

MEDIA RELEASE

COVID's challenges generate opportunities

17 December 2021

Murray PHN is pleased to release its sixth Report to the Community, which this year looks at the company's wide-ranging activity in primary health care and includes interviews with some of the dedicated health professionals who help deliver services to communities in the PHN region.

CEO Matt Jones said that in this, the company's second year of COVID-impacted operations, the pandemic had completely changed the way that many in primary health care managed their operations and businesses.

"Some of those changes have been positive – the recognition of the role that telehealth and technologies can play in good quality primary care, for example," he said.

"But for many, this positive has been countered by constant disruption, unsustainable workloads, and the additional time and cost impacts of infection prevention and control."

Mr Jones said the collaboration and system realignment that has accompanied COVID-19, along with the heroic efforts of our health system to get our population vaccinated, could have long-lasting benefits.

"The establishment of regional public health units has made health system partnerships more effective across primary, acute and tertiary sectors. Increasingly, there is a greater sense of us rowing together in the same boat, heading in the same direction.

"For Murray PHN, our extensive program of commissioning health services for our communities has continued, alongside our support for general practice and our COVID work where, for much of this year, we have had a regional bridging role in the work of helping to vaccinate our communities through general practice, pharmacy, respiratory clinics, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, local government and acute hospital services.

"Dedicated people and communities are at the heart of everything we do," he said. "It is collaboration and partnership that will continue to help us achieve positive health outcomes for the people in our region."

During 2021, Murray PHN established a new Strategy and Performance Unit, produced a three year Organisational Development plan, introduced a First Nations Health and Healing Strategy and began to shape its Outcomes and Experiences Framework. Community and stakeholder consultation for Murray PHN's new Strategic Plan and Health Needs Assessment are now complete. The organisation also published the first two editions of the Murray Health Report, which give community members an engaging snapshot of the mental and physical health of our region.

Murray PHN Chair, Fabian Reid, said a global pandemic was a formidable and daunting way of stress-testing a national health system, at every level.

"With vaccination levels well over 90 per cent of the eligible population, we believe – and hope – that our health system is now unlikely to be overwhelmed, even as COVID variants become endemic in our communities," he said.

"Murray PHN continues to play a pivotal role in planning, coordinating and communicating with general practice (and the health system more broadly) as part of the Commonwealth Government's vaccination goals, supported by the states' delivery mechanisms.

"In many ways, PHNs have formed a vital bridge between their primary care stakeholders and all levels of government. When vaccine supplies were low in one area and high in another, Murray PHN worked tirelessly with GPs, pharmacies, hospitals and public health units to balance the supply and get vaccines into willing arms."

Health professionals interviewed in this year's Murray PHN Report to the Community include:

- **Dominic Sandilands**, Corryong Health CEO on rural health challenges including bushfires and workforce issues
- **Melanie Molluso**, Echuca Regional Health's Remote Patient Monitoring Project Coordinator on using digital technology to improve patients' self-management of their disease
- **Kim Ching**, Business Manager Northeast General Practice Services on a new pharmacy model of care
- **Kathryn Cunning**, a senior practice nurse and hospital liaison officer, on the benefits of the local clinical referral system, Murray HealthPathways
- **Marg Jennings**, microbiologist and educator on infection prevention and control during the COVID pandemic
- **Posao 'Nido' Taveesupmai**, a health navigator assisting the Karen community and discussing the disparities of health care
- **Rachel Pritchard**, Eastern Melbourne PHN program manager, discussing HeadtoHelp's unique model of mental health care
- **Cheree Jukes** and **Renee Ficarra**, from Mildura City Council, on collaborating to help culturally and linguistically diverse communities get vaccinated during a COVID outbreak.

To read the full report, visit: murrayphn.org.au/2021report/

Contact details

To arrange an interview with Matt Jones or for any queries about the 2021 Report to the Community, please contact Murray PHN Communications Specialists:

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