

## The importance of vaccinations

**Vaccination continues to play a crucial role, not only for individual health but also for community health and safety, helping to manage and reduce the overall impact of new virus strains.**

Vaccines protect against diseases such as influenza, measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis, pneumonia, and of course, COVID. Each of these diseases can have severe complications, particularly in vulnerable populations.

Vaccination reduces the rates of severe illness, hospitalization, and death caused by virulent diseases, especially among the elderly and those with underlying health conditions.

### New variants emerging

The scientific and medical community report that new virus variants are emerging, some of which could partially evade immunity from previous infections or vaccinations. Vaccines can be

updated and adapted to provide better protection against these variants.

An overall culture of vaccination readiness can help protect against these potential threats. Maintaining high vaccination rates helps control viruses, preventing future outbreaks or surges, and reducing the burden on healthcare systems.

### Herd immunity

Higher vaccination rates contribute to herd immunity, reducing the overall spread of viruses in the community. This is vital for protecting those who cannot be vaccinated (such as individuals with certain medical conditions or allergies).

Children especially require a series of vaccinations to protect against diseases that can cause long-term health problems. Following the recommended vaccination schedule is important for their health as they grow.

When vaccination rates decline, there is a higher risk of renewed outbreaks of diseases like measles and whooping cough, which

have been less common due to widespread vaccination.

### Seasonal illnesses

Vaccines like the annual flu shot help reduce the incidence of seasonal illnesses that can lead to more severe health issues. Just like the flu, COVID requires periodic boosters to maintain immunity levels in the population.

Always consult with your doctor regarding which vaccines are appropriate based on your age, health status, and travel plans.

## IN THIS ISSUE

- Vaccinate before it's too late
- Managing chronic disease
- Improving mental health

## The claim

COVID-19 vaccinations probably caused increased deaths in the population and there's been a government cover up!

## The truth

Extensive research and monitoring has not found any evidence that COVID-19 vaccinations caused an increase in specific types of deaths.

