

Annual Report

2023/24

*Bridging gaps in service provision through shared projects
and outcomes for strategic integration of service delivery.*

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and pay respects to the traditional owners of the lands on which the Alliance operates; the Wiradjuri, Nari Nari, Wemba Wemba, Perepa Perepa, Yorta Yorta, Ngunnawal, Ngarigo, Bangerang and Yitha Yitha Nations. We recognise our communities are made up of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples descended from additional mobs and clans who also call the Murrumbidgee region home.

We pay respect to elders past, present and future and recognise these lands have always been places of traditional healing and medicine, and this plays a role in shaping future health services.

Acknowledgement of Lived Experience

We acknowledge the profound contributions of individuals with lived and living experiences of mental health challenges, substance use, and suicide, as well as those who care for and support them. Each person's journey is unique and adds invaluable insight into how we can collectively improve and reform mental health and suicide prevention systems. We also remember those we have lost too soon, and recognise the lasting impact their absence leaves on their families, carers, and communities. Their stories, strength, and resilience guide us to confront stigma and ensure our efforts are informed by compassion, respect, and lived experience.



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Our Members



Riverina Drug and
Alcohol Centre



Directions
Health Services





Communities and Justice

Chair's Report

Welcome to the Murrumbidgee Mental Health Drug and Alcohol Alliance (the Alliance) 2023/24 Annual Report.

The Alliance is going from strength to strength as we collectively strive to deliver on our vision statement.

The Alliance was formed in 2015 following planning work and consultations which identified the potential value of having an overarching group or governance process for mental health and drug and alcohol providers in the Murrumbidgee region.

The Alliance is a formal arrangement between partners in services for people with mental illness, mental health challenges including suicidality and/or drug and alcohol issues, that reflects a commitment to work together to improve mental health and drug and alcohol outcomes for the Murrumbidgee population.

There are now 21 organisations that are active members of the Alliance, meeting monthly and participating in a number of working groups actioning strategies based on our agreed priorities and plans. The following working groups are progressing Alliance priorities.

Priority populations working group

The priority populations working group have identified First Nations Peoples and people who experience co-occurring mental health issues and/or intellectual disability along with alcohol and other drugs issues as the first priority groups to be addressed. The Alliance continues to develop strategies to support members to deliver more effective and accessible services to these groups of people.

Community information working group

The community information working group seeks to enhance public knowledge of mental health and drug and alcohol issues and of the services available to assist people. Current planning is focused on information days in targeted communities, as well as sharing information amongst members about individual service activities that other agencies can link into.

Stigma working group

The stigma working group has developed information on stigmatising language and alternative, more appropriate language that the member agencies can share within their organisations to be more aware of and reduce use of unintentional stigmatising language. Information on the impacts of stigmatising language are also shared.

Recently the group organised a presentation to Alliance members by Wollongong Living Books, a program where real people, known as 'books', share their life stories and experiences. Each 'Living Book' has a unique story to tell which helps people see the world in new ways and challenges stereotypes. The Alliance members will now consider whether it is feasible to develop a local 'library' so that schools and other interested parties can organise sessions where participants can hear and ask questions of local Living Books.

Alliance lived experience and carer network

Work continues to progress to develop an Alliance Lived Experience and Carer Network, to increase engagement with people with lived and living experience of mental health and drug and alcohol issues and their carers. Funding has been identified and 2024/25 will see activities kick off. It will be a regional network of peers which aims to enhance consumer and carer engagement, facilitate information sharing, foster collaboration and networking, promote peer support and leadership and advocate for change. It is believed this multi-agency network will be the first of its kind in Australia.

Website development working group

To enhance visibility of the Alliance, work progresses to develop an Alliance website to enable communities and individuals to easily find out about the Alliance's purpose and activities.

"As Independent Chair of the Murrumbidgee Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Alliance, I would like to thank all of the Alliance members and their representatives for their ongoing commitment and focus on supporting Murrumbidgee communities and for taking the time from their really busy workloads to participate in Alliance meetings and initiatives. Together we can make an even bigger difference for our communities."



MapMyRecovery working group

MapMyRecovery is a free resource connecting the Murrumbidgee community with services that provide support for mental health and/or drug and alcohol concerns. MapMyRecovery is for people who are experiencing mental health and/or drug and alcohol concerns as well as their friends, family, carers and service providers.

Go to mapmyrecovery.org.au

Common Referral Form review working group

Some years ago, the Alliance developed a Common Referral Form for anyone referring a person to one of the Mental Health and/or Drug and Alcohol Services. The working group is now reviewing and updating this form with a view to relaunching it across the Murrumbidgee region. It will mean that referring agencies only have to access one referral form to refer a person to any of the Alliance members services.

Conclusion and feedback

I hope you enjoy reading this annual report and feedback is welcome. If you would like further information on the Alliance or have any questions, I can be contacted at

robyn.manzie@hotmail.com

Robyn Manzie

Independent Chair
Murrumbidgee Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Alliance



Lived Experience Members

The Alliance membership includes a number of people with a lived and living experience of mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues as well as of caring for people with mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues. The input of these members is critical to the work of the Alliance as they share their experiences and wisdom to help us deliver more effective services.

