

MEDIA RELEASE

Report gives insight into Gippsland GP visits

25 March 2024

More Gippsland people received health care from their GP in 2022-2023 compared to most other regions of Australia although the number dropped slightly from the previous year.

A report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) based on Medicare data from the 31 Primary Health Network areas in Australia found that Gippsland ranked third nationally in the category for Medicare-subsidised GP appointments.

A total of 89 per cent of people in Gippsland saw a GP in 2022-2023 compared to the national average of 86 per cent. This figure had dropped from 93 per cent in 2021-2022.

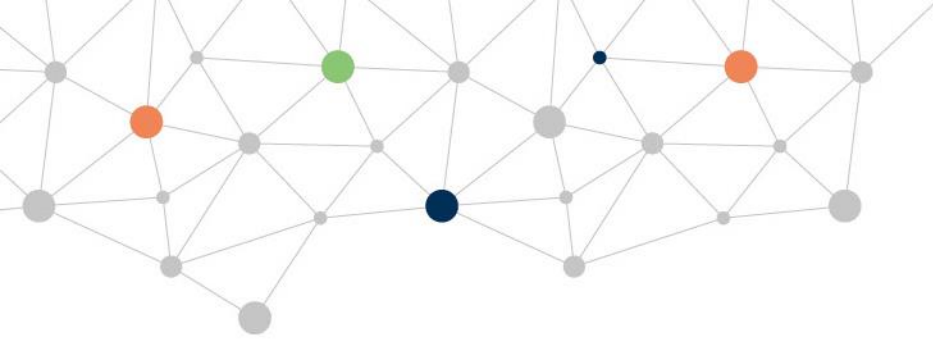
The drop in the proportion of people accessing a GP is in line with feedback Gippsland PHN has been gathering over the last two years from its Clinical Council, Community Advisory Committee and the community which points to the rise in cost of living as a significant barrier to seeking health care.

The Priority Issues Paper on General Practice Access, released in December 2022, showed other barriers include a lack of access to the usual GP/general practice, long waiting times, drop in bulk billing GPs, lack of affordable after-hours access to GPs and access to GPs who do home visits.

Recent feedback suggests accessing healthcare continues to be impacted by cost but also multiple other factors, including lack of transport, food insecurity, and homelessness.

Gippsland PHN Chief Executive Officer, Amanda Proposch, welcomed the report, adding the data aligned with information the organisation was gathering from a wide range of sources and stakeholders.

“Gippsland PHN advocates for priority, emerging health and system issues through our strategic health planning work,” Ms Proposch said. “We bring together insights from data, local community voices, services providers and our PHN community and clinical advisors. This data helps us plan for the future.”



In other findings, Gippsland had the third lowest proportion (7.2 per cent) of the population who had a Medicare-subsidised after-hours attendance, less than half of the national average of 16.4 per cent.

Ms Proposch said the low after-hours GP attendance had an inevitable impact on the workload of hospital emergency departments.

“We know regional areas have lower after-hours GP visits than urban areas. To alleviate the pressure on hospital emergency departments, we established two Priority Primary Care Centres in Warragul and Moe for people who need urgent care but it’s not an emergency.

“The centres have been very successful, seeing a total of 26,889 patients since they opened. We have also commissioned after-hours GP support in other areas to support the community when their usual GP may not be available.”

Gippsland was the fourth highest among people who had a Medicare-subsidised diagnostics imaging service at 43 per cent, compared to the national figure of 39 per cent and the fifth highest for people who had a Medicare-subsidised specialist service with 36 per cent, compared the national average of 31.59 per cent.

While the Gippsland figure is higher than the national average for people accessing diagnostic and specialised services, Ms Proposch said more work was needed to improve access to these “important services”.

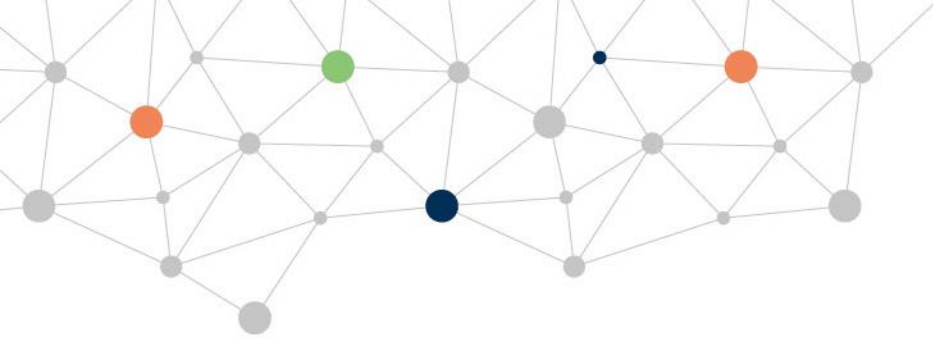
“Gippsland has an ageing population, with complex and ongoing health care issues, including diabetes, disability and mental health conditions, leading to a need for longer and/or more frequent services.

“The distribution of GPs and other health professionals does not match community need, with less professionals in rural and remote areas and in areas with greater need. Demand for GP services is also forecast to outpace supply with less medical students indicating that they intend to pursue a career in general practice in the future.”

Ms Proposch said Gippsland PHN had already implemented a number of initiatives to support access to services and strengthen workforce capability, with more to come.

These include:

- Priority Primary Care Centres in Baw Baw and Latrobe.



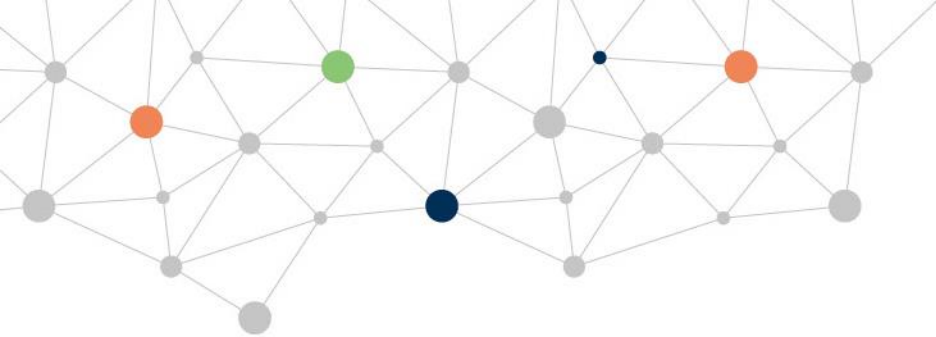
- Free after-hours GP support through Health Access via a telehealth consultation service.
- A \$500,000 commitment to provide scholarships to three new Federation University allied health students a year for 12 years, supporting them to succeed in their studies without the stress of financial pressure.
- Seeking input from the Gippsland allied health sector as an important part of an integrated patient-centred health system that is better able to meet community needs.
- General Practice Workforce Planning and Prioritisation (GP WPP) Project to support GP College-led general practice training through identification of Gippsland general practitioner workforce needs.
- Commencing two Community Led Integrated Health Care services - The Latrobe Valley clinic for children from disadvantaged backgrounds that provides care coordination, transport assistance and a multi-disciplinary approach to address family needs; and the Orbost Regional Health and the Deddick Valley Isolated Community Group operating health service hubs to provide healthcare in local communities.

Ms Proposch said the Australian Government was laying the foundations for significant reforms to Medicare, with a comprehensive package of measures to ensure Australians had better access to affordable care, cheaper medicines and a stronger health workforce.

“We look forward to further initiatives as they are announced,” she said. “We will also continue to work with partners to identify solutions that meet the needs of communities, providers and other stakeholders.”

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