



MEDIA RELEASE

Gippsland GPs prove ‘agile and responsive’ in coronavirus pandemic

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Gippsland general practices have proved agile and responsive to community and business needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This was a key finding in a new paper released by the Gippsland Primary Health Network (Gippsland PHN).

The paper – ‘Pandemics and disasters: The value of integrated care’ – includes a snapshot of data provided by Gippsland general practices to Gippsland PHN through POLAR, a cloud-based clinical intelligence platform for GPs to use within their practice. It can also be used to look at regional trends based on de-identified data.

Gippsland PHN Chief Executive Officer, Amanda Proposch, said the data showed the COVID-19 pandemic had forced people to change how they work, live and play.

“It has shown how quickly and effectively systems can shift when needed and that integrated, value-based care is vital to a resilient and agile health system,” Ms Proposch said.

Data for Gippsland general practice activity showed a fast adaptation to phone and video calls without impacting total activity. By 30 March 2020, there were more phone and video consultations than face-to-face in Gippsland (this was not the case across Victoria).

Key Gippsland findings of the ‘Pandemics and disasters’ paper are:

- Telehealth consultations sometimes exceeded face-to-face consultations
- General practices responded quickly to managing patient care
- People with an existing mental health condition presented to general practice more frequently
- There was an increase in new mental health diagnoses, particularly anxiety
- Medication prescriptions for mental health increased



- There were more child and adolescent mental health related presentations

Ms Proposch said during the coronavirus pandemic, Gippsland PHN had supported general practice to adopt and implement a range of digital health tools and technologies.

“These aimed at improving patient health including the transition to electronic prescriptions, making it easier to offer video consultations, remote patient monitoring, and to make transitions to and from hospitals and other providers easier,” she said.

“To assist GPs to respond quickly to managing patient care, we also provided grants to build immunisation workforce capacity in Gippsland and implemented the Capacity Tracker program to support timely information and response to surge capacity needs.”

Mental health services were funded to support communities affected by bushfire and drought as well as the impact of COVID-19.

Gippsland PHN, together with the other five Victorian PHNs, mobilised rapidly to establish a new mental health pandemic response service across Victoria. The service – part of the Federal Government’s \$31.9 million package for Victoria – was operational from 14 September.

Gippsland has two hubs in Wellington and Baw Baw, and four satellite centres in Bairnsdale, Lakes Entrance, Leongatha and Traralgon.

Ms Proposch said mental ill health could affect anyone at any time. “The COVID-19 pandemic has meant increased anxiety and uncertainty for many,” she added. “HeadtoHelp can help people find the mental health service that is best for them.”

The free service includes a statewide phone line (1800 595 212) to provide support to anyone who feels they are not coping.

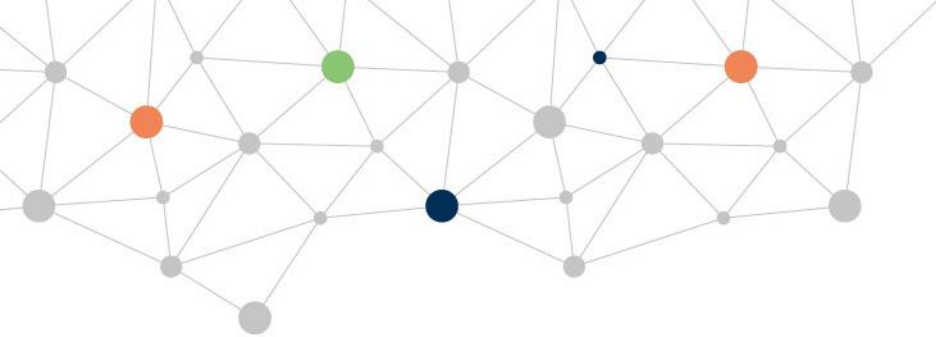
Among other mental health initiatives, Gippsland PHN is funding 10 free counselling services, offered through the Royal Flying Doctor Service and Relations Australian Victoria to communities affected by bushfires while it also funded a new headspace centre in Sale, initially providing services via telehealth and now face-to-face.

A second paper titled ‘Primary Care: Managing the main health issues’ gives a snapshot of key statistics of the Gippsland population.

The top five causes of death in Gippsland (2014-2018) included: coronary heart disease, lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cerebrovascular disease and prostate cancer in men, and dementia in women.

To read the two issues papers, go to

<https://www.gphn.org.au/populationhealthplanning/resources-2/>



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