



# WRAD HEALTH NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2023 EDITION

## A TIME OF CHANGE

It has been a time of huge change for WRAD Health, but some things always stay the same.

This year we have adopted a new name, changing from WRAD to WRAD Health, unveiled a new logo, changed our corporate colours and we now say goodbye to some of our longest-serving staff members, including our CEO Geoff Soma.

Mark Powell has stepped into the role of Acting CEO for the next 12 months, while Chris Kendall is the new operations manager.

WRAD Health is also losing experienced and valued retiring staff members Dawn Bermingham, Kevin Fitzgerald and Debbie Maguire.

In total, 100 years of experience will be leaving the organisation within a month.

While they will be missed, WRAD Health has a great core of dedicated staff committed to continuing their good work and leading the organisation into a positive new era.

Change can bring many benefits and we remain excited about the future.

Through all this change, WRAD Health's focus on providing community-based general health and alcohol and other drug services remains unchanged.

Today, there are many parts to WRAD Health's service, including substance misuse, general practice, mental health and support services and we continue to welcome everybody and encourage everyone to participate in change and personal growth.

New Acting CEO Mark Powell says he is coming into the position at an exciting time.

"WRAD is in a very strong and healthy position with very good staff," he said. "Whilst we're losing a lot of experience in one sense, their legacy of building a really strong foundation for the organisation will carry us through to an exciting future."

Outgoing CEO Geoff Soma says he is confident the new leadership team can maintain the organisation's high-quality care and its prominent role in the community.

"It has been a wonderful career and I am very proud of where WRAD Health is today and am confident it will have a bright future and continue making a positive contribution to our community," Geoff said.

MARK POWELL & GEOFF SOMA



Change can bring many benefits and we remain excited about the future".



# STEPPING UP

**Some mental health and alcohol and other drugs (AOD) services in Western Victoria were integrated on July 1.**

This change, known as Step Thru Care Regional Care Partnerships (RCP) Mental Health and AOD, will see a number of organisations working together to provide integrated care for individuals including Mind Australia as the lead agency, WRAD Health, Portland District Health, Brophy Family and Youth services Inc and genU.

The Step Thru program is designed to maximise client pathways and to implement a multi-disciplined approach which includes a peer worker.

RCPs are formal agreements among complementary health support agencies to ensure services to health care consumers are coordinated and delivered to meet the individual's needs. These services will be more collaborative, informative, supportive and culturally appropriate and will better coordinate and promote recovery and personal wellbeing.

Priority groups for the service are people on low income, living in rural and remote communities who do not have access to other appropriate services, experiencing short-term displacement or homelessness and people who identify as LGBTQIA+ or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

For more information about RCP referrals or assistance to direct your referral to the correct location please contact the Mind Customer Service Centre on 1300 286 463.

# SECOND RETIREMENT

**Dawn Bermingham has retired from WRAD Health – again!**

Dawn stepped down 2020 but later returned and continued to work one day per week, as a part-time personal assistance supporting CEO Geoff Soma, helping with queries from new staff and assisting however possible.

Dawn remains WRAD Health longest serving employee and has been with the organisation

since it started in 1986. When WRAD Health started at 325 Timor Street, it had a full-time coordinator, Carmel Crowe, counsellor Anne Parkes and Dawn as receptionist, a role that evolved into finance and office management.

Dawn said the best part of working at WRAD Health was seeing the difference the agency makes to people's lives.

It has been a wonderful career for me," she said. "I really enjoyed working with the organisation."

**Geoff Soma's** career and retirement was recorded in our autumn newsletter.

# PORT FAIRY EXPANSION

**WRAD Health has expanded services to the Port Fairy community, providing weekly assistance surrounding alcohol and other drugs.**

Each Monday from 9am – 1pm on Mondays WRAD Health AOD clinician Joel Willoughby will be located in the Port Fairy Medical Clinic.

Like all WRAD Health appointments, consultations are 100% confidential, guided by best practice, non-judgemental and are completely free!

If you or somebody you love are experiencing struggles with alcohol or other drugs, simply drop into the Port Fairy Medical Clinic and ask to speak with Joel, or phone WRAD Health on (03) 5564 5777 to book an appointment.

# MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

**WRAD Health is making it easier for people to seek help for their mental health concerns.**

Mental health social worker Leanne Mitchell is now providing after-hours mental health counselling to clients with a mental health care plans at WRAD Health.

The new service as part of WRAD Health's after-hours clinic and is proving to be very helpful.

Leanne is also offering telehealth consultations at other times and her services are bulk billed with no gap fees to be paid.

"We've had a steady flow of clients and the GPs at WRAD can access my services as another option for support," she said.

"I bulk bill so there is no gap fee, which is important for WRAD Health clients as it takes away some of the barriers to be able to get support."

In Warrnambool there is a six-month-plus waiting list to see a mental health professional.

Leanne said that while the after-hours face-to-face consultations are meeting a need, she is also available for Telehealth consultations.

"Telehealth has come a long way since Covid and people are feeling a lot more comfortable in using that as an option," she said.



Leanne's professional experience is extensive and includes five years working in adolescent mental health, two years working in forensics within the justice system, and 10 years working in adult mental health, providing support to adults and their carers.

This is a service primarily for WRAD Health clients who are seeing a WRAD Health GP.

Leanne supports people living with anxiety, depression, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). She supports people managing stress and work-related pressures, self-worth issues, anger management and substance-related issues. She is a collaborative and person-centred clinician who utilises Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT), Mindfulness and Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) to support her clients.

