Annual Report 2025–26

Bellarine Community Health



Built on CARE
Community, Accountability, Respect, Equity

Welcome



This Annual Report reflects another year of supporting the health and wellbeing of the Bellarine community. Across our six health centres, we've continued to deliver accessible health services and wellbeing programs, respond to the changing needs of our community and work towards healthier outcomes for everyone.

Statement of Diversity

We are working to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone in our communities no matter their age, race, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity or cultural background. Our services are accessible to everyone regardless of social or economic status. We value and respect the diversity of our staff, volunteers, clients and communities.

We are committed to creating safe, inclusive and respectful services. Everyone is welcome at BCH.

Respect 2040

We are a proud member of Respect 2040 which is a movement to provide resources and support for individual organisations and groups to drive and progress meaningful gender equality action, improving our community and our society while meeting the legal requirements of the state-wide Gender Equality Strategy.

Sustainability Statement

We join other health organisations around the world in recognising climate change as a health emergency. Climate change is the single greatest health challenge facing humanity.

BCH is committed to:

- mitigating the impacts of climate change
- educating our community on the impacts of climate change on health and wellbeing
- increasing community capacity to mitigate the impacts of climate change



Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct is how we work at BCH – ethically, professionally and responsibly.

The BCH Code of Conduct explicitly covers children, young people, older adults and NDIS participants and prioritises:

- commitment to safety and wellbeing of clients
- protection from abuse or harm
- strengthening capacity and maximising independence
- the right to be heard and participate in decision making

Acknowledgment of Funding

We acknowledge financial support from the State and Commonwealth Governments along with community grants, donations and private fee-for-service.

Acknowledgement of Country

Bellarine Community Health (BCH) acknowledges the Wadawurrung People as the Traditional Owners of the Bellarine Peninsula. We acknowledge the Wadawurrung People's continuing connection to the land, waterways and sea and pay respect to Elders, past and present.

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Board Chair & CEO report

The 2025-26 year reinforced both the enduring value of community health and the need to keep adapting as the environment around us changes. Across the Bellarine, demand for accessible, locally delivered care continued to grow, while health, aged care and disability reforms reshaped the way services are funded, regulated and delivered.

In this environment, Bellarine Community Health remained focused on providing high-quality care close to home. Almost 8,000 people accessed BCH services during the year, many through more than one program. This reflects the increasingly complex needs of our community and the importance of care that is coordinated, person-centred and connected across the life course.

BCH achieved a small operating surplus of $5,000, excluding depreciation, capital income and gains from revaluation. While modest, this positive result reflects careful stewardship and disciplined financial management. It was achieved despite continuing funding erosion, with indexation failing to keep pace with employment, compliance and operating costs. Like other independent community health services, BCH has limited capacity to influence pricing and must continually improve productivity and efficiency without compromising access, quality or safety.

BCH will continue to use its resources responsibly and seek opportunities for improvement, but efficiency alone cannot offset sustained funding erosion. Adequate investment in community health is essential to preserve the prevention, early intervention and coordinated support that help people remain well and independent, while reducing avoidable demand on hospitals and other parts of the health system. Through Community Health First, the Alliance of Rural and Regional Community Health and Bellarine Wellbeing Connect, BCH continues to advocate for sustainable investment, stronger service integration and a health system that is easier for people to navigate.

During the year, BCH successfully implemented major aged care reforms, strengthened quality and client feedback systems, improved access to care and received national recognition for the quality of our cardiac rehabilitation and palliative care services. These achievements are explored throughout this report through the experiences of our clients, staff, volunteers and community partners. Together, they demonstrate the value of skilled local teams who understand their community and can respond to its changing needs.

A significant focus this year was developing the BCH 2026-2030 Strategic Plan. Shaped by input from our community, staff, partners and Board, the plan provides a clear direction for the next five years, aligning our services, workforce, partnerships and resources with the outcomes that matter most to the Bellarine community. It recognises that sustainability is not achieved by standing still. We must strengthen what works, address what slows us down, build organisational capability and make responsible choices about where BCH will have the greatest impact.

Our CARE values of Community, Accountability, Respect and Equity will guide how we bring the plan to life. Community means listening, building connections and working in partnership. Accountability means taking responsibility for outcomes, using resources carefully and following through on our commitments. Respect shapes how we care for clients, work with colleagues and value differences. Equity requires us to understand that people face different barriers and to tailor access and support, so everyone has a fair opportunity to achieve their health and wellbeing goals.

The adoption of our revised Constitution also strengthened the foundations for BCH's future, reaffirming the role of members and formally recognising Auxiliaries within our governance framework. These connections will ensure BCH remains community-owned, accountable and responsive to local priorities.

