

Primary care: keeping people out of hospital

Potentially preventable hospitalisations

Preventable hospitalisations are estimated to cost Gippsland **\$127 million per year**

There were **12,895** potentially preventable hospitalisations for people in Gippsland during 2023-24:

- 7.4%** of total hospitalisations (6.2% nationally)
- Gippsland's PPH rate per 100,000 people (**3,343**) was higher than the national rate (**2,617**)
- Highest local rates: **Latrobe City (3,871)** and **Baw Baw (3,788)**
- 51%** were for people aged 65 years or older
- 59%** were for chronic conditions, **37%** for acute conditions and **5%** for vaccine-preventable conditions

Number of PPHs for Gippsland residents by PPH category:

Chronic PPHs increased by 34%
5,686 in 2017-18 to 7,610 in 2023-24

Acute PPHs increased by 18%
3,994 in 2017-18 to 4,701 in 2023-24

Vaccine-preventable PPHs decreased by 10%
646 in 2017-18 to 584 in 2023-24

Top reasons for PPHs for males and females in Gippsland in 2023-24 by number of hospitalisations

MALES		FEMALES	
Diabetes complications	1529	Iron deficiency anaemia	1272
Congestive cardiac failure	651	Urinary tract infections, including pyelonephritis	732
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	606	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	634
Cellulitis	532	Dental conditions	609
Iron deficiency anaemia	474	Diabetes complications	604

Timely and adequate primary healthcare is vital in preventing, identifying and managing health conditions within local communities to help keep people out of emergency departments and hospital beds

Hospitals in Gippsland



Community perspective

There are many reasons people visit an emergency department (ED) rather than a general practitioner or other primary healthcare provider. National data about the main reason people aged 15 years or older visited an ED in 2023-24:

46% were taken there by an ambulance or they had a serious condition

22% reported that a GP wasn't available or the wait was too long

16% reported that their GP didn't have the required facilities or equipment

10% reported that they were sent to ED by a GP

Professional perspective

Challenges for people working in the healthcare system include:

- Limited information sharing and coordination of care between the primary care setting and the acute setting, especially for people with complex needs
- High workload and administration requirements create pressure for the health workforce, which can limit the ability to provide high-quality care
- A high demand within many emergency departments in Gippsland can lead to long wait times

“The [local] hospital is too small for the expanded community, and the wider catchment area it covers. Acute care cannot be provided to all that need it...”

- Health professional

Barriers to accessing primary care in Gippsland include:

- The cost of healthcare can lead to people not accessing or delaying care
- Long wait times
- Additional barriers accessing a GP, such as transport
- Local referral options can be lacking or unaffordable
- People don't have information about existing services
- Poor communication can lead to ineffective care

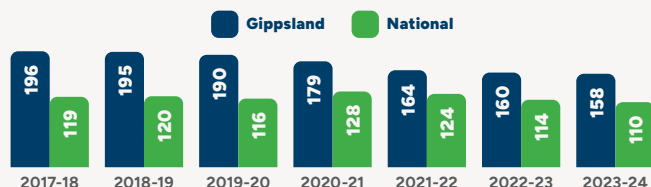
“People are attending the emergency department for health issues that should be handled in a primary care setting”

- Community member

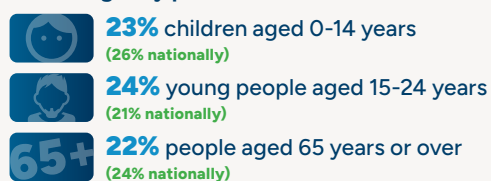
Lower-urgency presentations to emergency departments (EDs)

Lower-urgency visits to EDs often reflect cases that could have been managed in primary care. These include semi-urgent (triage category 4) and non-urgent (triage category 5) presentations, excluding arrivals by ambulance or admissions to hospital (see [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#) for definitions).

Gippsland rates of lower-urgency presentations per 1000 population (age-standardised) have reduced since 2017-18 but remain high compared to national rates:



Children and young people make up a high proportion of lower-urgency presentations:



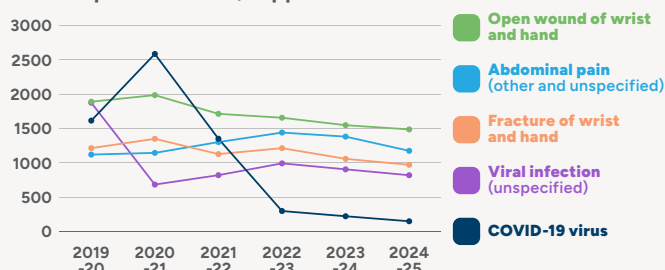
After-hours lower-urgency ED presentation rates have also reduced over time but remain high compared to the rest of Australia. In 2023-24, Gippsland had 72 presentations per 1,000 population (age-standardised), compared to 50 nationally. Sub-regional Gippsland rates per 1,000 population:



In 2024-25, there were 43,462 lower-urgency ED presentations for Gippsland residents:*

- 33% of all ED presentations in 2024-25 were lower urgency
- There was a 13% reduction since 2019-20 in lower urgency ED presentations
- In contrast, urgent and emergency presentations increased by 38% (triage categories 1-3)

Top five diagnosis categories for lower-urgency ED presentations, Gippsland 2019-20 to 2024-25*



*We acknowledge the Victorian Department of Health as the source of Victorian Emergency Minimum Dataset (VEMD) data used for this paper

Not all lower-urgency ED visits and preventable hospitalisations can be managed in primary care. Understanding local services and community needs can support better decision-making, service planning, and care coordination.

Urgent Care Clinics

Two Urgent Care Clinics provide GP-led care in Gippsland as an alternative to ED for urgent, but non-life-threatening conditions.

Since opening in 2023, the clinics have averaged approximately 27,000 presentations per year to May 2026:



Top three reasons for visiting:



How can we keep people out of hospital?

Strengthening **primary care access** to improve health equity is key to keeping people out of hospital.

- Australia's Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan 2022-2032** outlines strategies to strengthen primary healthcare as part of the broader health system
- GP-led **after-hours service** options can prevent lower-urgency emergency department presentations
- Integrated, multidisciplinary care models** can improve patient and provider experiences and outcomes by also addressing non-medical needs
- Support for **care coordination for complex cases**, including collaboration between acute care providers, GPs, allied health providers and support services
- Consider **virtual solutions to improve access**, support coordination and culturally safe care

Gippsland PHN services and supports

- Urgent Care Clinics** offer free help for urgent care needs that are not life-threatening
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples' health programs**
- Community Led Integrated Health Care**
- Primary Mental Health Care and Suicide Prevention**
- MyMedicare** support for general practice
- Digital health** supports including for My Health Record
- Gippsland Pathways**
- Innovative integrated care model** for atrial fibrillation

Additional services and supports

- 1800MEDICARE** (1800 633 422) free 24/7 advice from a registered nurse
- Victorian Virtual Emergency Department** connects patients online with emergency doctors and nurses for urgent but not life-threatening conditions
- Chemist Care Now** participating pharmacies may provide treatment for some common conditions or resupply certain medicines without needing to see a GP first

Access more Gippsland PHN publications here