# COVID Vaccine Fact Check

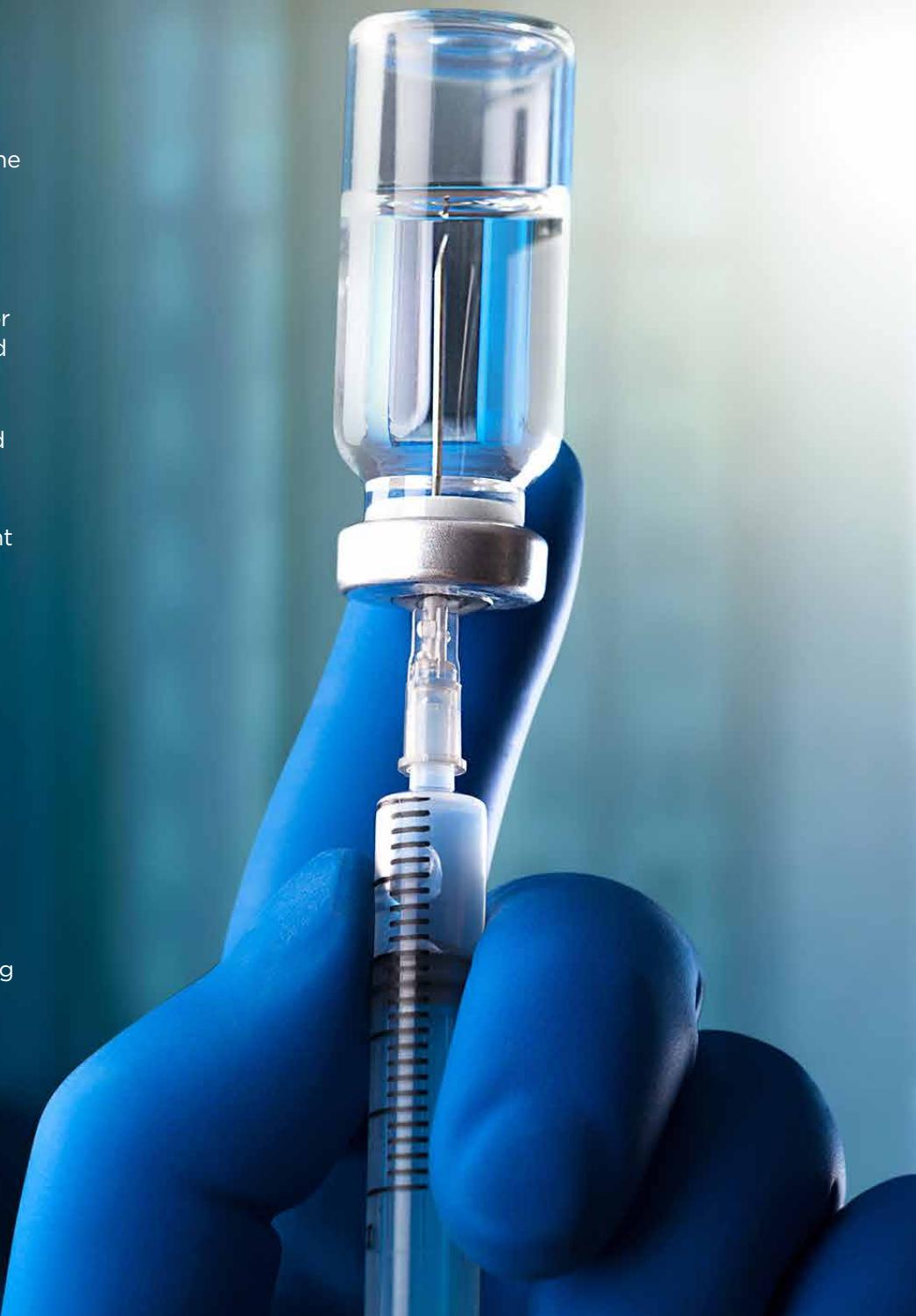
Vaccines are among a series of factors scientists have investigated as potential causes of excess deaths since the pandemic, as well as the impacts of delayed medical treatment due to lockdowns, and the long-lasting damage done to many people by COVID itself.

Research and monitoring by health organizations, including the World Health Organization, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and various independent studies, have not found credible evidence that COVID-19 vaccinations have caused an increase in specific types of deaths in the general population.

In Australia, the Federal Department of Health & Aged Care and the Australian Bureau of Statistics, as well as independent bodies like the Actuaries Institute, also maintain there is “no credible evidence” supporting such a link.

There have been reports of rare side effects associated with some COVID-19 vaccines, such as myocarditis and thrombosis, but these events are exceedingly rare compared to the millions of doses administered. Importantly, the benefits of vaccination in preventing illness, hospitalization, and death outweigh the risks of potential side effects in the majority of the population.

If you have specific concerns or queries about vaccine safety, discussing them with your doctor is a sensible approach.





# Key health challenges in rural communities

## Poorer Health Outcomes

Rural Australians face higher rates of chronic diseases, preventable hospitalizations, and premature mortality compared to urban populations.

## Limited Healthcare Access

Geographic distance leads to fewer healthcare facilities, longer wait times for GPs, and reduced access to specialists.

## Workforce Shortages

There is an inadequate supply of healthcare professionals, including GPs, nurses, and allied health workers in rural areas.

## Socioeconomic Disadvantage

Lower income levels and employment challenges contribute to poorer health outcomes and higher disease burdens.

## Risky Behaviours and Occupational Hazards

Higher rates of smoking, alcohol consumption, and injuries from strenuous activities such as farming exacerbates health issues.

Addressing these challenges requires targeted policies focusing on equitable access to healthcare services, workforce retention, and infrastructure development.

