adem (East Wimmera Health Service CEO) and Dr Cath Lees (Murray PHN Director Integrated Projects and Partnerships).
- A photo opportunity can also be arranged in Boort with a range of health service staff.

Contact details

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