



2020

Annual Report

NEERIM HEALTH



Neerim District Health Service offers a range of hospital, surgical, aged and community health services for local residents and the greater Gippsland region.

Neerim Health also provides emergency stabilisation, short-term restorative care and meals-on-wheels services for the Neerim community. Committed to contributing value to the health system in Gippsland, Neerim Health delivers high quality care in partnership with other health services in the region.



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The year in review

Message from the Chair

The last financial year began full of hope and effort to drive further improvement and expansion of Neerim Health ... and then COVID-19 struck!

COVID-19 has been the dominant issue for every Australian in 2020 and it has imposed critical challenges in our healthcare system. Despite being a rural organisation, Neerim Health has not been isolated from this.

Apart from the constraints necessary to protect those in our care, including patients, residents and staff, our primary source of revenue (the operating theatre and day surgery) was closed at government direction and huge stresses were placed on our team to continue to work in a very restricted framework.

We appreciate the financial assistance from the Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services in response to the revenue decline from COVID-19 restrictions.

At all times, thoughtful resource stewardship must be made a priority for a relatively small enterprise such as ours, but even more so in a crisis.

It is a tribute to CEO Kate Graham and all staff that their professional and personal commitment to the care of patients and residents has been their priority.

The Australian health system has not yet been truly tested by the pandemic but the prudent public health response has saved lives, protected healthcare capacity and continues to provide care to the most vulnerable Australians.

Preventative care is much more effective than treatment, both in ordinary times and in a pandemic and it was pleasing for the Board that Neerim Health played an early lead role in informing our community of the risks and preventative measures.

COVID-19 has reminded us of the vulnerabilities of our ageing populations, not just from the biological impacts of the virus, but also from the risks of social isolation, socioeconomic vulnerability and concurrent chronic diseases.

As the Board of a rural health service, we are naturally attentive to what might be the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on reforming our health system for the long term, and the role that Neerim Health can play.

A remarkable characteristic of the COVID-19 response has been the pace of reform, with major changes such as expansion of telehealth and unprecedented levels of cooperation between private and public hospitals.

We are hopeful of longer term structural reforms in rural healthcare delivery that create new opportunities for Neerim Health by building on our core capabilities and putting greater emphasis on providing local access to the services we can provide, underpinned by public funding.

Part of our underlying strategy to be best positioned for the future is ensuring we have the right skills on our Board and at management level to ensure we can achieve growth and best utilise our capacity while delivering the highest standard of healthcare.

Revitalising Board membership is essential for keeping an organisation energised and evolving, but it always impacts on morale when long-standing members who have made significant contributions step down.

Four of our directors retired in the past year - Catherine Gale (former Deputy Chair), Mark Dunsmuir (former Treasurer), Professor Graeme Jackson and long term NDHS supporter and fund raiser Jenny Muir.

We thank all for their generous commitment of time, effort and expertise, as well as acknowledging the significant influence Mark has had on the organisation's financial management and reporting systems upgrade over the past three years.

Our new Deputy Chair is Margaret Darton and our new Treasurer is Phillip Ransom. We also welcome lawyer Kim McFarlane and Dr Simon Fraser to the Board.

As 2021 gets closer, it is an opportune time to pause and reflect on the many lessons that must be taken out of this crisis and determine the direction of Neerim Health in the year ahead.

We look forward to the continuing support of all our stakeholders.



Sean Dignum, Board Chair

Message from the CEO

This year can be considered in two quite distinct halves - the first six months of the reporting period, and the remainder of the year operating under COVID-19 conditions.

Our strategic planning and priorities on infection prevention and control, contemporary policies and procedures, staff development and a sustained focus on quality standards and accreditation has enabled Neerim Health to maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of our patients, residents and staff in the lead up to, and through the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 preparedness

- Our pandemic plan was reviewed and revised to incorporate our COVID-19 contingencies as well as adopting new policies and procedures to ensure our entire team was prepared. It helped us unite as a team and work together to enact all necessary steps and be ready for any outbreaks.
- We actively partnered in the Gippsland Regional COVID-19 Cluster planning arrangements to ensure an effective regional response to the pandemic both for health services and aged care services.
- We reviewed and redesigned our Outbreak Management Plan to meet the standards set for pandemic levels. We continued with our mandated hand hygiene and infection prevention training and introduced COVID-19 training for ALL staff. We also delivered daily tool-box training for all staff on the use of personal protective equipment (PPE).



