

# MEDIA RELEASE

## The benefits and challenges of multiculturalism in our region

19 September 2024

Murray PHN today released its annual Murray Health Report 2024, examining the impact of multiculturalism in their region, which is almost 100,000 sq km in size and runs across much of central, north eastern and north western Victoria, with 22 Local Government Areas (LGA) and regional towns such as Mildura, Albury Wodonga, Shepparton and Bendigo.

In the 2021 census, 88,217 people reported they were born overseas, accounting for almost 12 per cent of the region's total population. Of those, almost two-thirds came from mainly non-English speaking backgrounds.

While the region has less than half the rate of people from non-English speaking backgrounds than the Australian average, the greatest number of permanent settlers in 2022-23 were skilled migrants (75%), followed by family (16%), and humanitarian settlers (9%).

Many of the region's overseas-born residents are highly skilled contributors to our healthcare sector, working as medical practitioners, nurses, aged care workers and more.

But for some people from multicultural backgrounds, language barriers, health literacy, cultural safety, previous trauma and stigma can all play a part in them failing to get healthcare in the right place, and at the right time.

The top three LGAs with the greatest number of overseas-born residents are Greater Shepparton, Greater Bendigo and Mildura. The top three languages spoken other than English are Punjabi, Italian and Mandarin.

The Murray Health Report provides insights into the top five languages spoken in each of our 22 LGAs, and some of the actions that Murray PHN is taking to help everyone in our community to get the right primary healthcare, at the right time and in the right place.

Earlier this year, the national PHN Cooperative released its multicultural framework, which acknowledges that people who come from non-English speaking backgrounds often face additional difficulties in accessing and navigating the Australian healthcare system.

Murray PHN CEO Matt Jones said that to support these underserved groups in our community, we all needed to do more, including more coordination between service providers.

"While many of our migrants have, or achieve, fluency in English, others struggle with healthcare information that is not in their native tongues.

"In recent times, Murray PHN has funded health navigator programs in Bendigo, Shepparton and now Robinvale, where native speakers of various languages can reach out to local diverse communities and help them, literally, to navigate the health system.

"Primary care providers can now access a range of quality resources to help them deliver optimum patient care to non-English speaking people," he said. "Importantly, most providers can access telephone interpreting services free of charge, to help them understand and then capture the social, cultural and health issues that can make good medical care possible."

Mr Jones said that cultural background data was not consistently captured in healthcare settings, despite the influence of culture and language on a person's understanding of health systems and how to access them.

"We believe that primary health providers should consistently collect the five key CALD data fields – country of birth, language spoken, interpreter required, ethnicity/cultural background and year of arrival in Australia – in a sensitive and supporting way," he said.

"This information can help to tailor services and programs for person-centred care, and begin to address the often misunderstood systemic racism that can impact of people's access to health and their health care outcomes.

Read the report at: <https://murrayphn.org.au/news/murray-health-report-multiculturalism-in-our-region/>

### **About us:**

*Murray PHN is one of 29 PHNs (Primary Health Networks) around Australia supporting effective and efficient primary care and service systems in our regions, through commissioning, coordination and capacity building. Across our region, we work with general practitioners (GPs), community health, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), 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 health care for our communities.*

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### **Images of Matt Jones**

- [https://www.murrayphn.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Murray-PHN-CEO\\_Matt-Jones\\_2024.jpg](https://www.murrayphn.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Murray-PHN-CEO_Matt-Jones_2024.jpg)
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