Beyond this, the Alliance members are committed to engaging with people with lived experience in everything they do.

Rhonda McInnes

My name is Rhonda McInnes I am a consumer representative on the Alliance and have served as an Alliance member since 2015.

I bring a consumer with lived experiences to the table. I feel privileged to be a part of such an important group and grateful to be able to represent a consumers' viewpoint.

I look forward to my continued involvement as I have so much more to share.



Tania Le Petit

I have been a member of the Alliance since 2019 as a mental health consumer representative. I really value being part of such a unique group and hearing how our organisations support our community.

I contribute to the Alliance using my own mental health lived experience of which I have faced many challenges. I always hope that what I offer is helpful to other people impacted by social barriers and consequently their mental health.

I truly believe that if we tackled more of people's social barriers and approached health from a community development perspective there would be far less mental anguish in the world.

Calvary Riverina Drug and Alcohol Centre

The past year for Calvary Drug and Alcohol Centre has been one of growth.

They have undertaken a review of their Women's Wellness Program Model of Care with the support of 360 Edge. The revised Model of Care will be ready to share in September 2024.

The Residential Program has seen a 21% increase in admissions and they have been witness to many amazing recovery journeys. Calvary Drug and Alcohol Centre was lucky enough to receive a grant from NADA to support the renovation of a cottage in Meurant Avenue. This has increased their capacity to be able to support 14 clients in the transitional care program. This has been a welcomed addition to their service in the current rental crisis.

The Medical Model of care in the inpatient withdrawal unit has been reviewed and they have welcomed a new partnership with Hammond Health and Doctor Ingrid Virgona. Dr Virgona will be supporting clients in the withdrawal unit and attending to primary healthcare needs in the centre on a Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday.

Their residential program continues to evolve and they have recently commenced facilitating the Adult Resilience Program. This is the first time this Australian developed program has been utilised in an AOD setting. The team are excited to see how this program is received by the residents and hope to see positive results.



As reported last year, Flourish Australia's Social Citizenship Framework was completed through a comprehensive co-design process involving multiple stakeholders and community representatives.

They decided that a strategic framework was needed, for supporting people with lived experience of mental health challenges on their journey of recovery, to cultivate and claim their social citizenship. Investing in this work is part of their commitment to building diverse, welcoming communities.

Feeling connected, and a sense of belonging, is so important to mental wellbeing, and their strategic framework was created to address issues of stigma and discrimination.

They believe social citizenship to be a vital component of cultivating greater meaning and purpose in people's lives and building inclusive communities.

Kindness is the quality of being friendly, generous and considerate. It's the nature of inclusive communities that celebrate difference and invite all people to participate and contribute, which is when social citizenship is realised.

The framework took shape as they listened deeply to a diverse range of people, through focus groups, social citizenship think-tanks, and forums. They devoted considerable time to robust conversations with participants representative of many different communities, including First Nations peoples of Australia and other countries, the culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTIQ+ people, those who had experienced the justice system, and young people.

The conversation was focused on how Flourish Australia might empower people to claim their social citizenship and right to belong as a contributing member of their community. Their thoughts on what social citizenship means for them and how this might translate into a service relationship, have formed the foundation of the framework.

Vital behaviours were identified including holding social citizenship conversations, exploring limiting beliefs and supporting people to access their chosen communities.

At the framework's core are the guiding principles of listening, partnering and engaging with the people they support, their families and carers, and other health and human services and communities.

Refugees and asylum seekers expressed their desire to be able to work, volunteer, engage in education, join clubs and sporting teams, and experience safety, inclusion and feeling supported to raise their families.

People from the LGBTIQ+ community sought genuine inclusion as an individual in shared experiences and said that belonging to varied communities not only supports different areas of a person's life, it is essential to their sense of identity.

Young people said they long to be listened to, feel respected and have freedom to create safe spaces for connecting and pursuing interests that excite them.

Those who have had involvement with the justice system were looking for 'less pace, more grace', touching on the need to feel safe physically, emotionally and financially, and to have a second or even third chance to be accepted into their community and lead a meaningful life.

Taking into consideration the wide range of deep insights gathered, strategies were developed for Flourish Australia to successfully integrate social citizenship in their policies, words and actions, in ways that are meaningful to the people they support and employ. In doing so, the aim is to bring about the growth in kindness in local communities and culture.

The framework will guide every aspect of the work done and define every interaction, by clearly spelling out accountabilities and vital behaviours for the workforce to use. Implementing it across the organisation and service delivery will break down barriers and build bridges to the community for people with lived experience.

A new performance matrix is in place to measure results against their Results Statement, supported by monthly reflective practice.

Flourish Australia looks forward to reporting on the outcomes of this framework for better supporting people with lived experience to lead their best life, in the communities of their choice, by advocating for their right to social citizenship.



Grand Pacific Health (GPH) is a not-for-profit provider of high quality, locally tailored health services. GPH has operated for almost 30 years and continues to evolve, building on its foundations of local community care and its knowledge of how to deliver services in local communities. GPH are committed to delivering excellence in health care for consumers, carers, and families.