- At the beginning of the pandemic when elective theatre was suspended, Neerim Health negotiated inclusion in the National Partnership Agreement. This agreement between Commonwealth and State Governments and private hospitals allowed us to retain staff and provide limited services during the theatre suspension and be ready to recommence all surgery when possible. While these arrangements mean increased regular reporting requirements, it has helped us forge deep and high value working relationships with government health authorities that we hope to leverage into the future.

Compliance and accreditation

- Neerim Health has and continues to operate in accordance with all health and government mandated requirements. Over the past year, we maintained our accreditation standards for our aged care, Short-Term Restorative Care (STRC), operating theatre, and hospital services.
- We have adopted the new Aged Care Standards and self-assessment process against these standards for residential aged care and the STRC program.
- We have completed a review and refreshed our Clinical Governance and Credentialing Committee based on the updated 2020 Safer Care Victoria Clinical Governance Framework and the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards.
- We met regulatory requirements for our dangerous goods storage and management as assessed by WorkSafe and the CFA.

Staff training and wellbeing

- This year we adapted communication and training and some work practices to respond to the restrictions and additional stresses experienced by staff.
- We have adapted and used technology for staff to access on-line training and introduced virtual staff meetings.
- Particular attention was given to increase the frequency of communications to ensure staff were kept up to date on all COVID-19 developments and requirements that were experienced over many months.
- Our annual staff survey focused on mental health and wellbeing and along with the record levels of responses, the positive feedback from our staff confirmed the success of the changes.

Business improvements

- Several business functions have been outsourced, including payroll to provide greater efficiency and improved risk management.
- We transferred to a new information technology provider to upgrade our telecommunications and computer hardware and software. We also upgraded our web technology to ensure we can stay connected with our growing external stakeholder network.
- We have identified further areas of improvement and are seeking funding from the Commonwealth Government to improve our nurse call system, security system, and other information technology functions within our aged care facility.
- Our capital works plan for the financial year has been fully completed as planned and included much needed major repairs to the plumbing system.

Building our business

- We finalised our three-year strategic plan and priorities which focus on how we deliver the best mix of safe and high quality health services for patients and residents. We have identified collaborative opportunities and partnerships with local and regional health services to best position and utilise our expertise and facilities. In particular, we have maintained our strong relationship with Latrobe Regional Hospital.

- Our focus on expanding our network of credentialed medical practitioners (9 new in total this past year) including GPs, Gastroenterologists, a General Physician, Dentist, Anaesthetists, and Ophthalmologists gives us confidence that our utilisation strategy will be successful.

To our patients, residents, and their loved ones, thank you for being so ready to accept and respond to the health and safety measures put in place. We acknowledge these changes can be difficult especially when loved ones are kept apart.

My continued thanks to the Board of Management who volunteer their time, skills and valuable experience to ensure the success of Neerim Health. The support of the Board members clearly demonstrates their commitment to ensuring Neerim Health continues to provide high quality and appropriately governed health services to the Neerim district and greater Gippsland.

Finally, and very importantly, I want to extend my continued thanks to the incredible team that I have the privilege to lead at Neerim Health. The support shown by our staff over so many months that at times challenged all of us both professionally and personally was truly humbling. To every member of our staff, thank you for respecting that the combined health and safety of Neerim Health was our first priority.

Kate Graham, CEO



Our organisational structure

Board of Management

Sean Dignum, Chair.....	Appointed to Board 2015
Margaret Darton, Deputy Chair	Appointed to Board December 2017
Dr Joe Rabar	Appointed to Board October 2017
Christie Bransgrove	Appointed to Board August 2019
Nicole Steers	Appointed to Board August 2019
Dr Simon Fraser	Appointed to Board June 2020
Kim McFarlane	Appointed to Board June 2020
Phillip Ransom, Treasurer.....	Appointed to Board July 2020

Retired from Board

Catherine Gale	2019/20
Mark Dunsmuir	2019/20
Prof Graeme Jackson	2019/20
Jenny Muir	2019/20

Board Committees

Audit & Risk

Chair Margaret Darton, Kim McFarlane, Christie Bransgrove, Sean Dignum (ex-officio), Kate Graham, Jo Harris & Rachelle McKay in attendance.

Finance

Chair Phillip Ransom, Margaret Darton, Sean Dignum, Kate Graham & Jo Harris in attendance.