# A guide to local health services

## Neerim Health

Hospital Services

Please contact Reception to put you through to the relevant person (03) 5628 1226

[info@neerimhealth.org.au](mailto:info@neerimhealth.org.au)

General Business -

Alexandra Blackwood,  
HR Manager (03) 9117 7328

[ablackwood@neerimhealth.org.au](mailto:ablackwood@neerimhealth.org.au)

## GP Clinics

Neerim South Medical Centre  
- 85 Main Road 03 5628 1302  
[www.nsmc.net.au](http://www.nsmc.net.au)

Atticus Health Jindivick Clinic  
- 1070 Jacksons Track  
03 5628 5445  
[www.atticushealth.com.au](http://www.atticushealth.com.au)

## Ambulance

Phone Triple Zero (000) to request an ambulance in a medical emergency

## Dieticians

WGHG [www.wghg.com.au/our-services/achs/dietetics/](http://www.wghg.com.au/our-services/achs/dietetics/)

## Paediatrics

West Gippsland Paediatric Group  
5623 0810

## Physiotherapy

Gippsland Physiotherapy Group  
[www.gippslandphysiotherapy.com.au/](http://www.gippslandphysiotherapy.com.au/)

WGHG [www.wghg.com.au/our-services/achs/physiotherapy/](http://www.wghg.com.au/our-services/achs/physiotherapy/)

## Speech Pathology

WGHG [www.wghg.com.au/our-services/achs/speech-pathology/](http://www.wghg.com.au/our-services/achs/speech-pathology/)



# Managing Chronic Disease

**Chronic conditions are becoming increasingly common and are a priority for action in the health sector, especially in rural areas such as West Gippsland where statistics show a higher incidence than in metropolitan Melbourne.**

Chronic diseases are long lasting conditions with persistent effects. Their social and economic consequences not only impact peoples' quality of life, but also impact their community.

By following the general guidelines for each disease, individuals can more effectively manage their condition and improve their quality of life.

**Managing chronic disease requires a multifaceted approach tailored to the specific condition, but there are 5 Key Steps to take first if you are diagnosed with a chronic condition:**

- 1** Learn about your specific condition and available treatments.
- 2** Develop self-management skills, including tracking symptoms and treatments.
- 3** Build a support network of family, friends, and healthcare professionals.
- 4** Attend to mental health needs, as chronic disease management can be stressful.
- 5** Incorporate healthy lifestyle changes, such as balanced nutrition, regular exercise, and sufficient sleep.

**Always consult with your doctor for personalized advice and treatment plans.**

## Diabetes

- Monitor Blood Sugar Levels: Regularly check blood glucose levels as recommended.
- Diet Management: Follow a balanced diet rich in whole grains, lean proteins, healthy fats, and vegetables while monitoring carbohydrate intake.
- Physical Activity: Engage in regular physical activity (150 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise per week is a common recommendation).
- Medications: Take prescribed medications (insulin or oral agents) only as directed.
- Education: Learn about managing diabetes and recognizing symptoms of hypo- or hyperglycemia.
- Regular Check-ups: Schedule regular check-ups with healthcare providers for blood tests and diabetes management review.

## Hypertension (High Blood Pressure)

- Monitor Blood Pressure: Regularly check blood pressure at home and during healthcare visits.
- Diet: Adopt a heart-healthy diet that is low in sodium and rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy.
- Exercise: Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise weekly.
- Medications: Take antihypertensive medications only as prescribed.
- Weight Management: Maintain a healthy weight to help lower blood pressure.
- Limit Alcohol: Consume alcohol in moderation and avoid tobacco.

## Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

- Medications: Use bronchodilators and steroids as prescribed.
- Quit Smoking: If applicable, quit smoking and avoid exposure to secondhand smoke.
- Pulmonary Rehabilitation: Participate in a pulmonary rehabilitation program that includes exercise training and education.
- Infection Prevention: Get annual flu and pneumococcal vaccines to prevent respiratory infections.
- Breathing Techniques: Learn and practice breathing techniques to improve lung function.
- Monitor Symptoms: Recognize signs of exacerbation and know when to seek medical help.