The next step in contributing to improved health and wellbeing in local communities is the provision of the Wagga Wagga and Young Medicare Mental Health Centres (MMHC), which are currently in an interim service delivery stage. MMHCs are designed to fill a gap in the community for people experiencing moderate to high mental health needs and target hard to reach populations. Wellbeing planning, counselling, care navigation, peer support and safety planning are now available free to individuals aged 16 and over as well as to their families and carers. Referrals can be made via the national Head to Health number, directly from third party services and via the MPHN CAN (Central Access and Navigation) service. Wagga MMHC accepts walk-ins, further improving accessibility. The future

for both MMHCs is exciting with new premises in both locations in development and the recruitment of Aboriginal Health workers, a GP and co-occurring needs clinicians amongst other disciplines. Wagga MMHC will be opening extended hours with a seven day per week service. This expansion and improvement shows their commitment to better serving the community's mental health needs with enhanced facilities and a broader range of specialised personnel.

The MMHCs are operated by GPH in partnership with Directions Health, Mission Australia and Riverina Medical and Dental Aboriginal Corporation. These partnerships are crucial to the provision of truly holistic care and ultimately achieving better outcomes for the consumer and their families. In addition to the sharing of clinical expertise, these successful partnerships have resulted in shared recruitment processes, co-location, cultural supervision and training. Overall, these collaborative efforts highlight a commitment to creating a supportive network where expertise, resources, and services are shared.



Wagga and Young Medicare Mental Health Centre team members with CEO Adam



Making jack cakes at cultural awareness training



NAIDOC Week celebrations

Griffith Aboriginal Medical Service



As part of their extensive services, the Griffith Aboriginal Medical Service also hosts the Alcohol & Other Drugs (AOD) program. This service is part of a larger Regional Drug & Alcohol support network.

Along with AOD counterparts in Wagga RivMed, and Albury AWAHS, drug and alcohol caseworkers deliver local and outreach AOD support services across the whole Riverina region, providing drug and alcohol support to Aboriginal communities and individuals wishing to make positive changes to their and their family's lives.

Services provided and offered are:

- Drug and alcohol detoxification admission and discharge support.
- Drug and alcohol counselling.
- Drug and alcohol support groups, both the Minhi Mingaan Women's Group and the Walan-Budhang-Gibir Men's Group.
- Drug and alcohol information and education to individuals, communities and high school students.
- Advocacy and referral to other services and agencies which may assist in the individual's recovery.

The referral process to the AOD program is very easy, simply call the Griffith AMS on 6962 0000 and ask to speak with one of the AOD team. Your inquiry is respectfully treated as strictly confidential and an appointment will be made to meet with one of the AOD caseworkers.

With your participation and assistance, they will conduct an assessment to identify your strengths and weaknesses regarding the surrounding AOD issues, and help you design a progress plan with the various options available to choose from within your uniquely individual set of personal circumstances.

AOD caseworkers are highly trained, qualified and experienced, with a strong local knowledge of the area and the communities which they service, and are extremely aware of the sensitive nature of the issues that challenge and afflict some individuals within the Aboriginal community.

headspace Griffith provides early intervention mental health services for young people, aged between 12 and 25 years, their family and their friends. headspace Griffith services are guided by the headspace Model of Integrity Framework.

headspace Griffith sits within the Murrumbidgee region and is supported through lead agency Centacare SW NSW, which has services in Griffith, Wagga Wagga, Albury and Mulwala. Centacare SW NSW supports the community through parenting, mental health and wellness programs.

Belonging to the Alliance is significant for headspace Griffith, as collaborating alongside affiliated local services develops awareness of mental health trends within shared communities.

headspace Griffith's recent fundraiser was facilitated with the National Push-Up Challenge, which raised over \$8000. The challenge ran from 5–28 June, focusing on reducing mental health stigma, with local businesses forming teams and supporting each other, to complete 3,249 push-ups each. This target represented the number of lives lost to suicide in Australia in 2022.

A current project underway at headspace Griffith is the development of the CARES program, managed collaboratively with Orygen, who are researchers, advocates and educators in youth mental health. CARES is headspace Griffith's complex mental health needs program.

headspace Griffith can be contacted on 02 6962 3277 or enquiries@headspacegriffith.org.au



Griffith headspace staff

Intereach is a not-for-profit organisation focused on enhancing the social and personal wellbeing of children and families, people with disability, mental health, and older people across rural and regional communities. For more than 50 years, Intereach has been delivering services in the Riverina-Murray region of NSW and, more recently, in northern and central Victoria.

In 2024, Intereach has been actively involved in several inter-agency initiatives, including the Alliance, headspace Echuca Consortium, and child and family inter-agencies across Junee, Hay, Deniliquin, and Finley. Their participation has also extended to working closely with FAMS, the peak body for children and family services, and the Deniliquin Aboriginal Liaison Committee. These collaborations have allowed them to strengthen community ties and deliver services across their footprint.

Their team has played a significant role in providing community legal services, Safe Start programs, and domestic violence liaison services. Notably, Intereach presented at the Alliance, where they highlighted how Intereach supports individuals experiencing mental health conditions or addiction through integrated, wraparound services. Additionally, they showcased their efforts to connect vulnerable individuals with essential legal support through the Cooperative Legal Service Delivery (CLSD) program. Their involvement in the Common Referral Form working group furthers their commitment to improving service delivery and coordination across the region.