Clinical Governance & Credentialing

Chair Dr Joe Rabar, Dr Simon Fraser, Nicole Steers, Sean Dignum (ex-officio), Kate Graham & Rachelle McKay in attendance.

Nominations

Chair Sean Dignum, Margaret Darton, Nicole Steers.

The Board continues to act to ensure the organisation is performing in accordance with the principles of best practice and clinical governance.

Board recruitment and appointment of new Board members is designed to bring the right mix of executive health management, business acumen, sound judgement and attention to detail required to deliver high quality, safe services in an environment of increasing health care demands and complexities.

Neerim Health has updated relevant policies and procedures and continues to operate with robust risk management and financial governance policies and procedures.

Executive Management

Kate Graham.....	Chief Executive Officer and Director of Nursing
Jo Harris.....	Business Manager
Rachelle McKay	Clinical Services Manager
Nicole Brown	Nurse Unit Manager Hospital and Aged Care
Lauren Mucic	Nurse Unit Manager Operating Theatre
Cherie Howe	Manager Organisational Support Services



Our services

Neerim Health delivers health services with revenue streams through the Commonwealth Government, Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA), private health insurers, fee for service, public health sub-contracted services and funding for emergency stabilisation from the Victorian Government.

Our services are used by people from across the Gippsland region as well as our local community.

Our services are underpinned by robust clinical governance systems and policies and processes that are regularly reviewed and updated.

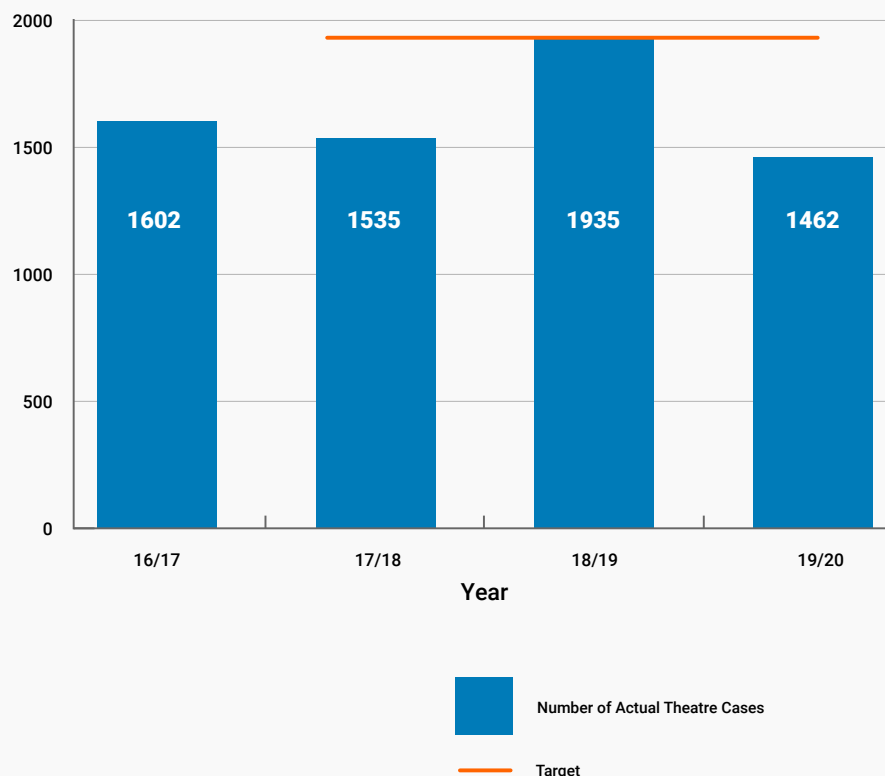
Our performance results for the year reflect the challenges posed by COVID-19 across our entire health service. Overall, we demonstrated a strong performance, and had we not experienced COVID-19, Neerim Health was on track to achieve, and in some cases, exceed the internal targets we set ourselves as part of our ongoing commitment to ensuring our business is sustainable for the long term.

Theatre

Day procedures undertaken this year include cataract surgery, ocular plastics surgery, endoscopy and dental surgery. We have maintained our partnership with Latrobe Regional Hospital to provide public cataract services, which this year, made up 50% of total theatre cases.

In the past financial year we set a target of undertaking 1,920 theatre cases. Target achievement would have been achieved if only 60% of the planned elective theatre for the last quarter of the year had not been lost due to restrictions on elective theatre due to COVID-19.