We thank our staff, volunteers, members, Board Directors, community partners, supporters and funders for their contribution throughout the year. Their expertise, commitment and generosity enable BCH to continue making a meaningful difference across the Bellarine. As we look ahead, we do so with a clear strategy, strong values and confidence in the role locally led community health will continue to play in building a healthier and more connected community.

Fay Agterhuis
Chair

Kathy Russell
Chief Executive Officer



Kathy Russell, CEO (left) with Fay Agterhuis, Board Chair (right).

Who we are

Bellarine Community Health's vision is for a thriving, healthy Bellarine Peninsula where every person has fair access to holistic, client-centred care. Our purpose is to deliver high-quality, accessible health services that empower our community to live well.

We are an independent not-for-profit community health organisation supporting almost 8,000 clients each year through a workforce of 167 staff and almost 90 volunteers.

Amid ongoing reforms and growing health needs in our communities, independent registered community health services like BCH remain vital to Victoria's health system, serving as a critical safety net for over 670,000 people, or 1 in 10 Victorians.

The number of people accessing community health services grew by 11% last year, showing more Victorians than ever before are seeking support through our organisations.



167

Staff (106 eft)



7981

Clients supported



89

Volunteers



86,982

Service delivery hours



2330

Clients receiving more than one service

Where you can find us

We work from six locations from Drysdale and Portarlington on the Northern Bellarine to Point Lonsdale in the South.

Our sites include a specific youth site in the Drysdale schools district, a children's hub in the heart of Ocean Grove and a headspace service in Ocean Grove. We also work in various community and school settings.



What we do

Clients access support from multiple BCH programs, reflecting the complexity of need within our community and the value of coordinated, person-centred care.

Our services and programs are funded through different programs including Community Health (CH), Home and Community Care - Program for Younger People (HACC-PYP), Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP), Dental Weighted Activity Units (DWAU), National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Medicare (MBS), and the new Support at Home program (SAH).

Our services span the life course and include:



