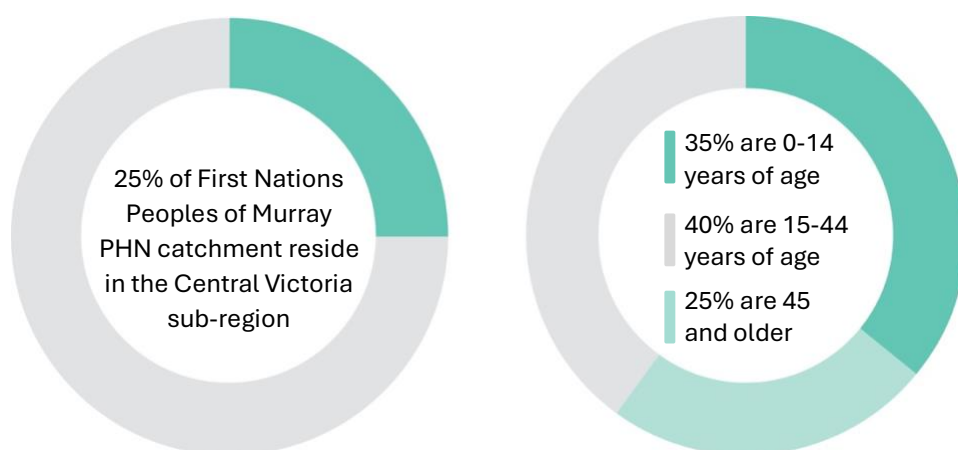


# First Nations in Central Victoria

Approximately 4600 First Nations Peoples reside in the Central Victoria sub-region, which is equal to 25 per cent of the total First Nations population in the Murray PHN catchment (ABS, 2021). Available data also indicates that approximately 35 per cent of the region's First Nations population (or 1598 individuals) were aged between 0-14 years, while around 24 per cent (about 1122 individuals) are 45 and older. The region covers six LGAs: Campaspe, Gannawarra, Greater Bendigo, Loddon, Macedon Ranges and Mount Alexander.

Within this region, the floods, the Stolen Generation and the 2023 failed referendum were highlighted as key concerns impacting First Nation People during the consultations.








## ACCHOs in the region

- Njernda Aboriginal Corporation
- Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-operative
- Mallee District Aboriginal Services (Kerang)





## Key findings

### Barriers to accessing healthcare and the provision of health and wellbeing services

Domain	Finding
 <p>Autonomy, empowerment and recognition</p>	<p>There is a need to address the health concerns of the community and acknowledge the expertise that ACCHOs and First Nations service providers hold in knowing the needs of their Community, which can be limited by restrictive and inefficient funding.</p>
 <p>Health and chronic conditions</p>	<p>The region has the second highest rate of potentially preventable hospitalisations (PPHs) in the catchment and the highest rate of PPHs occurred in First Nations Peoples aged 65+ years, which was 38 per cent higher than the state rate.</p>
 <p>Social and emotional wellbeing</p>	<p>There is a need for culturally appropriate mental healthcare to support the prevalence of mental illness across the region. Services raised the specific need for culturally appropriate services for First Nations youth.</p> <p>Anxiety, depression, PTSD, autism and ADHD are significant mental illness profiles in this region. Mental health and alcohol and other drugs were quite prevalent areas of concern in their community, especially for youth. This is supported by the data that emphasised that the region had the highest rate of reported mental health conditions in the catchment. This is largely driven by the rate in Bendigo, which was the second highest rate in the catchment by LGA.</p>
 <p>Access to services</p>	<p>Sufficient funding for prevention and early intervention, including intervention activities, is needed, especially in non-health organisations. Often this means First Nations services that are making a positive impact are not being recognised or funded for what they are doing.</p> <p>There are significant challenges with access to services with increasing demand and waitlists.</p> <p>Accessing allied health was highlighted as a significant barrier, with some highlighting that even if their clients are on the NDIS, they still have very long waitlists to be seen, with some waitlists being up to 12 months. This is important to highlight, as the data demonstrates that the region has the highest rate of First Nations Peoples with a profound or severe disability in the catchment.</p> <p>Mainstream services do not feel like an appropriate option for First Nations Peoples in the region. It was highlighted that there is a lack of culturally appropriate services in the region across all areas of support - youth services, allied health and mainstream primary care.</p> <p>It was highlighted that there are currently no Aboriginal maternity services in the region, with First Nations People having to travel to Melbourne to have a baby for cultural birthing services. At times, First Nations People have been away from their home for multiple weeks to have a baby.</p>
 <p>Workforce</p>	<p>There are significant workforce challenges in the region, making it hard for the region to keep up with the demand for services. A lot of participants highlighted the shortages of staff, particularly Aboriginal Health Practitioners (AHPs) and the difficulty recruiting and retaining staff.</p>

## Enablers to access and opportunities to support the region

Domain	Finding
 Access to services	<p>Collaborations, partnerships and integration in the region could be improved as an enabler for First Nations People in accessing better care.</p> <p>Services need to be adaptable and meet the needs of the First Nations People accessing the service regardless of the policies e.g. if a person wants 10 people in the room while birthing and/or on an end-of-life journey, this needs to be allowed in order to ensure they are being Culturally Safe.</p>
 Workforce	<p>There is a need for increased training and support for AHPs and more traineeships. Identified positions are also required in services following the completion of traineeships to support First Nations People to enter the workforce.</p>