

# Pandemics and disasters:

## The value of integrated care

### Background

Gippsland has experienced years of drought and devastating bushfires in East Gippsland and Wellington.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to change how we work, live and play. We have seen how quickly and effectively systems can shift when needed. Integrated, value-based care is vital to a resilient and agile health system.

### Key COVID-19 general practice information

#### COVID-19 POLAR general practice data<sup>1</sup>



Telehealth consultations sometimes exceeded face-to-face consultations.



Overall GP contacts and prescriptions remained steady.



There was a reduction in pathology and radiology prescribing during lockdown periods.



Chronic disease did not receive the usual preventive care and management during early stages of the pandemic.



There was an increase in new mental health diagnoses, particularly anxiety.



General practices responded quickly to managing patient care.



Medication prescriptions for mental health increased.



There were more child and adolescent mental health related presentations.



People with an existing mental health condition presented to general practice more frequently.



For children, there was less seasonal infective presentations and a large decrease in antibiotic prescriptions. Routine immunisations appear unaffected.

### Information about mental health, suicide, alcohol and other drugs



More calls to helplines between 10 August to 6 September 2020; Beyond Blue (39%), Lifeline (15%), Kids Helpline (25%)<sup>2</sup>



20% more mental health related MBS services in the four weeks to 6 September 2020 in Victoria



1/3 of MBS mental health services provided were through telehealth



Increase in commissioned service delivery during 2020, while number of clients and care episodes have seen comparatively steady growth<sup>3</sup>



More antidepressants prescribed in general practice in 2020 compared to 2019



Further pressure on an already stretched workforce, including psychologists (47 per 100,000 population, compared with 103 in Victoria)



Increased Emergency Department presentations for self-harm in young people



Increased alcohol sales and consumption<sup>4</sup>



Longer waiting times for psychological services and psychiatry



Strong uptake of HeadtoHelp services from September 2020

### References

1 Outcome Health; <https://polargp.org.au/primary-health-networks/covid-19-data-insight-papers/>

2 AIHW; <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/covid-19>

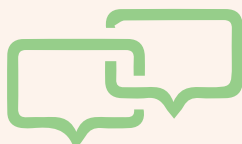
3 Gippsland PHN; Volume trends of commissioned mental health service data July 2019–November 2020, extracted 3/12/20 from Primary Mental Health Care Minimum Data Set.

4 AIHW; <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/alcohol/alcohol-tobacco-other-drugs-australia/contents/impact-of-covid-19-on-alcohol-and-other-drug-use>

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## Digital solutions and communication



General practice activity showed a fast adaptation to phone and video calls without affecting total activity; in the week beginning 16 March 2020 there were over 2000 consultations. By 30 March 2020 there were more phone and video consultations than face-to-face in Gippsland (but not the case across Victoria).

Vast majority of telehealth consultations were phone based rather than video consultations.

Increased use of HealthPathways for COVID-19 updates.

## Primary care



Gippsland general practice data showed increased respiratory presentations as a result of poor air quality caused by the bushfires (January–March 2020)



The longer-term effects of bushfires include deterioration of existing health conditions such as hypertension, gastrointestinal disorders, diabetes, mental illness, substance abuse



Decrease in breast screening with around 1,100 mammograms performed in April 2020, compared to 74,000 in April 2018<sup>5</sup>



Increased workplace stress due to safety concerns (lack of Personal Protective Equipment)



12-19% increase in family violence related ambulance attendances<sup>6</sup>



66% increase in calls to **1800RESPECT**



Increased number of people relying on government payments for an income



Increase in people who report being isolated



Increased demand for homelessness services since March 2020, including increasing numbers of Indigenous clients seeking support<sup>7</sup>



Increased isolation for residents of aged care homes



Disease deterioration among residents of aged care homes, including dementia<sup>8</sup>



More collaboration between jurisdictions, providers and industry



Increase in political leaders taking advice from various experts to find solutions



Opportunity to link primary and acute care data, funding arrangements and regional coordination<sup>9</sup>

## What does it mean for Gippsland PHN?

General practice in Gippsland is agile and responsive to community and business needs.

Mental health has been affected throughout 2020 and this is expected to continue into 2021.

Important to promote access to mental health services.

The way disease is managed has changed.

Primary care has a pivotal role in shaping future planning and management of pandemics and natural disasters.

Integrated patient care is the future of primary care, with a focus on digital health, technology, data-driven care, collaborative commissioning, mental health, suicide prevention and adequate workforce.

## References

- 5 AIHW; <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/cancer-screening/cancer-screening-and-covid-19-in-australia/contents/how-has-covid-19-affected-australias-cancer-screening-programs>
- 6 Crime Statistics Agency, COVID-19 Family Violence Data Portal; <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data-portal/covid-19-family-violence-data-portal-0>
- 7 AIHW; <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-monthly-data/contents/monthly-data>
- 8 Dementia Australia. (2020). One day the support was gone The mental health impact of COVID-19 on people living with dementia, their families and carers. <https://www.dementia.org.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/PFOD-Discussion-Paper-Nov-2020-ver1.pdf>
- 9 Duckett, S. (2020). What should primary care look like after the COVID-19 pandemic? <https://www.publish.csiro.au/PY/pdf/PY20095>