Child Services



Youth Mental Health & Wellbeing



Adult & Paediatric Allied Health



Public & Private Dental, Oral Health & Smile Squad



Community Nursing & Palliative Care



Social Support Programs



NDIS Services



Support at Home Program



Group Exercise Programs

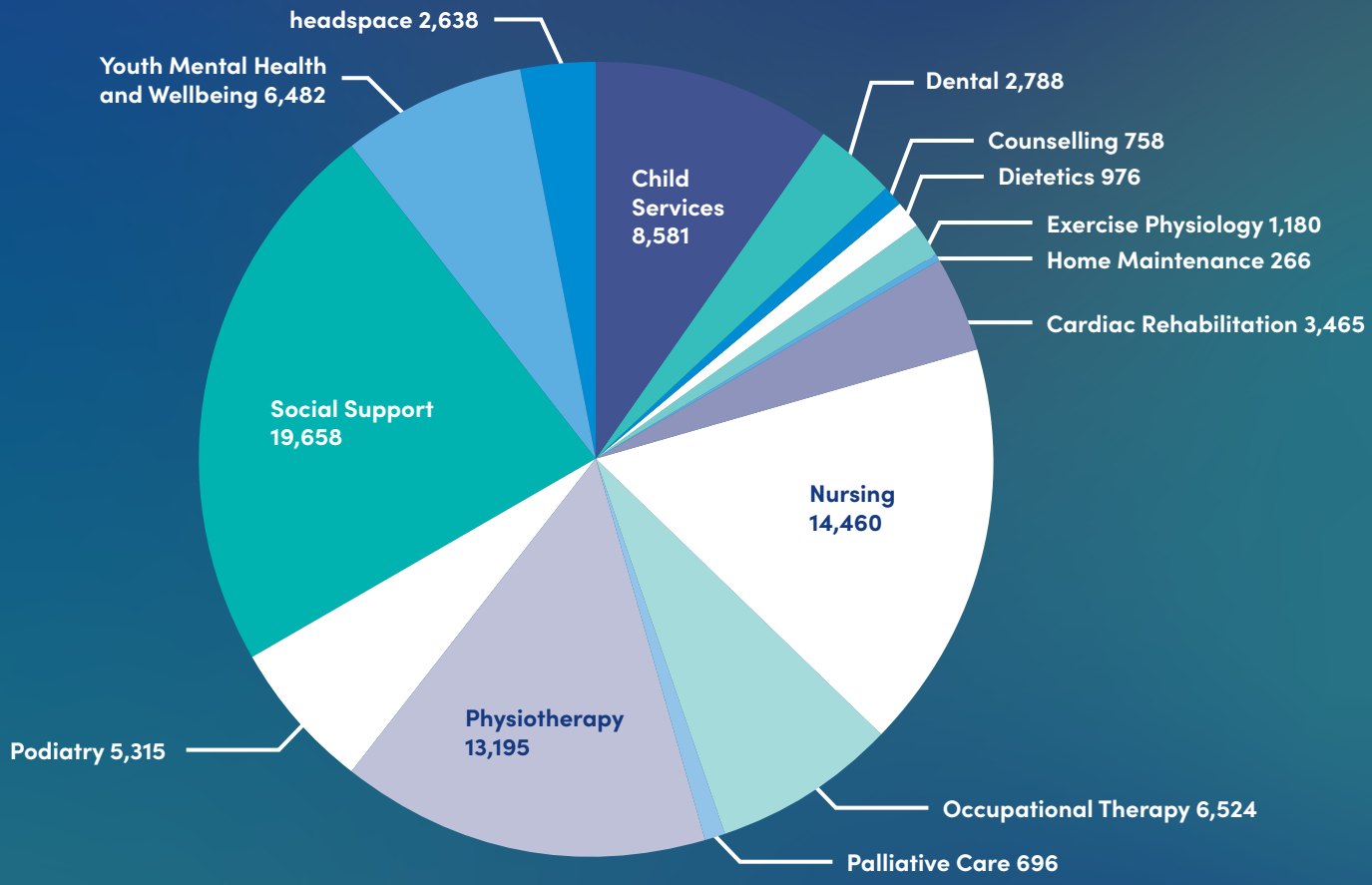


Cardiac Rehabilitation Program



Health Promotion

Service delivery hours





Our Board Directors

BOARD DIRECTORS



Fay Agterhuis
Chair



Lucy Simms
Deputy Chair



Rod Slattery
Treasurer



Virginia Todd
Board Director



Kristina Dimasi
Board Director



Jean Paul
Board Director



Tim Walsh
Board Director



Mark Harris
Board Director



Robert James
Board Director
(1 July 2025 to 27 Nov 2025)

(All held the position of Board Director for the full financial year, unless specified)


SHOW YOUR HEART FOR PALLIATIVE CARE
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bch

Our people & their stories

In the 2025-26 financial year, BCH farewelled 10 long term employees as they transitioned into retirement, including three who have been with us for more than 20 years. Collectively they represent 147 years of dedicated service to BCH.

BARB

Barb, a much-loved footcare nurse bid BCH farewell after almost 28 years of caring passionately for the feet of her clients, and Sue, a 27-year veteran of the Social Support team said farewell to her team and clients.

"I've had the conversation many times with people who say, 'How can you stand looking at feet all day? Don't you ever get sick of feet? But I say, well, there's never two feet the same, and there's usually somebody interesting on the end of them."
– Barb



SUE



"Sue has been instrumental in creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere for BCH social support clients. Her skill in supporting those who might need a little extra encouragement to be able to participate on their own terms has been wonderful to watch."
– BCH CEO Kathy

YUAN



Our Dentist, Yuan, treated a refugee couple who have experienced numerous hardships over time, and their feedback about the public dental service provided by BCH left the team feeling very proud.

"S and his wife P were blown away by the kindness and professionalism of all involved in their dental appointment. They reported that they felt so safe and well cared for and couldn't believe they could receive such a service free of charge! S is free from pain and can eat easier and is also more able to pronounce his words."
– Dental clients

BERYL

BCH Community Nurse Beryl undertook a trek across thousands of kilometres in the outback in a car worth less than $1500 as part of the 'Shitbox Rally' because she wanted to make a difference in the fight against cancer.

After 40 years of nursing, Beryl says the hardships of the road are a small price to pay for a cause this important.

"I have looked after so many people over that time that are no longer with us. They have suffered, their families and friends have been devastated, and the universe has missed out on some cracking human beings simply because we didn't know then what we know now."
– Community Nurse Beryl



National recognition for delivering excellent client outcomes

The BCH Cardiac Rehabilitation program has received a Certificate of Program Excellence from the Australian Cardiac Rehabilitation Foundation, a significant national acknowledgment of the team's commitment to quality improvement and flexible, client-centred care.

This achievement reflects our evidence-based approach to cardiac rehabilitation, which research shows reduces hospital admissions and improves long-term health outcomes.

The multidisciplinary team draws on nursing, exercise physiology, dietetics, occupational therapy, psychology and pharmacy expertise, working with clients across weekly supervised exercise and education sessions.

Cardiac rehabilitation is often delivered in hospital-affiliated settings due to the complexity of participants' needs. Our program proves that the same high standard of care can be delivered safely and effectively in a regional community setting, where travel can be a major barrier to attendance.

Being able to access rehabilitation close to home reduces the burden of travel at a time when clients are often managing significant physical and emotional recovery following a cardiac event or surgery.



The strong, positive response from our clients underscores the real value of specialised cardiac care delivered locally, and the national recognition affirms that our community-based model sets a benchmark for program excellence.