Looking forward, Intereach remain committed to promoting and expanding their partnerships within the community, ensuring vital services like community transport and other support initiatives continue to reach those in need throughout the Murrumbidgee area.



Intereach provides community transport services in the Deniliquin and Griffith areas for older people, people with disability, and those who are transport disadvantaged.

Karralika Programs has been operating for over 45 years, supporting adults, young people, and families in the ACT and surrounding NSW region, through a range of alcohol and drug (AOD) programs. Karralika provides specialist end to end alcohol and other drug services to support the needs of individuals, families and communities. (karralika.org.au)

In the Riverina, Karralika operates:

- The Child and Youth AOD Program for 10 -19 years olds with substance use issues or are affected by a family members substance use,
- The AOD Day Group Program, for young people aged 12-17, and 18-24 years in Wagga and Griffith; and
- As part of a state-wide consortia group, provide Community and Drug Action Teams (CDAT) for the Riverina (as well as Southern Tablelands and South Coast)

In February, Althea Brunskill was recruited as the programs manager, to oversee the running of Karralika's AOD programs in Wagga Wagga, Griffith and Moruya. Anna McKenry, Clinical Services Director has clinical oversight and supports Althea and the NSW team.

A larger premises has been leased at 69 Johnston St Wagga to provide the Child and Youth AOD program, the Day Group Program and the CDAT team - an open day will be announced. The Griffith premises is being finalised.

Recruitment for the Day Program teams have been completed, with two counsellors and a lived experience mentor at each location. Callum McPhee, Michelle Calloway and Sharon De Valentin make up the Griffith team, and Jesse Warran-Rigby, Sharon De Plater and Paula Honeykats will be working in Wagga Wagga.

The CDAT has been successful in their various ventures; Louise Graham (Riverina) and Chloe Chant (Southern Tablelands/Coast) have coordinated community initiatives with their CDAT volunteers, supporting the prevention and early intervention of substance use in their community.

The Child and Youth Program continues to support young people, with a counsellor, Duval Martinez, and registered nurse, Melissa Noble, working closely with support services, headspace and schools to deliver AOD services to children and young people. This is replicated on the South Coast with both teams working closely together.

Most recently, Karralika was involved with the Homelessness Expo and participated in the Youth Mental Health forum held at Christian College.

They had a very successful presentation to Mount Austin High School, conducting an AOD Information session to students aged 16-18.

Another forum for the Indie School, for years 9-12, was run by CDAT, which included a presentation on vaping by Blurred Minds.

Anna McKenry and Althea Brunskill have both been involved in the Alliance working groups. Althea is involved in the common referral form project group, and Anna is a member of the Priority Populations project group.

LikeMind Wagga Wagga by Stride is funded by the NSW Ministry of Health and partners with various local services to offer a holistic and collaborative approach to supporting people on the journey to good mental health. LikeMind Wagga Wagga has a range of services available to support individuals seeking help to address their mental health concerns including brief psychological interventions, alcohol and other drug counselling, gambling counselling, art therapy, First Nations wellbeing and cultural supports, therapeutic groups and care coordination services.

They are a relatively small service and continue to work as best they can with the resources they have in delivering high quality services to the community despite ever-growing demand and ongoing shortages in the local mental health workforce. They meet challenges with professionalism, creativity and a sense of teamwork and shared purpose.

A highlight in the last year has been their partnership with Three Rivers Department of Rural Health to establish and roll out the Community Mental Health Experience Program

providing student placements for nursing, social work and paramedicine students. This project offered valuable lessons outside of the acute ward in working respectfully and effectively with patients in the community who may be experiencing mental health issues. The project won the Charles Sturt University 2023 Excellence Award. Pre and post placement data shows exceptional feedback from students and an increase in their overall knowledge and confidence in working with people experiencing mental health concerns. This data has recently been collated and analysed and the findings will be formally published shortly.

As a long-standing member of the Alliance, LikeMind prides itself on the shared commitment of collaboration and innovation of services delivery in the Murrumbidgee region, reducing silos and dismantling the barriers faced by consumers in getting the care and support they need. Being a part of the Alliance ensures they stay abreast of the changes in the sector and can support various Alliance projects that drive innovation and improvement for the sector and for consumers.



Charles Sturt University nursing students Emily and Dana, with 'Rosie' accredited therapy dog



Adam - mental health social worker, Cindy - intake and assessment officer/group facilitator, Madison - reception and admin

Marathon Health is a not-for-profit, registered charity with a vision of enabling country communities to thrive through improved health and wellbeing. From their hubs in Albury, Bathurst, Dubbo, Orange, Queanbeyan, and Wagga, they provide services that are person-centred, culturally safe and inclusive. This means the people they work with have choice and control over the decisions that affect them – ensuring their voice is heard and respected. Marathon Health is one of the largest providers of headspace services in Australia (Western NSW) and the largest non-government employer of allied health professionals in regional NSW. Marathon Health is passionate about providing innovative and accessible health services where they're needed, and that help to fill the gaps in country healthcare.

