

## MEDIA RELEASE

# Program helps Barb return to her love of horse riding

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Barb Harding's goal in life is to keep horse riding until she is 80.

And it looks far more likely now for the 77-year-old since she completed the Healthy Ageing Program, funded by Gippsland Primary Health Network and delivered by Healthlinks Gippsland.

Barb always admired the late Queen Elizabeth for her horse riding skills. "I thought if she can keep riding at 96 then I can do it at 80," she laughed.

But her goal was not looking great a few months back with joint pain preventing her from not only horse riding but line dancing and Tai Chi too. She was also finding it difficult to help husband Mal on their 170-acre beef cattle farm between Willow Grove and Hill End.

"Getting up on the horse was difficult and getting off was even harder," Barb said.

Years of working outside on the farm, milking cows, feeding calves and helping with the general farm work had caught up. A fall in the mud didn't help.

It was fate that Barb picked up a flyer for the Healthy Ageing program at Trafalgar and decided to give the eight-week program a go.

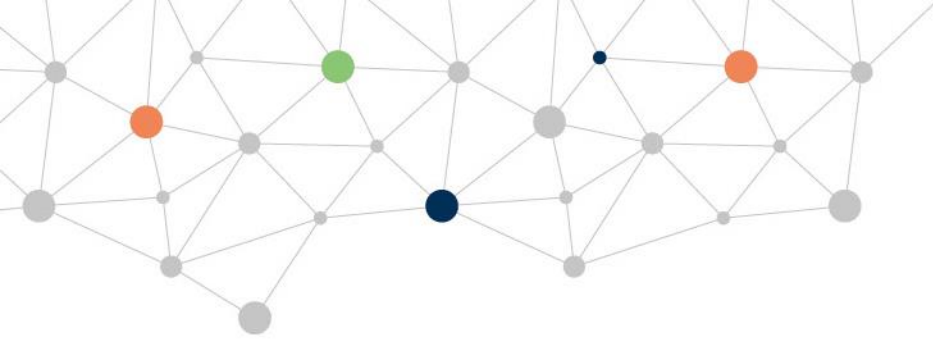
"After just three weeks, I started to see a huge difference. The gentle exercises, stretching, balance work and weights relieved all the tightness and tension. After the eight weeks, I felt really good."

So good in fact Barb was back up on her 22-year-old mare Charm, riding around her yard once again. She's gone back to line dancing, taken up pilates and is even thinking of re-joining the Moe Riding Club.

Barb started riding as a young woman when she worked on a farm near her home at Dandenong. After marrying Mal, the couple moved to a property near Longwarry before buying their current farm, Thistlepark, 27 years ago.

The property is located in a green valley, with rolling hills on three sides and a creek with native bush on the other. Barb could often be found riding through the bush with her dogs not far behind. Endurance riding has always been a favourite pastime.

She has four horses but Charm, who she bought two years ago, is her riding partner. After throwing the saddle on Charm's back last week, Barb climbs the mounting block (her only concession to age) and in an instant, is sitting high above the ground, speaking gently to Charm



the whole time. The two friends then go through their riding exercises, around obstacles, over small logs and some breaking into some fancy side-stepping.

Barb is keen to share the positive benefits from health ageing. “Old age creeps up on you and then suddenly, you’re struggling to move.”

Gippsland PHN funds a range of early intervention activities and models of care for chronic disease management to support senior Australians to live at home for as long as possible.

Chief Executive Officer, Amanda Proposch, said the Early Intervention activities and models of care were designed to promote healthy ageing and reduce pressure on local health services.

“Our [Health Needs Assessment](#) includes information relating to the over 65 year population and assists with defining areas for potential commissioned work,” Ms Jacob Proposch.

It is estimated that 23.6% of the Gippsland population are aged 65 years or older, compared to 15.8% in Victoria. An even higher proportion of the Bass Coast and East Gippsland populations are aged 65 years or older; 28.7% and 29.4% respectively.

By 2030, 28.1% of the Gippsland population is expected to be aged 65 years or older with 33.5% of the Bass Coast population and 34.9% of the East Gippsland population, compared to 17.1% in Victoria.

Ms Proposch encouraged old residents of Gippsland to find out more about programs available across the region at <https://gphn.org.au/what-we-do/programs/programs-aged-care/early-intervention-services/>

*Caption: Barb Harding with Charm.*

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