CASE STUDY

Alan, 42, was fit, active and working full-time as a tradesperson while raising his young family when he suffered a cardiac arrest during a local team sport. The arrest was caused by a heart attack, and he needed bypass surgery, despite having no warning signs and minimal risk factors for heart disease.

The unexpected event and prolonged hospital stay took a significant physical and emotional toll on Alan and his family. After discharge, he faced reduced confidence in his ability to exercise and return to work, alongside financial pressure and emotional distress.

Through cardiac rehabilitation, Alan received individualised support to safely rebuild his physical capacity and confidence, with the team working closely alongside him to meet his personal goals. He successfully completed the program and returned to his usual work and family life.

Alan's story highlights the vital role cardiac rehabilitation plays in helping people regain confidence, independence and quality of life after a life-changing cardiac event.

AWARDS

Our dedicated community Palliative Care team were finalists in the 2025 National Palliative Care awards in the category 'Outstanding Work by a Team delivering Palliative Care', competing against major health institutions.

The team's selection as finalists recognises several key achievements including supporting approximately 60% of clients to die at home through our community-based model of care, a figure well above the national average.

"We were lucky enough to spend 3 days immersed in all-things palliative care. To have been given the opportunity to attend the 2025 Oceanic Palliative Care Conference was such a privilege.

There were such a wide variety of palliative care clinicians who provided education, shared research, presented case studies and so much more. I left feeling inspired by the enormous scope that is palliative care. I feel so proud to work in this field and the passion for palliative care was palpable throughout the whole conference.



We got to attend the awards night and whilst we didn't come away with a win, having our work acknowledged in the first place was incredible and it was such an enjoyable night. Palliative care clinicians know how to dance!" – Beth, BCH Palliative Care Nurse

A new aged care landscape

The aged care sector has undergone its most significant reform in decades with the new rights-based Aged Care Act, which came into effect on 1 November 2025.

Central to this reform is the shift to the Support at Home program, which replaced the Home Care Packages Program and Short-Term Restorative Care Programme.

BCH is proud to have supported our clients smoothly through this challenging period, ensuring vulnerable clients experienced no disruption to essential home-based support during the changeover.

Our staff successfully transitioned service agreements and adapted allied health and clinical service delivery models at the same time as overhauling billing and reporting systems.

Our compassionate team has listened and supported existing clients at the same time as significantly growing our client base by being a trusted local partner delivering quality clinical services.

As a local provider based on the Bellarine, we have also built a network of carefully chosen and approved local suppliers to deliver everyday living supports to help clients stay independent and living well at home.

LYN'S STORY

Lyn seriously considered moving into an Aged Care facility after the death of her husband George. The 85-year-old says she just didn't want to be a burden to her kids.

But her family felt strongly that with the right supports, Lyn could continue living well at home. They pursued support services through My Aged Care and in February 2026, Lyn was allocated funding under the Support at Home Program and chose Bellarine Community Health (BCH) to manage her funds and services.

"My son said, thank God, we talked you out of doing that when we knew we were going to lose Dad," Lyn recalls. "It just would have been the worst thing for me to have cut myself off from everybody. Definitely, I would have fallen in a heap if I hadn't had Bellarine Community Health."

BCH wasn't new to Lyn. George had received home care support through BCH in his final years, and Lyn herself had spent five happy years volunteering with BCH before that.

Now, Lyn says she has a new lease on life and independence she loves. There's help with the garden, someone to lend a hand with the cleaning, taxi vouchers so she's not stuck waiting for a lift, and a social support program that gets her out among people again.

Each morning, Lyn checks the board that outlines her week.

"It gives you a purpose, like I check the board, you know, every morning," she says. "I know what days, BCH come and all of that, but it's just a pleasure to wake up in the morning and think, what have I got on today? And you'd look and see, oh, the bus is picking you up at 10 o'clock or whatever, and we're going out for lunch, things like that."

Her children have noticed the change in Lyn too.

"My daughter tells me all the time, she's so proud of me for becoming more independent now, not relying on them as much. So, I think for the family, I'm doing all right."

Despite having lost her husband, Lyn is moving forward and getting more out of life.

"I'm just so wrapped in BCH at the moment," Lyn says, "what they've done for me, you know, getting me out of the house and everything, and meeting all these new people and everything. It's just fantastic."

With the right support services at home, that's what independence at 85 can look like, not doing everything alone, but having just enough support to keep living independently.



"My daughter tells me all the time, she's so proud of me for becoming more independent now, not relying on them as much. So, I think for the family, I'm doing all right."
– Lyn

Child & Youth services

Our Child Services team is committed to delivering a seamless service experience and high-quality care for the children and families they support. Clinicians work in partnership using child and family centred principles that are goal oriented, neuro diverse affirming and strengths based.