Marathon Health has been an active member of the Alliance for several years as an associate member and over the last 12 or so months has been supporting the governance committee also. Marathon Health is committed to the objectives of the Alliance and welcomes any opportunities to work with Alliance members, to improve mental health and drug and alcohol outcomes for the Murrumbidgee population.

MPHN commissioned Marathon Health to lead the Psychosocial Physical Health and Wellbeing Initiative between June 2022 and June 2024. The purpose of the pilot was to develop an integrated multi-strategy approach to improve physical health care outcomes for people with a severe mental health illness accessing primary care, mental health, and psychosocial support services across the Murrumbidgee region.

Bespoke training was developed to build capacity within the sector regarding the relationship between physical and mental health. This training also incorporated a 'Train the Trainer' model to further increase the reach of the program and ensure the longevity and sustainability of the program for the future.

Marathon Health trained 116 participants from 24 organisations and 100% of organisations sent at least one program participant to the Train the Trainer course, which attracted 48 participants.

Participants covered ten broad vocational roles, with the majority coming from the mental health sector. More than half (58%) were from support or coordination roles – including 40 who worked as recovery/wellness coach or support worker/navigator, while 27 worked as a care coordinator or vocational specialist.

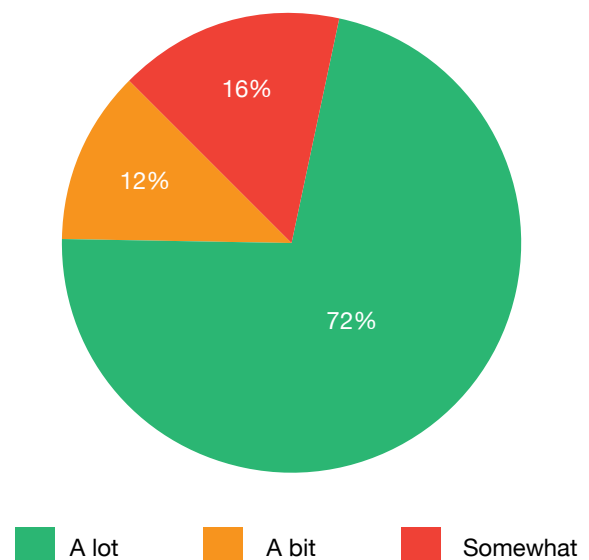
Most pleasing were the results when people were asked if their knowledge and confidence had improved because of the training:

100% said their knowledge and understanding of the connection between physical and mental health had improved.

100% felt more confident in:

- supporting psychosocial program participants
- understanding of how to screen and support with physical health needs.
- putting their learning into practice in the workplace.

Improvement in knowledge and understanding after training



After the training, 100% of participants felt they had at least some confidence to support people across both their mental and physical health needs.

Murrumbidgee Local Health District



Murrumbidgee
Local Health District

The Murrumbidgee Local Health District (MLHD) service provides specialist clinical support for children, adolescents, adults and older persons experiencing severe, complex or long lasting mental ill health and/or drug related ill health. Mental Health Inpatient Services are provided in a purpose-built facility on the campus of Wagga Wagga Base Hospital and include High Dependency Unit, Low Dependency Unit, Recovery Unit and Older Persons Mental Health Unit. Community Mental Health Drug and Alcohol Services are provided from six locations around MLHD and deliver a range of specialised community based services, as well as a wide range of specialised services in partnership with other organisations.

Some of the key projects that MHDA have been implementing during 2023-2024 include:

- MLHD Drug & Alcohol Services are participating in a Centre for Oral Health Strategy (COHS) project aimed at reaching communities at high risk of dental disease with the distribution of fluoride toothpaste, toothbrushes and oral hygiene information. Additionally, D&A Services also recently participated in a one-off COHS initiative to nominate eligible D&A clients to receive vouchers for dental care, which may include major dental work.
- Hep C blood spot testing project: In this project, which is part of a state-wide trial, MLHD Drug & Alcohol workers take finger prick tests to screen for hepatitis C and B for people accessing opioid dependence treatment through MLHD.
- GP OTP Prescriber Project: In February 2024, MLHD Drug & Alcohol Services ran the Opioid treatment accreditation course in Wagga Wagga and 12 local GPs attended this training.
- St Vincent's Drug and Alcohol service: This service continues to support MLHD with virtual addiction medicine specialist consultations around the district. The specialists are supported by local MLHD staff to undertake patient consultations, provide opioid dependence treatment medicines and to provide advice on best management of alcohol and other drug issues.

- The MLHD Eating Disorders team have launched an 'Overcoming Binge Eating Group'. The group is an online therapeutic group addressing gaps in access to services for people experiencing binge eating across the district.

Joint Activities with Alliance Partners:

- The Snowy Valleys Nature Wellness trail, opened by the NSW Chief Psychiatrist in August 2023, is the culmination of collaboration between the Disaster Recovery Team, community groups from bushfire affected communities across the region and the NatureFix team. Grounded in science, the 40+ activities, assist users to connect or reconnect with nature while providing health benefits such as increasing a sense of connectedness, increasing feelings of wellbeing, and reducing blood pressure and heart rate. Funded by MPHNSW Bushfire grants to the communities involved, the trails are embedded in each community and can enhance personal psychological resilience and reduce the ongoing impact of the traumatic events for affected individuals as well as providing a unique environmental tourism attraction for the region.