A total of 124 Endoscopy and Colonoscopy procedures were conducted this year. This service is increasing, largely supported by a new clinician performing these procedures at Neerim Health.

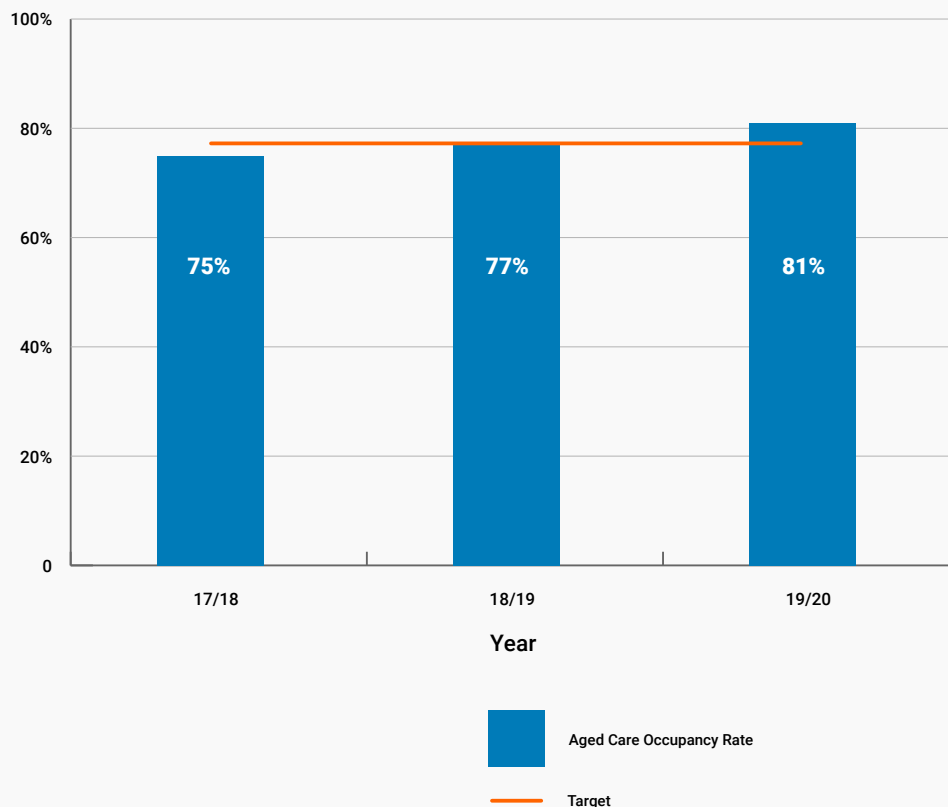
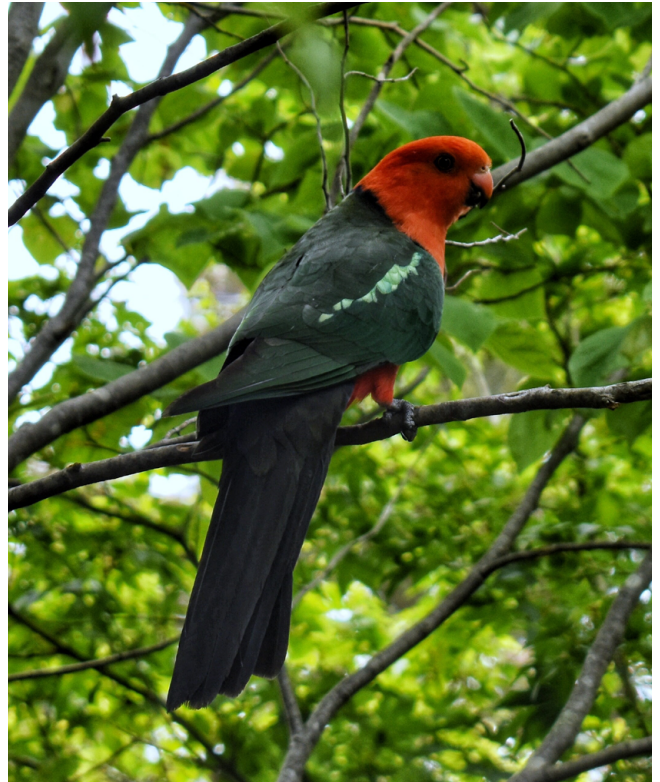


Residential Aged Care (Tarago Views)

Services and conditions for our residents and families were significantly affected by COVID-19 in the second half of the year. In accordance with the Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) guidelines, we decreased the frequency and set limits on visitors to our residents to ensure their safety and well-being. Throughout this period, we adapted by offering virtual visits via video and phone to maintain family and carer connections.