The team has been delivering an Autism Assessment clinic over the past year supporting clients onto the NDIS or ensuring adequate funding via the NDIS.

Staff including Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists and a Psychologist are trained in specialist assessment, creating a supportive pathway for families to be able to access the NDIS following diagnosis.

The coordination from the team in providing these assessments and reports in a timely way have been welcomed by many families who struggle with the complexities of getting a diagnosis for their child.

Our child services team provided more than 8,500 hours of service to children between the ages of 0-12 years both in clinical and community settings.

Young people from the ages of 12-25 access our youth mental health and wellbeing services for diverse and complex needs, often presenting for multiple reasons.

For 58.4% of young people, anxiety was the most common primary issue, followed by depressive symptoms (37.6%), stress-related concerns (19.5%), attention-deficit and disruptive behaviour concerns (17.3%), and difficulties with personal relationships (17.1%).

To respond to these needs, our Youth team deliver a combination of low-intensity and psychological interventions, including supportive counselling, behavioural interventions, social and emotional wellbeing support, psychoeducation, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), crisis intervention and risk management.

We support young people from a range of priority populations, including Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse young people, LGBTIQA+ young people, and young people experiencing homelessness, ensuring that support is inclusive and responsive to the specific needs of vulnerable and often underserved groups.

Our child and youth health services across the Bellarine are accessible and play a critical role in early intervention, therapeutic support and connecting children and young people to broader care within the community.





HEADSPACE OCEAN GROVE

Our headspace Ocean Grove site is a vital hub for youth mental health support.

These results show a strong reach into the community and growing awareness of the service among young people seeking help. The client satisfaction reflects the quality of care and connection young people experienced at the headspace Ocean Grove centre.

2,640
occasions of service

379
clients

157
first time clients

92.4%
client satisfaction

Dental Services

Bellarine Community Health's Dental team continues to provide accessible, high-quality oral health care to the local community and in the 2025/26 financial year, the team provided care for 1,045 adults in clinic, alongside 1,076 children and young people aged 0–17, seen either in clinic or through our outreach program to schools across the Bellarine.



BCH is a proud partner in the Victorian Government's Smile Squad program, which delivers free dental care to primary school students. By bringing quality dental care directly into the school environment, the program removes barriers for busy families and ensures children receive prompt, preventive care. This year, the team supported the dental needs of 1,048 students across 8 public primary schools on the Bellarine.

BCH Dental also runs a unique, personalised dental service for people with Autism or mild intellectual disabilities, supporting 30 clients through the program this year.

Central to this service is our 'My Story' intake process, which helps the team understand what sensory support each patient needs before they arrive. This information allows the dental team to put tailored strategies in place to reduce and manage any challenges or concerns.

Patients accessing this program are given extra time for their appointment, so nothing feels rushed. Visual aids, social stories and a video walk-through of the clinic help patients familiarise themselves with the space before their visit, while sensory aids such as noise-cancelling headphones, squishy toys, a weighted blanket and iPads are available on-site to support emotional and behavioural regulation.

This program reflects BCH's commitment to inclusive, patient-centred care that adapts to the needs of every individual in our community.

1,045

adults in clinic

1,076

children in clinic & outreach

1,048

primary students through Smile Squad



Community Nursing & Palliative Care

Our highly regarded Palliative Care team achieved a milestone, supporting more than 100 active clients for the first time. Through their community-based model of care, the team are dedicated to honouring client wishes at the end of life.

This small but dedicated team is made up of a Specialist Palliative Care Nurse, three Community Palliative Care Nurses, an Occupational Therapist and a Palliative Care Social Worker who work closely with volunteers from Compassionate Hearts on the Bellarine.

Client Dave describes the BCH Palliative Care team as a parachute when he needed it the most.



COMMUNITY NURSING

Our clients on the Bellarine are also supported by a Community Nursing team made up of Registered and Enrolled Nurses and Clinical Coordinators. They provide vital in-home care to clients across the Bellarine Peninsula, visiting up to eight clients a day.

Throughout the year the team made 13,235 client visits for wound care, health assessments, personal care, catheter and medication management, Hospital in the Home, advance care planning, complex symptom management and end-of-life care.

DAVE'S STORY

82-year-old Dave was referred into the BCH service after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and given five to twelve months to live. It was a cruel twist for a man who had already fought, and beaten, stage four Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma and stage four Multiple Myeloma over the past fifteen years.

"It was a safety net. It was a backup. It was like, someone's got your back. It's not just us out there alone in another battle, you know."

Dave is determined to make the most of the time he has, and that determination shapes how he and wife Jan approach each day.

"For every minute, we can squeeze something out of it. We're going to squeeze it out. As long as I can stay healthy enough to be able to complete an activity that we want to do, we're going to do it."

