

MEDIA RELEASE

New approach to improving regional health outcomes

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Murray PHN (Primary Health Network) has established a new Strategy and Performance Unit to bolster the organisation's work in dedicating resources effectively for the health outcomes of rural and regional communities.

Led by Dr Belinda O'Sullivan, Chief of Strategy and Performance, the unit will use a combination of data and evaluation, strategy and business innovation, and partnerships. These portfolios combine to determine the most effective use of primary health care funding in the Murray PHN region.

"Our region has significant challenges with access to health and aged care services and ensuring as much care is available to people as close to home, particularly as we face deferred care related to COVID-19," said Dr O'Sullivan.

With a background in physiotherapy, public health and rural health systems policy and research, Dr O'Sullivan previously worked in the Office of the National Rural Health Commissioner. She is an adjunct Senior Research Fellow at Monash University and the University of Queensland specialising in rural health research and in 2018-20, led a global collaboration to deliver a World Health Organisation sponsored rural pathways checklist to plan training for a sustainable rural workforce.

One of the unit's imperatives is to deliver strategic, outcomes-based and evidence-informed decisions for Murray PHN to promote value for regional and rural communities and stakeholders.

"When we have a strong understanding of the difference we want to make and we collect the right data to inform and track our decisions, we are able to target funding effectively. We also need to partner with other agencies to promote more value to the community."

Dr O'Sullivan has assembled a team of highly skilled and experienced staff, all living in regional Victoria, who will provide additional skills and perspective to Murray PHN.

They include:

- Dr Catherine Lees, Director Integrated Projects and Partnerships
- Ms Tania Buck, Director Evaluation and Data Analytics
- Ms Aida Escall, Director Strategy and Business Innovation
- Dr Sue Wilson, Evaluation and Data Management Lead
- Ms Elizabeth Foster, Consultation and Engagement Coordinator
- Dr Nerida Hyett, Integrated Health Network Project Lead.

Murray PHN Chief Executive Officer Matt Jones said that the new Strategy and Performance team added to Murray PHN's capacity for strategy, evaluation and partnerships, to help the organisation make a difference to the health outcomes of its communities.

"This team is adding to the other specialist experts at Murray PHN, bringing a real buzz about what we can do for primary health care in our region," said Mr Jones.

Background information:

Dr Belinda O'Sullivan completed her PhD in 2016 as part of the MABEL (Medicine in Australia: Balancing Employment and Life) research team, exploring rural outreach service models and the role of video consultations. Dr O'Sullivan has also worked in applied public health policy and research within the NSW health system and with the Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine.

Dr Catherine Lees is a PhD-trained health care leader who has worked in the public health sector for more than 18 years. Dr Lees has been involved in the leadership of local health education pilot programs and has worked at the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Cancer Council of Victoria.

Ms Tania Buck is a specialist evaluator with a background in nursing and midwifery. Ms Buck has broad experience in government, not-for-profit and private industry and has a Master of Public Health and Master of Evaluation, with experience in program design, evaluation and evaluative reasoning across clinical care, public health and social services.

Ms Aida Escall has more than 30 years' experience in primary health care settings and community-based organisations. Ms Escall brings a rich historical understanding of Primary Health Networks and their strategic place in health care and has a diverse range of experience in the non-for-profit and private sectors in the areas of marketing, workforce development, strategic planning, innovation and nursing.

Dr Sue Wilson is a PhD-qualified specialist nurse, educator and researcher with more than 35 years' experience in public health and executive roles managing health systems reporting and quality improvement in rural health. Dr Wilson holds a Master of Education and is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Dr Nerida Hyett is PhD-trained specialist in community engagement and co-design to inform rural health systems development. Dr Hyett has a clinical background as an occupational therapist and experience working in the community health, mental health and education sectors.

Ms Liz Foster has more than 30 years' experience in education, consultation and improving outcomes for people in the health and aged care sectors. In her previous role, Ms Foster led the establishment of a regional alliance and coordinated several networks for community nursing and allied health.

About us:

Murray PHN is one of 31 PHNs (Primary Health Networks) around Australia working to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of primary health care and service systems. 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.

Contact details

For more details, or to arrange an interview with Dr O'Sullivan, contact Jackie Grant, Communications Specialist e: jgrant@murrayphn.org.au or t: 0408 366 312

Supplied images

Team photo: (top row L-R) Dr Belinda O'Sullivan, Dr Sue Wilson, Dr Catherine Lees
(bottom row L-R) Ms Liz Foster, Ms Tania Buck, Dr Nerida Hyett, Ms Aida Escall
Dr Belinda O'Sullivan headshot