Our commitment to provide high quality care to all residents of Tarago Views includes the annual aged care resident influenza vaccination program. All residents of Tarago Views and their families/carers were provided with relevant information and the necessary consent form regarding the vaccination program. 100% of Tarago Views residents received the influenza vaccination during the 2020 reporting period and all new residents have been able to provide evidence of influenza vaccination during 2020.

Our occupancy levels exceeded our target this year and we are proud to have maintained the safety, health and wellbeing of our residents through the pandemic.



Sub-acute hospital beds

The sub-acute hospital bed activity and utilisation continued to be challenging. It is important to note the significant decline in occupancy following the 2017/2018 financial year when the publicly sub-contracted Geriatric Evaluation and Management (GEM) contract with West Gippsland Healthcare Group was finalised.

As outlined in the Neerim Health strategic plan it is imperative that we increase the number of medical practitioners who are able to admit to the hospital beds. Negotiations continue with additional General Practitioners, General Physicians and our public health partners to ensure that these valuable hospital beds are accessible to our community and more effectively utilised.

Emergency Stabilisation

The Victorian Government DHHS provides funding to Neerim Health to maintain emergency stabilisation services for patients who present with immediate needs and require stabilisation while awaiting transport by ambulance for emergency treatment. We continue our commitment to ensure all our registered nurses are trained in Advanced Life Support to enable Neerim Health to meet this obligation.

Meals on Wheels

Neerim Health successfully tendered to continue to provide meals on wheels from our in-house catering service to local Neerim community residents on behalf of Baw Baw Shire Council.

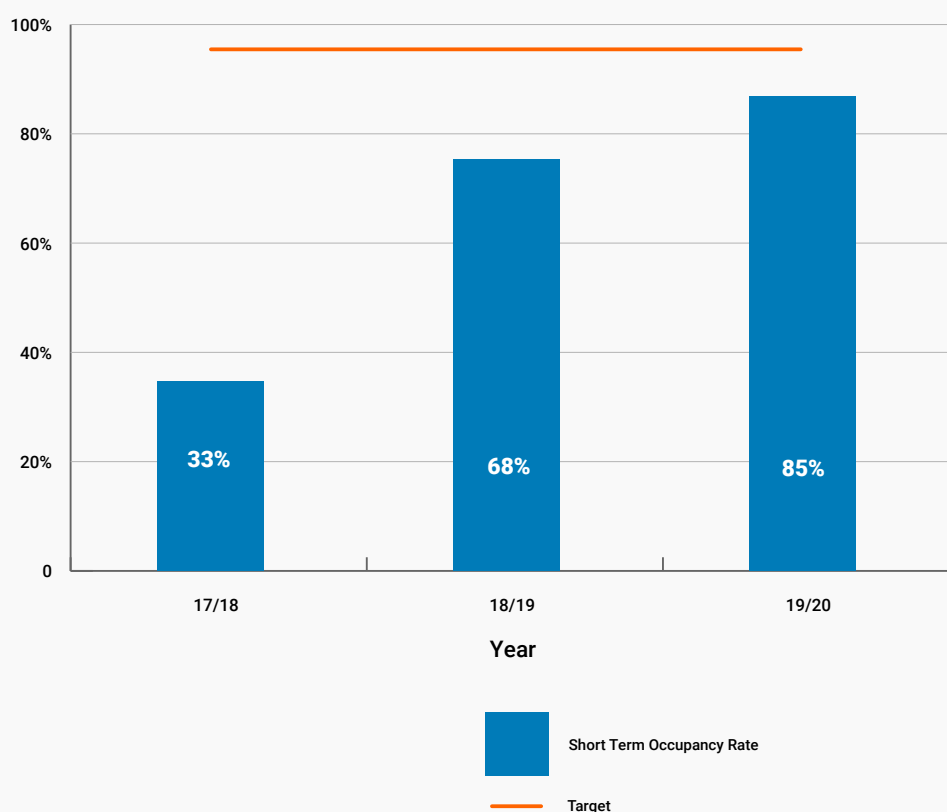


Short-Term Restorative Care program

It has been another outstanding year for Neerim Health's STRC program that provides time limited, multidisciplinary and flexible care to older members of our community. The program is delivered primarily in the home environment, within Tarago Views Aged Care or a combination of venues.