Dave is keen for other families to understand something he didn't fully appreciate before his own diagnosis: palliative care isn't only for people at the very end of life. Support can begin much earlier, whenever it's needed.



"These people are so special at what they do. Every person that we've come across, with palliative care, have been empathetic, have listened, and they're really good listeners. And then they work on whatever it is that you are concerned about, you know? And they just let you talk about your concerns and the things that maybe they can help with. And they've been able to help us with lots of things. And also, we talked about alternatives, and tweaking medication."

(Sadly Dave passed away in September 2026).

Social support for our community

The BCH transport program provides far more than a ride to the shops; it's a vital social lifeline for isolated elderly residents across the Bellarine Peninsula.

For many elderly people, getting to the shops isn't simply a matter of jumping in the car. For those who can no longer drive, live alone, or have limited mobility, a weekly grocery shop can be overwhelming.

The BCH 'Going Places' transport program picks up eligible clients directly from their homes in communities right across the Bellarine and transports them to a local shopping centre for a relaxed morning of shopping, coffee, and connection.

The program runs three days a week, offering a reliable lifeline to residents who may have no other way to access essential goods and services and are needing to top up their groceries.

80-year-old Kaye no longer drives and says the program has transformed her week. "It means I can get out and meet people, different people. I'm not just at home and I feel safe."

Each session includes approximately 1.5 hours of shopping time, followed by 30 minutes for coffee and socialisation at the shopping centre. For many participants, these moments of connection with others are just as valuable as the practical purpose of the outing.

82-year-old Marion says she would be lost without the 'Going Places' bus. "The people that I've met, they keep you going. We look forward to the next time we all meet. I'm on my own, so I look forward to it."

Our memory loss group is another vital community connector for people who often find themselves isolated.

Group activities can include spending time outside in the BCH garden planting vegetables, flowers and herbs. The garden is a place for clients to feel active and involved, especially when English is not their first language. One client whose English is limited has described the garden as a great way to feel 'part' of the group.



Our people, Our strength

We believe our people are our strength and by participating in the Victorian Public Sector 'People Matter Survey' our staff can share their experiences and perspective about our workplace culture in a safe and confidential way.

The survey draws feedback from more than 65 organisations statewide, asking questions across a range of areas including engagement, wellbeing, inclusion, leadership, behaviours, safety and more.

BCH achieved an outstanding 86% participation rate, significantly higher than our comparator group, and an 80% engagement score, again highly favourable in comparison to other organisations. The survey also revealed that 93% of staff are proud to work at BCH while 96% intend to stay, all strong indicators of a positive workforce culture.

As a workforce-dependent organisation facing sector-wide shortages, these results are extraordinary and reflect the value BCH places on staff health and wellbeing.

In addition to supporting our staff, BCH also believes supporting student placements is a key investment in BCH's future workforce. We hosted 21 students across a range of service areas, including undergraduate Occupational Therapy and Speech Pathology students, reflecting our desire to support and train the next generation of clinicians.

Placements reinforce a culture of high-quality care, as well as recruitment and workforce sustainability, with several current BCH staff beginning their careers with us as students, later returning to join the organisation permanently.



86%

survey participation



80%

engagement score



93%

proud to work at BCH



96%

intend to stay at BCH

Listening & learning

Listening to our staff and the people we serve is the foundation of how we improve and this year, we invested significantly in improving client feedback systems.

We expanded our client feedback program with two Feedback Fest surveys, six months apart, using consistent core questions to track performance over time. Targeted surveys for new clients now capture their experience of the Intake and Access process, helping us understand and improve those crucial first interactions with BCH.

To ensure client voices shape decision-making at the highest level, we set up the Quality Care Advisory Body, which reviews quality and compliance data and reports directly to the Quality, Safety and Risk sub-committee of the Board.

Behind the scenes, we implemented LogiqcQMS, a system that strengthens data quality and visibility across document management, complaints, incidents and risk, helping us respond faster to issues. We also uplifted staff training to ensure ongoing regulatory compliance and continued improvement in service delivery.

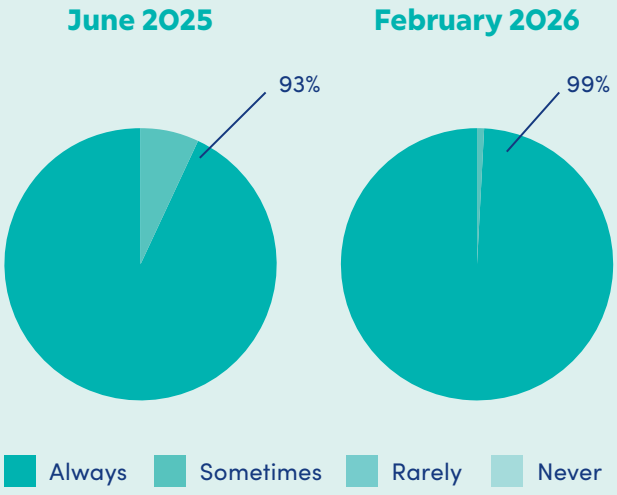
We began piloting Patient Reported Outcome Measures in select exercise groups, with clients rating themselves at intake and discharge across five wellbeing factors: mobility, self-care, usual activities, pain/discomfort, and anxiety/depression, allowing us to benchmark real improvements. We look forward to rolling this out organisation-wide in 2027.