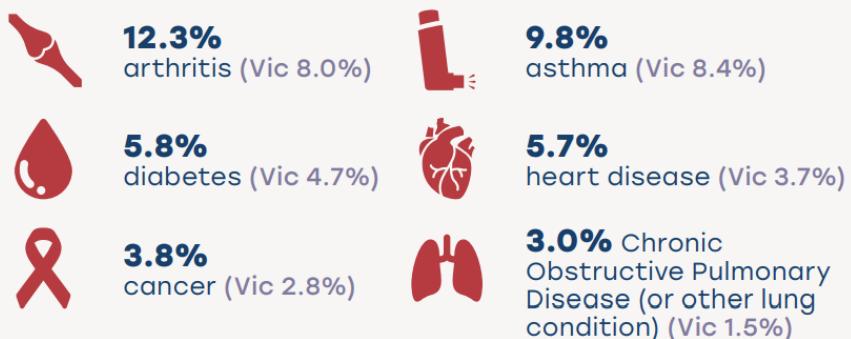
## Heart Disease

- Regular Check-ups: Have routine appointments to monitor heart health.
- Healthy Diet: Follow a heart-healthy diet low in saturated fat, trans fats, sodium, and cholesterol.
- Regular Exercise: Engage in regular physical activity as recommended by a healthcare provider.
- Medication Compliance: Take prescribed medications (e.g., statins, beta-blockers) and monitor blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- Weight Management: Aim to maintain a healthy weight.
- Stress Management: Practice techniques such as yoga, meditation, or mindfulness to manage stress.

## Chronic Kidney Disease

- Diet Management: Adhere to a kidney-friendly diet, which may involve limiting protein, phosphorus, and potassium intake.
- Control Blood Pressure and Diabetes: Manage blood pressure and blood sugar levels effectively.

## Prevalence estimates of common chronic diseases in Gippsland are higher than the Victorian average



**7.8% of adults in Gippsland are registered with the National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) with type 2 diabetes (Vic 6.4%)**

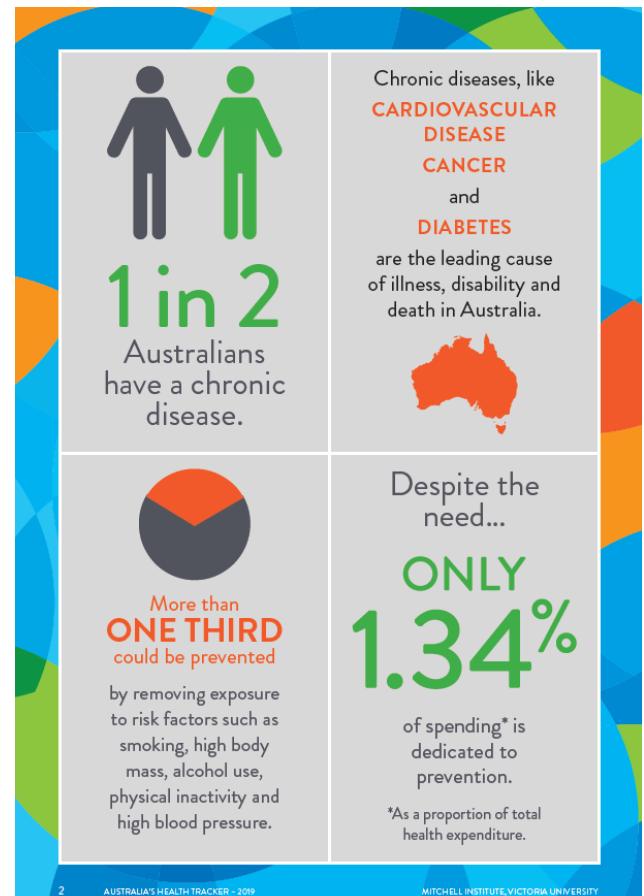
- Regular Monitoring: Schedule regular check-ups to monitor kidney function and adjust treatment as needed.
- Hydration: Stay adequately hydrated, but consult with a healthcare provider about the appropriate fluid intake.
- Medications: Take any prescribed medications to manage symptoms and complications.
- Avoid Nephrotoxic Substances: Avoid medications and substances harmful to kidney function.