We have achieved almost 300% growth over the past two years demonstrating the community demand and importance of this service. Even through COVID-19, we increased service provision and successfully modified our service delivery model to remain within the restrictions set out by the Australian Government Department of Health and the Victorian Government DHHS.

Neerim Health's STRC program has maintained strong service brokerage relationships with a range of local external stakeholders to ensure the appropriate assessments and services are available within the 8 week STRC service delivery period.



Our people

Neerim Health continues to be the largest employer across the Neerim District with 92% of our staff identified as living locally.

As this year has shown us, the value of our staff team being local has been essential as we worked through the pandemic conditions that posed specific risks for health services, in particular aged care facilities. We currently employ approximately 90 full time, part time or casual staff.

We have continued to pursue our strategy to reduce the numbers of casual staff by moving staff to permanent employment arrangements.

Staff Awards

Each year, we recognise our staff for their years of continued and committed service. This year, we recognised the following staff:

5 years:	Melissa Burton and Penny Gibson
10 years:	Tess Buckley, Izumi Hiraga and Maria Kelly
15 years:	Sharyn Norris and Lainie Silver
20 years:	Bernie Notman

The Board and Management team extend our congratulations and appreciation to the long serving staff and to all of our staff for their ongoing commitment to Neerim Health.

Staff Health & Wellbeing

Our strategy to support our people has been continuously reviewed and expanded this year, recognising the additional stress and work requirements imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This year we offered free influenza vaccination to our staff and volunteers. We achieved a 99% vaccination rate (clinical and non-clinical staff). Other key activities included:

- More frequent communications from our CEO and regular updates to ensure staff were updated about the pandemic response, health and government requirements and changes to our service delivery.
- Encouraging staff to use our ongoing Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to provide tailored and confidential counselling support for staff experiencing any physical and mental health concerns.
- More frequent breaks to relieve staff from the additional health and safety requirements such as mandatory use of PPE that can be demanding on physical and mental wellbeing.

- Appropriate leave provision and support for any staff member that was required to take leave as part of COVID-19 precautionary measures such as staying home if unwell, seeking immediate testing and remaining at home whilst awaiting results.

Staff Training

We continue to invest in training and professional development to support and advance the skills and qualifications of our staff including support for staff to undertake and complete higher education qualifications. Increased use of on-line training has enabled more staff to participate in our training programs.

COVID-19 has emphasised the need for effective hand hygiene practices. All staff were trained in hand hygiene and infection prevention practices and use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) along with COVID-19 specific infection prevention training.

Management of the risks associated with safe patient handling remains a priority at Neerim Health to minimise the risk of harm or injury occurring for our staff, residents and patients. Professional development for clinical staff on safe patient handling was provided through eLearning training modules, and a practical competency training program. Safe patient handling policies and procedures further support the provision of safe care.

Staff Wellbeing Survey

In recognition of this extraordinary year, we conducted our annual staff satisfaction survey with a focus on their health and wellbeing through the COVID-19 pandemic. The confidential online survey was issued to all staff inviting them to participate.

We received responses from 55% of staff (13% higher than last year). Staff were overwhelmingly positive to the initiatives taken by management to address health and wellbeing of staff and felt their views and ideas were respected and listened to. Staff were invited to describe our greatest strengths as an organisation and their feedback focussed on the genuine care and dedication of staff to residents, teamwork, communication, and inclusion.

Areas identified for improvement were associated with access to further training opportunities, systems development and improved knowledge sharing. These will be considered and reflected in our future planning sessions.

Reports

Treasurers Report

The financial position of the Neerim District Health Service ("Neerim Health") was, like most organisations, impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding was received from various government programs and we appreciate the support to replace revenue lost due to government restrictions on elective surgery. The total funding received was \$813,417.

However, even with government COVID-19 support, revenue from operating activities, total comprehensive income and net assets decreased during the year primarily due to COVID-19 restraints on theatre procedures. The overall result for the year was a deficit of \$68,967.

Given the extraordinary circumstances that have existed during the second half of the financial year, the financial outcome for the year evidences how Neerim Health has continued to focus on maintaining exceptional service despite the many difficulties caused by COVID-19 during this period.