Improving access to care is a key priority. Through streamlined intake and service delivery, BCH halved the average wait time from referral to first appointment compared with the previous financial year.

Together, these initiatives reflect our ongoing commitment to listening, learning and continuously improving care for our community.

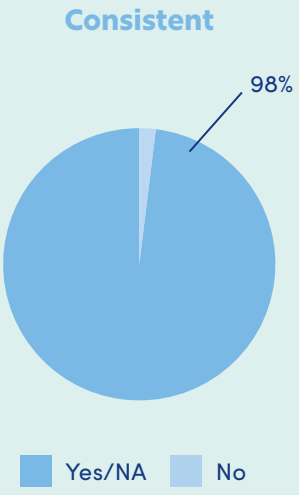
BCH Feedback Fest Surveys conducted in June 2025 & February 2026

Question: I am respected at BCH and the care I receive is personalised to my needs.



BCH Intake & Access Survey Snapshot

"During your registration and first appointment, have we respected any diverse needs you may have?"





Diversity & inclusion matter

BCH has a longstanding commitment to equity, access, and community-led wellbeing. This year, that commitment took tangible shape through the work of our Diversity and Inclusion Action Group (DIAG), set up to drive meaningful, lasting change across the organisation.

One of DIAG's first projects was an access audit of all BCH sites, examining how welcoming and inclusive our reception areas are for every member of our community. This audit directly informed the design and creation of a Welcome Poster, now proudly displayed in reception areas across all sites, a visible signal that everyone who walks through our doors is seen and valued.

Building on this momentum, the DIAG developed the Diversity and Inclusion Framework 2026–2028. This Framework provides a clear and strategic foundation for our diversity and inclusion work, setting up the structure needed to guide our actions, measure our progress, and support meaningful, long-term change across BCH. It sets out DIAG's guiding principles and overarching pillars, which will shape our priorities and actions over the next three years.

A Gender Impact Tool has also been developed to help us assess how our policies, programs and services meet the needs of people of all genders, acting as a practical guide to ensure gender is thoughtfully considered in the work we do now and into the future.

Together, these achievements mark a crucial step forward in embedding diversity and inclusion into the everyday fabric of BCH ensuring our services remain accessible, equitable and responsive to the diverse community we serve.



"Every initiative we've introduced has been informed by our students and families, and what they told us would help them walk, ride, scoot or roll to school." – School Principal

Supporting early intervention

The BCH Healthy Communities team, in partnership with the City of Greater Geelong, and funding from the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industries and Regions set out to increase active travel participation in three schools from the region: St Leonards, Portarlington and Leopold Primary Schools.

BCH led a co-design process with schools and found creative ways to help more students and their families actively travel to and from school.

This process started with a wellbeing audit and conversations with students, staff, and families to find what works, what does not, and where there were opportunities for change.

These conversations helped to identify the most important actions for each school. BCH supported each action by conducting added research, sourcing supplies and materials, and overseeing implementation in close collaboration with schools.

As a result, each school has taken unique actions that they believe will make the biggest difference. These actions include colourful footpath murals to engage students in physical activity, the initiation of 'Active Travel Tuesdays', bike maintenance workshops, bike education activities, new bike sheds and signposted routes to guide safe journeys to school.

Teachers reported that they gained new skills and students grew more confident, through sharing ideas and seeing them come to life. Each school celebrated the end of the project in March 2026 with vibrant Ride 2 School Day events with great participation numbers.

The change this project has made is already visible. Schools are not just supporting active travel; they are living it!

Connecting with community

Community health doesn't happen without community support, and we are continuing to look at ways to fundraise, seek philanthropic support and grow our membership and volunteer base.

As an independent community health service, BCH exists to serve its community and is accountable to it.

Our members and volunteers play an important role in helping shape the future of the organisation. Through involvement, local people can contribute to governance, participate in Annual and Special General Meetings, provide feedback on organisational priorities and help ensure we remain responsive to changing community needs.

We encourage community members who share our vision of a thriving and healthy Bellarine Peninsula to become involved and help shape the next chapter of BCH.