- The Tumut Community Mental Health Drug and Alcohol co-hosted the Snowy Valley Community Fun Day with Alliance partners including Flourish Australia, Intereach, Wellways, and Headspace. The event was held during Mental Health Month with expressive art therapists, parent and general information sessions on mental health as well as coffee and food being available.

- Safe haven and Suicide Prevention Outreach Team (SPOT) teams:
 - For International Suicide Prevention Day 2023, in conjunction with Wellways and their 'Sock it to Suicide' campaign and the Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network, visitors were invited to assist in crocheting a large sock at the MLHD Safe Havens sites in Wagga Wagga and Griffith;
 - 2024 Wagga Wagga Mardi Gras Festival, the Safe Haven stall created an atmosphere of collaboration and inclusive conversations by making inclusion bracelets together with consumers. These activities led to purposeful conversations about suicide prevention and wellbeing;



- Working collaboratively with the Wellways Wayback Program;
- Attendance at Yandarra – RivMed Family Wellbeing Festival; and
- Student visits from LikeMind and Flourish.
- 3 Stages of Voice Hearing Workshop: A group of mental health clinicians and support workers from MLHD and Wellways attended the workshop to extend their knowledge and skills on how to support individuals who hear, see or perceive things that others cannot.

Alliance Working Groups that MLHD has been involved during 2023-2024 are:

- Leading the Stigma Strategy that aims to address the stigma individuals and carers experience within the community and when engaging with mental health, drug and alcohol services.
- Participating in the review of the Common Referral Form including the format of the form. This working group is also exploring how this form will be rolled out and what training and resources are required to educate all Alliance members on the usefulness and purpose of the form.



Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network



Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network (MPHN), operated by Firsthealth Ltd, commissions primary healthcare services and works across primary care, with general practice, healthcare professionals and local communities to improve health outcomes of people living in the Murrumbidgee region. MPHN achieves this by understanding the region's health needs, coordinating local services and systems, commissioning services to meet population health needs, and supporting capacity building activities with our primary healthcare providers. They have been supporting and delivering primary healthcare programs in the region for 30 years.

Over the last 12 months, MPHN has continued to commission mental health, suicide prevention, post-vention and aftercare programs, as well alcohol and other drugs services. For a comprehensive list of these services, please visit [Mental Health – Funded](#). They supported the promotion of the Opioid Treatment Accreditation Course (OTAC) to general practitioners (GPs) seeking to upskill their knowledge of opioid agonist treatment. This also included OTAC Scholarships to assist GPs to gain accreditation for opioid pharmacotherapy prescribing in the treatment of opioid dependence. These activities aimed to increase the number of prescribers within the Murrumbidgee region.

During July 2023, MPHN engaged Urbis and ACON to develop a comprehensive Health Needs Assessment for the LGBTIQ+ community within the Murrumbidgee region. As part of this activity, LGBTIQ+ community members and primary health care providers participated in consultations to better understand and support the health needs, and barriers and enablers to accessing services and supports for the LGBTIQ+ community in the Murrumbidgee. Key recommendations included; support practices and primary health care providers to enhance safety and inclusion and implement effective methods of data collection, support the development of referral networks and pathways, facilitate access to training on LGBTIQ+ awareness and inclusion for health care staff and support connectedness for the LGBTIQ+ community.

MPHN also continued to promote their new mental health campaign Connect Your Way, with its purpose being to encourage people living across the Murrumbidgee to connect to services and resources, and to reduce stigma around seeking support. Juntos Marketing was engaged to support the development of this campaign as they had created the first campaign 'Life doesn't always go according to plan, reach out' which was an award-winning campaign aimed at reducing stigma and encouraging help seeking behaviour, and an Alliance activity. Find out more about the [Connect, Your Way](#) campaign.



Connect, Your Way campaign

MPHN's [Mental Health Diary](#) was refreshed and delivered to general practices, pharmacies, and farming support and supply businesses across our region at the beginning of 2024.



In March 2024, MPHN and MLHD updated the [Murrumbidgee Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Alcohol and Other Drugs Regional Plan \(2021-2024\)](#). This update saw the inclusion of the NSW bilateral funded activities; Medicare Mental Health Centres, Universal Aftercare, headspace enhancement, as well as providing an update of key achievements to date and key priorities for the duration of the plan. The Alliance will be involved with consultations in the last quarter of 2024, to support the development of the new Murrumbidgee Regional Plan for 2025 and beyond.

As part of MPHN's involvement with the Alliance, both Anita McRae and Maja Asmus have been actively involved with the Priority Populations and Community Information Strategies working groups, as well as providing a representative for the Common Referral Form working group. These working groups are an important mechanism for progressing the collaborative work of the Alliance, and for identifying opportunities to improve social and emotional wellbeing for community members across the Murrumbidgee.

MPHN's Suicide Prevention Team continues supporting the development of a Suicide Prevention Lived Experience Advisor Network (LEAN), which includes 18 lived experienced advisors with representation across the MPHN footprint. To support advisors' capacity and capability in their advisory roles, they have been supported to attend Roses in the Ocean 'Our Voice In Action Training'.

