Health Insights

Let's talk about health and wellbeing

phn GIPPSLAND
An Australian Government Initiative

Social determinants of health

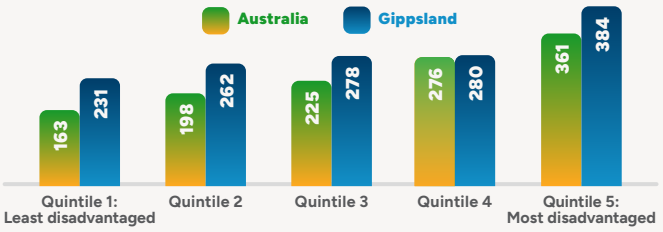
Why social determinants matter

Social determinants are the conditions in which we live. They include housing, education, employment and our environment. They also include our access to power, money and resources. All of these things influence our health, and research shows that social determinants can have a bigger impact on health than genetics or healthcare. This means that improving the conditions in which people live, learn and work can improve health outcomes.

> *The context of people's lives determine their health, and so blaming individuals for having poor health or crediting them for good health is inappropriate. Individuals are unlikely to be able to directly control many of the determinants of health*
>
> - World Health Organization

According to the latest Australian data, people who live in areas with the most disadvantage are twice as likely to die prematurely compared to people who live in the least disadvantaged areas. This is called the social gradient.

Premature deaths (deaths before age 75 years) 2019-2023
average annual age-standardised rates per 100,000 population



What can we do to improve?

- Centre the voices of people with lived and living experience of marginalisation to address systemic barriers, including through partnerships
- Support for increased access to person-centred care that is holistic and trauma-informed, including for co-occurring clinical and non-clinical needs, supported by allied health and support workers
- Design services that embed social determinants of health to improve access to integrated care for population groups with poorer access to health care
- Prioritising services and supports that are free or low-cost for consumers
- Support for prevention and early intervention, including opportunities for people to develop meaningful connections in the community
- Improved access to social determinants data relevant to health planning
- Support for healthcare providers to work with people experiencing complex and intersecting forms of marginalisation
- Support for providers to provide clear information for people with low health literacy

Social determinants of health in Gippsland include:

Gippsland
Victoria
National

Education
81% of 16-year-olds were full-time at high school in 2021 (85% nationally)

Unemployment and job insecurity
4.6% unemployment rate in 2025 (4.1% nationally)

Working life conditions
Health Care and Social Assistance is Gippsland's largest industry, employing **19%** of working people in 2026 (16% nationally). This means the sector has a major influence on working life conditions

Food insecurity
12% of people in Gippsland ran out of food and could not afford to buy more (2023 estimate) (8% Victoria) (highest PHN in Victoria)

Housing
Gippsland had a higher rate of homelessness service use, with **25 people per 1,000 population** accessing services (11 people per 1,000 population nationally)

Environment
The Gippsland region is at extreme risk of floods, bushfires and heatwaves

Early childhood development
27% of children were developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains at school entry in 2024 (24% nationally)

Structural conflict
14% experienced discrimination in the past 12 months (16% Victoria)

Access to affordable health services
79% of GP visits were bulk billed in 2025 (78% nationally)

Gippsland PHN services and supports

- **Homelessness Access Program** – provides healthcare for people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness
- **Gippsland Supporting Recovery Program** and **Gippsland Supporting Outreach Healthcare Program** – for victim-survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence
- **Community Led Integrated Health Care** – a service model based on meeting community needs
- **Indigenous Australian Health Programs** – programs and resources for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples
- **Gippsland Geospatial Climate Vulnerability and Risk Map** – supports the identification of Gippsland communities most at risk from climate change and natural disasters to inform planning and targeted action
- **Education and Training Program** – including cultural safety and person-centred care

Version 2 | July 2026 Please contact tellgippslandphn@gphn.org.au with feedback or to request a reference list.

Social determinants of health spotlight

Living rurally

Residents living in rural areas may benefit from increased community connectedness and access to the natural environment. However, it can also be harder to access services such as specialists and education.

40% of people in Gippsland live in towns and settlements of fewer than 1,000 people

At birth, life expectancy of **81 years** (83 years nationally)

57% of people in Gippsland feel they would be able to get help from their neighbours if they needed it (49% in Victoria). This is the highest rate in Victoria, and all regional PHNs report higher rates than metropolitan PHNs.

> "I drove two, three hours just to come and get this five-minute opinion... There has to be a [better] way... a phone consult"
> - Community member

> "...we need more NPs [Nurse Practitioners] and allied health"
> - General practitioner

Social inclusion

Social inclusion is when we feel connected to our community and are able to participate fully in society. This includes access to education and healthcare, as well as feeling safe and free from discrimination. Research has found a strong association between social exclusion and poorer health outcomes, including mental health and wellbeing.

There are many interrelated factors that can contribute to social exclusion, including low income, unemployment, poor housing, crime, family breakdown and discrimination.

In 2023, an estimated **22%** of people in Gippsland experienced loneliness, compared to 23% in Victoria

14% of people in Gippsland experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months, compared to 16% in Victoria

> "I kind of felt like, growing up, being from a multicultural background, like, that I wasn't really Australian"
> - Young person

> "I think we need to be open to adapting our practices to cater well for all ethnic groups"
> - General practitioner

> "It must not be assumed that everyone in the community has safe [and] reliable family and friends' situations"
> - General practitioner

Access more Gippsland PHN publications here

Income and cost of living

Having sufficient financial resources facilitates access to essential needs, including nutritious food, safe and stable housing, and timely medical care, all of which play a critical role in influencing overall health and wellbeing.

Financial disadvantage can have significant negative impacts on health. For example, limited ability to afford medical care may delay diagnosis, leading to untreated conditions that can worsen over time and result in hospitalisation.

60% of people with higher incomes reported good health, compared to 32% of people with lower incomes

8% of people in Gippsland were Health Care Card holders in 2023 (6% nationally)

The proportion of affordable rentals in Gippsland dropped from **94%** to **39%** between 2000 and 2025 (37% to 14% in Victoria)

> "It's different with your kids... you take them [to a doctor] when there's a problem. But... as a parent I go without"
> - Community member

> "...the cost of living is making it harder for people to meet their health and wellbeing needs across a range of activities"
> - Health professional

Health literacy

Health literacy means being able to access, understand, appraise and use information and services in ways that promote and maintain good health and wellbeing.

Health literacy is shaped by a wide range of societal factors and is, therefore, not the sole responsibility of individuals. Governments and health services have a role in enabling access to trustworthy information in a form that is understandable and actionable for all people, particularly in an environment where health misinformation can spread rapidly and undermine individuals' ability to make informed, evidence-based decisions.

Digital literacy is increasingly important for both consumers and providers as more services, tools and supports are online, leading to a risk of digital exclusion and a risk of accessing misinformation. Those most at risk include marginalised communities who already face systemic barriers to health, including older adults, low-income populations and rural residents.

In Gippsland, the **Digital Inclusion Index** (measuring the digital divide) is lower than Victoria, but has improved

> "Too much information is spread between different agencies resulting in confusion..."
> - Professional

Version 2 | July 2026 Please contact **tellgippslandphn@gphn.org.au** with feedback or to request a reference list.