This year also saw the adoption of a revised BCH Constitution, creating a strong foundation for the future of the organisation and reaffirming the important role members play in our governance.

Under the revised Constitution, Auxiliaries are now formally recognised within BCH's governance framework which ensures their invaluable role is acknowledged, supported and sustained into the future.

This change means our Portarlington Auxiliary, which has been supporting BCH for more than 50 years, is even more closely aligned with our organisation.

The dedicated members of the Portarlington Auxiliary fundraise through the 'Op Shop' co-located at the BCH Portarlington site, helping purchase equipment, support programs and upgrade facilities over decades.

Their commitment, generosity and community spirit have played a vital role in supporting BCH and, most importantly, the people of Portarlington and the northern Bellarine.

This year, Portarlington Auxiliary nominated the BCH Community Nursing and Palliative Care Team as the beneficiary of their fundraising, which has already allowed for specific training for staff, the purchase of training equipment and the branding of the nursing vehicles.

Several Auxiliary members are former nurses or have accessed BCH nursing services and they feel connected to the team and incredibly proud to be supporting the work they do.

We hope to find similar sponsorship opportunities in the future to support BCH as a community organisation.



Looking to the future



The groundwork for the BCH 2026 – 2030 Strategic Plan was undertaken during the financial year, and we are now looking forward to bringing it to life. Our focus is on strengthening what works well, fixing what slows us down, and building capability sustainably.

The plan was shaped by the voices of our community, staff, partners and Board, and responds to the challenges of increasing demand, workforce pressure, constrained funding and the need for responsible, sustainable decision-making.

Our vision is for a thriving, healthy Bellarine Peninsula where every person can access the care they need. Our work is guided by our CARE values of Community, Accountability, Respect and Equity. These values shape how we care for clients and families, how we work with each other, and how we partner with others to improve health and wellbeing across the Bellarine.

BCH doesn't just deliver services; we contribute to improving the systems that support local communities.

Community health organisations work in partnership with health, education and community services every day, providing affordable care close to where people live.

Another important community collaboration that continues to grow is Bellarine Wellbeing Connect (BWC). This alliance of community organisations and service providers is a partnership that focuses on bridging the gaps and sectoral divides in health and community settings and integrating social prescribing as a strategic solution.

BCH chairs and hosts the group and delivered a comprehensive presentation on social prescribing on behalf of BWC at the Alliance of Rural and Regional Community Health (ARRCH) conference held in Ballarat.

BCH is a founding member of ARRCH which is made up of 9 registered independent community health services in regional and rural Victoria with one shared goal – improving the health and wellbeing of our communities.

ARRCH along with Community Health First, which is made up of all 21 registered independent community health services across the state, continue to advocate for investment in the community health sector.

With the right investment and support, community health can continue to support those most in need, and ease pressure on the hospital system. Population growth is outstripping the care available and community health funding is shrinking as a share of the overall health spend.



BCH CEO Kathy Russell and other ARRCH leaders at the ARRCH Conference in Ballarat.

Community

- Connection, support and caring for each other
- Building and strengthening partnerships to improve health outcomes

Accountability

- Taking responsibility for outcomes and results
- Following through on our commitments

Respect

- For the people we care for and work with
- Ensuring a supportive and inclusive organisation that respects the values of people's unique differences

Equity

- Tailoring care to individual needs so that everyone can achieve their goals
- Ensuring everyone has the opportunity to participate

Our community partners

Alliance of Rural and Regional Community Health

Barwon Health

Bellarine Secondary College

Bellarine Wellbeing Connect

Blitz Basketball Club

Borough of Queenscliffe

City of Greater Geelong

Community Bank Bellarine

Community Health First

Compassionate Hearts on the Bellarine

Corless Family Trust

Costa Foundation

Deakin University

Department of Education

Department of Health, Disability & Ageing

Department of Health, Victoria

Department of Family Fairness & Housing, Victoria

Department of Jobs, Skills, Industries & Regions

Doctors in Secondary Schools

Farm My School

Geelong Community Foundation

Geelong Regional Libraries

Give Where You Live

headspace National

Oral Health Victoria

Portarlington Football Netball Club

Respect2040

Sirovilla

Stride Mental Health

The Orange Door Bellarine

The Sexual Assault & Family Violence Centre

VicHealth

Western Victoria Primary Health Network


bch
Bellarine
Community
Health

Bellarine Community Health

Bellarine Community Health

Point Lonsdale, Ocean Grove Central, Ocean Grove Kingston, Drysdale, Drysdale Schools Precinct, Portarlington.

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As a not-for-profit organisation, Bellarine Community Health relies on a mix of government funding, fundraising and the generous support from donations and grants. Donations allow us to enhance our current programs and develop new ones to address emerging health needs.

By investing in Bellarine Community Health, you're investing in the health and future of our region.