The One Door Mental Health Family and Carer Mental Health Program (FCMHP) in Murrumbidgee offers inclusive and innovative support for carers of people experiencing mental health challenges across the region.

Our team of dedicated Carer Advocates is committed to fostering mental health and wellbeing through innovative initiatives and community engagement. Our services are built on a foundation of empathy, inclusivity, collaboration. Our team understands that providing support and care for a person experiencing mental health distress may involve some significant challenges. It may impact a carers health, wellbeing, relationships and other meaningful aspects of their life.

We provide a range of services designed to offer emotional and practical support while helping carers navigate the complexities of the mental health system while also nurturing their own sense of recovery. We offer:

- Face-to-face support groups in Wagga, Griffith, Leeton, Deniliquin, Corowa and Urana
- Emotional and practical support
- Information on coping strategies
- Assistance in navigating the mental health system and NDIS
- Finding additional supports in the community
- Building a peer support network
- Education on how to support someone experiencing mental health challenges
- Advocacy support



In February, Carer Advocates Daniela Thoner (Griffith) and Michelle Conroy (Albury) joined Independent Member for Murray Helen Dalton, Minister for Mental Health Rose Jackson, and industry stakeholders at the Murrumbidgee Region Mental Health Forum. Key topics discussed included the need for increased investment in suicide prevention, mental health, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation in the Murray electorate.

During the event, Daniela raised concerns about reduced investment in mental health services, high suicide rates, and untreated mental health conditions in the region. She stressed the crucial role of emergency services in crisis intervention and emphasised the need for a dedicated Mental Health Ward at Griffith Base Hospital to support individuals and carers effectively.

One Door Mental Health is proud to be a member of the Murrumbidgee Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Alliance, working collaboratively to build pathways to resilience and wellbeing in the community.



Pathways Murrumbidgee



Work It Out Program

Pathways Murrumbidgee has recently begun collaboration with Riverina Medical and Centre Aboriginal Corporation (RivMed) to complete weekly SMART Recovery meetings. Pathways Murrumbidgee clients are invited to RivMed's 'Get Active' program the mornings prior to SMART to encourage familiarity and comfortability among attendees. Pathways and RivMed are set to complete Yarn SMART facilitator training in November.

Two Aboriginal members from Pathways Murrumbidgee attend the monthly Aboriginal Interagency Meeting (Wagga), as well as the MLHD Aboriginal Multiagency Meeting (Wagga).

Pre/Post Program

Pathways has prioritised communication and understanding of pre-rehabilitation and post-rehabilitation of their local Detox and Rehabilitation Centre. Pathways will collaborate with Calvary Riverina Drug and Alcohol Centre, aiming to assist with a smooth transition in/out, collaborating in exit-planning, case conferencing and warm handovers of clients. Pathways makes efforts to attend the centre in-person once a referral is received.

Pathways works collaboratively with Calvary Riverina Drug and Alcohol to co-facilitate SMART Recovery Meetings on Tuesday nights (open to community.)

Post Custodial Program

Although specific funding was not provided to Pathways via PCS for the Juvenile Justice Centre, Pathways completes intermittent outreach to JJC to service client's needs.

Pathways is currently completing Telehealth (phone appointments via AVL department) for referred clients of PCS. Pathways have established and initiated contact and facilitated calls with Mannus Correctional Centre, South Coast Correctional Centre and Goulburn Correctional Centre. Pathways are in the process of arranging in-person visits and submitting applications for 'approved visitors' for Junee Correctional Facility (expediting the visiting process and negating need for providing identification information every visit at the gaol).

Methamphetamine (ICE) Program

Their ongoing primary program and referral pathways that is widely known to other service providers, notably Community Mental Health Drug and Alcohol and Community Corrections. Pathways will support family members as part of the ICE Program. Often times, two separate case managers will work with both the substance user and the family member on collaborative goals and outcomes.

Priority Populations

Pathways Murrumbidgee has identified several outreach locations for priority populations funding and has begun face-to-face contact. Pathways provide services out of Intereach (Hay), Hay Aboriginal Medical Service (HAMS), "The Gym" (Harden), Intereach (Lake Cargelligo), GP Clinic (Deniliquin).

ADAPT

Pathways Murrumbidgee facilitate the ADAPT program weekly, open to community for involvement. Clients are encouraged and given the opportunity to complete 1:1 case management and counselling in conjunction with, or post ADAPT attendance.

Pathways has, twice, facilitated the ADAPT Program at the Edel Quinn Specialist Homeless Service for clients residing at the centre.

AOD Morning Teas

Pathways Murrumbidgee facilitate bi-monthly morning teas with location specific AOD services in attendance. All AOD services are encouraged to share knowledge and updates on their service. Other services that work alongside or in conjunction with AOD specific clients and services, such as Legal Aid, Medicare Mental Health Centre and Wellways are invited to present and provide an update on how their service may positively impact the needs of our clients.

Education

Pathways Murrumbidgee is regularly invited to other services to provide up-to-date information on alcohol and other drug trends, relevant AOD education including harm minimisation, risk management, AOD safe language and outlining general service capabilities and referral capacity.

