

MEDIA RELEASE

Strengthening access to healthcare in the Wimmera

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East Wimmera communities are set to benefit from improved access to primary healthcare after funding was secured from the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing for Phase 2 of the Wimmera Thin Markets project.

The project is being delivered in partnership between Murray Primary Health Network (PHN), Western Victoria PHN, Rural Workforce Agency Victoria (RWAV) and East Wimmera Health Service, who are working together to implement an innovative model of care designed for rural communities facing healthcare workforce challenges.

Murray PHN CEO, Matt Jones, said the funding represents a significant step forward for healthcare access in the region.

“This investment ensures rural communities can access high-quality, coordinated care closer to home. It also supports a model that strengthens the local workforce and services for the future,” Matt said.

Western Victoria PHN CEO, Craig Wilding, said the initiative reflects the strength of collaboration.

“This project demonstrates what can be achieved when organisations work together with a shared commitment. By coordinating efforts, we are building a stronger, more connected healthcare system that improves access and outcomes for people living locally,” Craig said.

Building on the extensive community and stakeholder consultation and co-design workshops completed during Phase 1 of the project last year, this next phase will focus on improving access to care, strengthening the local workforce and ensuring long-term sustainability of primary healthcare services.

The funding will support the establishment of a new primary healthcare hub in St Arnaud, including upgrades to facilities and infrastructure. It will then expand to serve as a base for outreach services delivered to surrounding communities including Birchip, Charlton, Donald and Wycheproof.

Care will be provided by a multidisciplinary team comprising GPs, nurse practitioners, nurses and allied health professionals, following workforce activities that focus on recruitment, training and encouraging people to live and work in the region.

Rural Workforce Agency Victoria CEO, Lauren Cordwell, said building a strong rural workforce is essential to long-term success.

“This initiative creates real opportunities to attract, develop and retain a skilled healthcare workforce to the region. By supporting training pathways and multidisciplinary models of care, we’re helping to ensure rural communities have access to the healthcare professionals they need,” Lauren said.

By bringing together public and private providers through a coordinated, multidisciplinary approach, the project aims to reduce fragmented care, improve patient outcomes and create a more resilient healthcare system.



Leadership



Collaboration



Respect



Accountability



Innovation



East Wimmera Health Service CEO, Trevor Adem, said the project reflects a strong commitment to collaboration and community-led solutions.

“We have worked closely with our communities, clinicians and partners to design a model that meets local needs. Phase 2 allows us to bring that vision to life and deliver real improvements in access to care,” Trevor said.

Residents will begin to see changes in the coming months, including the rollout of services from a temporary location, followed by an official launch of the St Arnaud Hub.

Community members, healthcare providers and stakeholders will continue to be engaged throughout the project’s implementation to ensure the model remains responsive to local needs.

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