- Education: Learn about asthma management and how to use inhalers properly.
- Regular Check-ups: Have regular follow-ups with healthcare providers to adjust treatment as necessary.

In 2026-27, Neerim Health plans to offer a range of services through our new Community Health Hub to better support chronic disease management in our community.

## Asthma

- Use of Medications: Use controller medications (e.g., inhaled corticosteroids) daily and rescue inhalers as needed.
- Monitoring: Keep track of asthma symptoms and peak flow readings.
- Avoid Triggers: Identify and avoid asthma triggers (e.g., allergens, pollution, smoke).
- Emergency Plan: Develop an action plan for asthma attacks, knowing when to seek emergency care.





# Reviving unused medical supplies

**Pending construction of the new Neerim Community Health Hub and following suspension of aged care and overnight hospital services, we had excess apparatus and expired stock that we didn't want to scrap or waste.**

Our community in Neerim District has always been supportive of us and we believe it's respectful to continue that tradition where we can help others and utilise

unwanted or redundant assets.

In response to a call out via Day Hospitals Australia, we donated some expired stock to a disability services organisation, CSNU PNG, working to improve health and accessibility for vulnerable communities in Papua New Guinea, particularly eye and ear health.

Some of the expired stock also went to the Orison Medical Health Centre in South Sudan. The newly built Health Centre will be providing community maternity services and healthcare in an area of need.

Two of the founders of Orison Medical Centre project, South



Sudanese born Medina and George, are now Australian citizens living in West Gippsland with their children. Medina (above with NH DCS Lauren Mucic) is a former RN at Neerim Health.



Access to mental health care remains a significant challenge in Gippsland. Limited resources, fewer health care providers and geographic isolation contribute to a substantial mental health care gap in rural communities such as the Neerim District.

# Improving community mental health

However, Neerim Health is aware that Telehealth technology offers innovative solutions to bridge this gap and bring essential mental health services to those who need them most.

## Mental Health Challenges

Mental health care in our region faces a unique set of challenges that contribute to disparities in access and quality of care, including inaccessibility, shortage of mental health professionals, inadequate funding and resources, and low socio-economic conditions.

Addressing these issues is crucial to ensure our community has access to mental health care services when needed. In our close-knit community, some individuals are discouraged from seeking help due to fear of judgment or privacy concerns, leading to untreated mental health conditions.

Telehealth has emerged as a transformative tool in addressing these challenges and Neerim Health plans to incorporate the technology in its facility rebuild.

## What Is Telehealth?

Telehealth refers to delivering health care services and information through digital communication technologies, such as video calls and live

internet links to allow patients to connect with healthcare providers remotely.

Telehealth facilitates the provision of medical services in a more convenient and flexible manner, enabling access to consultations, diagnoses and follow-up care without needing in-person visits. It encompasses a range of services beyond traditional consultations, including remote monitoring, health education and management of chronic conditions.

Neerim Health understands the potential to enhance patient care, reduce costs, and address disparities in health care access through the use of Telehealth and it one of the priorities in our redevelopment to create a community health hub in Neerim South.

The effectiveness of Telehealth is contingent on reliable internet access and technological capability. Neerim Health, utilising a government grant for NBN, improved broadband connectivity in 2024 and is now using StarLink to further underpin reliability of services.

For individuals managing ongoing mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety and post traumatic stress disorder, Telehealth offers a way to maintain regular contact with their providers.