Highlights for the year include:

- An increase in revenue generated by our hospital beds of \$44,210 on the previous year;
- An increase in revenue generated by Short-Term Restorative Care packages of \$50,670 on the previous year;
- An increase in aged care revenue of \$83,564 on the previous year;
- Three new surgeons accredited and able to utilise the theatre which should position Neerim Health well moving forward with regards to theatre capability.

It is difficult to make year on year comparisons with regards to financial expenses due to the impact of COVID-19 across all areas of the health service. Employee benefits increased due to prior year back-payments and current EBA increases to wages. Materials and services costs fell during the year due to reduced direct theatre costs.

The Finance Committee is responsible for reviewing and monitoring the financial performance of the organisation. Management worked closely with the external auditors to ensure a detailed audit was completed which resulted again in a clean audit report.

I would like to thank Neerim Health staff, members of the Board and various committees for their participation in meetings and contributions throughout what has been an extremely difficult year.

Phillip Ransom, Treasurer

Ladies Guild Report

Office bearers for the year were:

President..... Marilyn Lewis

Vice President..... Jenny Neil

Treasurer..... Deb McCann

Secretary..... Jacky Bailey

We currently have 14 members and would welcome more members from the community to assist in our fundraising efforts.

Thanks go to all who knit, sew, cook, donate to raffles and the support of the community.

Thanks also go to IGA for supplying the equipment and food for our BBQ fundraising, and to the Community House Craft Group who make items for the Ladies Guild stalls. Thanks go to the Men's Shed who assist us when needed.

We have raised funds by the way of the various street and market stalls, catering at Tall Timbers, sausage sizzles, and raffles. Big thanks to Marilyn Lewis who is our raffle queen!

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic we have been unable to fund raise since February. Although we still raised over \$3,000 for the financial year.

Our funds went towards the purchase of the following equipment:

- Chairs for the Nursing Home
- Dental equipment for the hospital
- Christmas gift to the Nursing Home
- Bed and mattress for the Nursing Home (being supplied)
- Two mattresses for the hospital (being supplied)

Thank you Kate Graham and to all the nursing and office staff for their support.

Jacky Bailey, Secretary

Neerim District Health Service Ladies Guild,
P.O. Box 498, Neerim South 3831

Thank you and acknowledgments

Despite it being an exceptional year, Neerim Health continued to benefit significantly from the generosity of many members of our community. We are extremely grateful for this ongoing support and show of strength from our community who generously donate to our organisation in so many ways.

Thank you to our dedicated volunteers who have continued to visit and support our aged care residents when possible, tended to our gardens and provided valuable consumer insight and guidance to our Quality and Safety Committee.

Although very much limited in their fundraising activities this year, our Ladies Guild continued to provide much needed equipment to the hospital and aged care through their generous donations. During part of the year when market stalls and raffles have been forced to pause, beautiful homemade face masks appeared at Neerim Health for purchase from the resourceful Ladies Guild.

The 2019 Neerim Christmas Fair was again a huge success and we are indebted to the many local members of the community that donated valuable raffle prizes to raise money for the hospital. We extend our greatest appreciation to the many people that volunteered their time, skills and equipment to make this another fantastic event for the local community.

Thank you to all of our Visiting Medical Officers, Surgeons, Anaesthetists, General Practitioners and Allied Health Clinicians who have continued to provide valuable services to Neerim Health during such a disruptive year.

Again this year, Neerim Health benefited from the generosity of many people who donated both financially and in kind to the organisation. Whether it be through Open Gardens, donated morning teas for our staff or monetary donations we are truly appreciative, particularly in a year that has been so difficult for so many people.

A particular thank you to the Neerim District Lions Club for their extremely generous donation that allowed Neerim Health to update our Cardiac Defibrillator for our Emergency Stabilisation facility this year.

This year has seen a further consolidation of our collaboration with local services and organisations within the district and we extend our thanks to all of our valuable partners and supporters. The ongoing collaboration with our First Responders including Victoria Police, CFA, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and Ambulance Victoria ensures we are well positioned to manage emergency situations and bushfire preparedness as a community. We extend our thanks and appreciation to these vital services. This working collaboration has been further extended this year to include the Neerim District Men's Shed and Community House to plan and identify strategies to support our community during the pandemic. On behalf of this collaboration we extend our appreciation and thanks to the Neerim District Financial Services for their support and encouragement of the Neerim District Community Hub project plan along with our local sporting clubs, schools and the Progress Association.





Address: 29-39 Main Neerim Rd, Neerim South VIC 3831
Phone: (03) 5628 1226
www.neerimhealth.org.au