Pathways has most recently completed in-services regarding the above information to Mission Australia (Family Preservation Team), Wellways, Community Corrections and Department of Communities and Justice.

Pathways attended Lockhart at the request of the local football club, to provide education and information on cocaine use as it was recognised that there had been an increase in use amongst the team. Pathways provided AOD support over the last two years to the Narrandera Lizards (Football Club) with grant funding.

Pathways have active members in and collaborate with the local Community Drug Action Team (CDAT), assisting in facilitating a 'Drug Education Forum' at Indie School, providing a 'Harm Reduction' booth at both the local Ag Races (Horse racing event), and Mardi Gras.

Community

Pathways was recently involved in the local 'Men's Leadership Forum' event, hosted by Wagga Women's Health Centre, discussing AOD relevance in family domestic violence.

Pathways complete weekly outreach to the local Tolland Hub with goals of facilitating warm referrals in the community and having a presence in an area of increased need and identified location of concern.



Cultural Considerations on Country training

St Vincent de Paul Society's Alcohol and other Drugs Continuing and Coordinated Care Program (AOD CCCP) is a free and confidential service for people 18 years and over, who are struggling to address their drug and alcohol concerns. The program is a strength based and recovery-oriented approach to treatment and is tailored to the needs of the individual and may include; utilisation of skills concepts from cognitive behaviour therapy and dialectical behaviour therapy, assistance with developing customised safety/care plan, 1:1 support with harm minimisation or towards abstinence, referral/support access to formal AOD treatment, and strengthen connections with other health or community services (e.g., probation and parole, child protection, domestic violence, specialist homelessness services).

AOD CCCP continues to outreach outside of Wagga Wagga (not limited to, please check with provider) including Young, Temora, West Wyalong, Harden, Cootamundra, Coolamon, Tumut/Snowy Mountain area, Griffith/Leeton, Lockhart, The Rock, Junee and Gundagai. The program also provides support in Albury NSW.

AOD CCCP participated in NAIDOC in July at Tolland Hub, including the Triple H Homelessness Expo on 8 August 2024 held at the Wagga Wagga Beach Precinct, together with other local services in the community in bringing awareness of the reality of individuals experiencing homelessness with other needs (e.g. mental health and AOD issues, and financial difficulties). The program maintains partnerships with other AOD services locally (and outside) in bridging the gap in resolving client substance challenges, including once a month outreach to Tolland Hub and Micah Hub St Vincent de Paul. AOD CCCP continues to provide service visits with NGO locally in providing support and information for families and individuals.

AOD CCCP is committed in participation with current membership with the Alliance and involvement with the current Stigma project in shining a light on the community, towards erasing stigma around alcohol and other drug use, mental health, and disability.



Sunflower House



This past year has been a period of remarkable growth and achievements for Sunflower House. A testament to their support workers and management team.

University Placements

Sunflower House expanded their partnerships, now including a five-year collaboration with Three Rivers Department of Rural Health alongside UNSW. Medical students from as far as Sydney visit to observe their services, highlighting the team's dedication and impactful programs for people living with psychosocial mental health challenges.



NDIS Registration

Sunflower House is now a registered NDIS provider, offering provision of Support Service and Coordination for Level 1 and 2 for all disabilities.

Breakfast for the Homeless and Vulnerable

In these difficult times Sunflower House now serve free egg and bacon rolls every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 8:30 to 9:00am.

Teys Charity Golf Day

Teys organised a successful Charity Golf Day, raising over \$50,000 for Sunflower House. Staff served BBQ breakfasts and lunches. This funding will support programs and enhance the quality of life for participants. Sunflower House sincerely thanks Teys for their support.



Refreshing upgrade for House and Backyard

Thanks to a generous grant from Riverina Water, the backyard and garden at Sunflower House have been upgraded, creating a vibrant space for participants to socialise, relax and enjoy activities. They've also improved the house with new flooring and contemporary furniture for a safer, more accessible environment. It looks fantastic and participants love it. Visitors are always welcome!

Wellways delivers the following services across the Murrumbidgee, working from a hub and spoke model with key offices in Wagga Wagga, Young, Griffith, Deniliquin, Temora and Albury.

- Community Living Support Services (CLS)
- Housing and Support Initiative (HASI)
- NPS: Well Connected & Service Navigator
- Supporting Recovery
- The Way Back Service
- After Suicide Support
- Standby
- Community Response Package (Urhere)

These mental health programs provide support for people who have mental health concerns, to develop coping strategies to recover in their community. People are supported to live independently, manage physical and emotional health, and get involved in the community.

Staff have a strong focus on becoming active members of the community. Wellways works closely to establish working relationships with the Alliance, MLHD Inpatient Facility, Community Mental Health teams, MPHN and other stakeholders.

They continue to provide opportunities for community members to obtain QPR and ASIST training and engage with the SafeHaven and SPOT teams.

Wellways Murrumbidgee have been involved in the Alliance Community Information Strategies Working group, to discuss and look at options for a collaborative website, to ensure that information from all stakeholders is shared across the community.



Wellways Group



Wellways Easter celebrations



Jay from Wellways



West Wyalong March Against Domestic Violence