## Let's talk about MENTAL HEALTH



Almost half of Australians will experience a mental illness in their lifetime [1]



Mental illness is very common. One in five (20%) Australians aged 16-85 experience a mental illness in any year



Prevalence of mental illness decreases with age, with greatest prevalence among 18-24 year olds

### Language around mental health

Mental health is about your wellbeing rather than about an illness. It affects how we:



Think



Feel



Act

### Do say

A person is 'living with' or 'has a diagnosis of' mental illness

### 5 TIPS TO LOOK AFTER YOUR WELLBEING



Focus on your physical health (sleep, exercise, food).



Nurture relationships and connect with others.



Learn to manage stress.



Take time out for things you enjoy. Balance in life is important.



Reach out for help when you need it.

### Need more info?

Have a look at these pages

Headspace  
Beyond Blue  
Embrace Mental Health Foundation House  
Health Translations  
Lifeline (13 11 14)

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2009). National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results, 4326.0, 2007. ABS: Canberra

phn  
NORTH WESTERN MELBOURNE  
An Australian Government Initiative

gcl  
cmy  
Centre for Multicultural Youth

# New research could halt rheumatoid arthritis

**The Australian Government is funding a promising treatment that could effectively put rheumatoid arthritis into remission and eliminate the need for lifelong immunotherapy.**

Rheumatoid arthritis is an incurable and chronic condition affecting 450,000 Australians that causes pain, disability and early death.

The Reset Rheumatoid Arthritis project at the University of Queensland unites experts in

immunotherapy, clinical trials, clinical practice and consumers to progress groundbreaking research into resetting the immune system in patients with rheumatoid arthritis.

Early-phase trials in 2024 were promising and Reset Rheumatoid Arthritis will now develop a second-generation product for testing in future clinical trials.

Lead researcher, Professor Ranjeny Thomas says: "We can now accelerate work to ready us for clinical trials of ASITI-RA, an antigen-specific immunotherapy we developed to reprogram the immune system to sustain long-term remission in rheumatoid arthritis.

"Within two years, we expect to be able to start phase one clinical trials of the immunotherapy, which aims to reduce the need for lifelong immunosuppression. It would transform patients' lives and reduce the economic burden associated with rheumatoid arthritis."

## The new Gippsland Health Network

**An independent advisory committee, appointed by the Victorian Government in 2023, found that there was a need to deliver better, more connected healthcare.**

The Committee recommended more collaboration and connection between services by creating Local Health Service Networks to group health services within a geographical region and better utilise resources.

In early 2025, the State Government announced that 12 Networks would come into effect from July, including the Gippsland LHSN which comprises Bairnsdale Regional Health, Central Gippsland Health, Latrobe Regional Health,

Omeo District Health, Orbost Regional Health, South Gippsland Hospital, West Gippsland Healthcare, Yarram & District Health.

Private and community health services, such as Neerim Health, have also been invited by the Department of Health to work more closely with the public network to provide greater access to services, closer to home.

The goal is for the networks to deliver stronger referral pathways that enable specialties to share expertise across the region, to support better access to high complexity care and expertise.

Neerim Health will continue negotiations with the public health network throughout 2025-26 to determine opportunities for greater collaboration which will deliver additional services through our facility in Neerim South.

### We need your support

To show governments that the community in West Gippsland believes access to local health care is important, I strongly urge you to throw your support behind Neerim Health.

Annual membership of our hospital association is only \$25 for an individual or \$40 for a family and having as many names as we can get on our association register sends government a clear message - local healthcare matters to our community.

That demonstration of local support for Neerim Health adds weight to our submissions for new resources to expand services to meet community expectations.

We also thank the many families in our district who have made bequests and significant donations to Neerim District Soldiers' Memorial Hospital and Tarago Views Aged Care over many years.

**Neerim Health CEO  
Andrea Linden**

The membership application is available at [neerimhealth.org.au/about/membership](http://neerimhealth.org.au/about/membership)