Leanne said a mental health social worker can help people in many ways. "When people think of mental health support, they automatically think of a psychologist but a mental health social worker is trained the same way and offers very similar support to that of a psychologist, with the exception that we can't diagnose."

# WELCOME PARTNERS

**WRAD Health's focus on collaboration is reaping great rewards.**

A memorandum of understanding is under development with Southwest TAFE to provide employment and training pathways as well as placements between TAFE and WRAD Health.

This will open opportunities for WRAD Health clients to get access to South West TAFE courses

training pathways and also for students from South West TAFE having access to experience and training at WRAD Health.

Gunditjmara and WRAD Health are also building closer relationships for a range of collaborative projects.

Both organisations will work side by side to support the development of the Lookout Residential Rehabilitation Centre in the near future, along with increasing access to WRAD Health's dual diagnosis program.



# DEBBIE LEAVES HER "WRAD HEALTH FAMILY"

Finance officer Debbie Maguire refers to her colleagues as her "WRAD Health family" and she admits she's going to miss them when she retires.

Debbie, 64, will be taking holidays and long-service leave from July 21 before her formal retirement date in November.

And while she'll miss her work and her colleagues, she has good reasons to be retiring. "I'm becoming a grandmother and I always said when I had grandchildren, I would retire so I could be a good Nan," she said. "It made it an easy decision for me. Stacey lives in Geelong and is due in September. We can travel back and forwards and help out and be there to support her. If I was still working four days a week, I wouldn't have that flexibility."

Debbie will also spend more time caring for her elderly parents and hopes to do some travel with husband Leon and be more flexible in catching up with friends for a coffee.

Debbie started with WRAD Health on October 10, 2001 on a casual basis.

"I found out about the job through the late Alan Main," she said. "I met him in a butcher shop and he asked me what I was doing. I'd left my job in the bank about three months earlier and I was starting to get a bit bored and looking for a new challenge. He told me that WRAD Health was looking to put someone on so I went to the house in Timor Street opposite the hospital and helped to set up some files.

I was going on holidays and when I got back, I was offered the job in December 2001."

Her first official day on the job didn't get off to a good start.

"I remember my first day clearly," she said. "WRAD Health was moving into Fairy Street. I turned up in my work gear and everyone was moving offices. I had to go home and get changed."

While most of Debbie's previous work had been in the office and finance

sectors, she also spent two years caring for two children with muscular dystrophy.

She had been working in a bank for 14 years before moving to WRAD Health. "I was a teller and helped with other work like opening new accounts but the bank was changing focus encouraging us to sell things which didn't suit me."

After starting as a receptionist with WRAD Health, within a couple of years Debbie was helping office manager Dawn Bermingham, mostly with salary packaging and staff payments.

"When WRAD Health moved to its current building, I worked more in finance but I have always helped out on reception if needed," she said.

Debbie has had to grow as WRAD Health has expanded. "We've more than doubled the staff from when I started and finances have just grown and grown," she said.

"Our funding and what we were looking after was so little back then compared to what we do now," she said. "I've learnt a lot. I didn't have an accountancy background but I had a good teacher in Dawn and I learnt by listening to Geoff and Dawn."

When Dawn was on leave, Debbie would step into office manager duties.

While looking forward to the next chapter, Debbie will miss her "WRAD Health family". "The best part has been the people I work with. I call it my WRAD Health family. We have a great lot of staff and the morale is really good," she said.



**They're not just work colleagues; they're friends and it's going to be really sad when I leave".**

Geoff is a great CEO who is very supportive of staff. That's why we've had people who have worked so long here; it's just a great place to work."



# AN ANIMATED LOOK AT RECOVERY

Stories of recovery are being animated as a way of inspiring others to find their own way to recovery.

The Sharing Stories: Strengthening Communities - Storytelling as a pathway to connection and awareness program has been helping people to develop their skills in writing life stories and will develop a learning tool in the form of animated stories to tackle de-stigmatisation.

The Warrnambool Library and Learning Centre was successful in winning a grant as part of the Libraries for Health and Wellbeing Innovation grants, funded by the State Library and Public Libraries Victoria.

The project is a collaboration between Warrnambool Library and Learning Centre, WRAD Health, and One Day Studios.

WRAD Health is supporting the project with the involvement of a clinician and peer worker Cindy Ormiston.

Cindy said the program aimed to destigmatise addiction and recovery and enhance community understanding about lived experience of addiction and recovery.

Current and past WRAD Health clients have been involved in workshops with professional writers to learn skills to help them better share their stories.

"We hope that sharing these stories of recovery will encourage others to see a path for recovery," Cindy said.

There was also a strong focus during the workshops on improving literary skills of the participants.

"Everyone got a lot from hearing each other's stories & some really great connections were made" Cindy said.

One of the participants has now joined Cindy's active recovery program at WRAD Health.

"She felt very supported and safe and wanted to continue the connection with others in a similar situation."

The animation is expected to be released in September. It will be available to the public and will also be used as a learning tool.



# LONGER SUPPORT

The introduction of the long-acting injectable Buprenorphine project is proving to be more user friendly, supportive and cost effective.

Buprenorphine is an opiate substitute that helps people to manage their dependence on drugs such as heroin and oxycontin while getting back to their lives. It's a harm reduction strategy similar to the methadone program and has been rolled out by WRAD Health across the region.

The long-lasting injection can be delivered either once a week or once a month, meaning clients no longer have to visit a pharmacist every day for an oral dose.

"This means there is reduced burden on people," Acting CEO Mark Powell said. "It allows people to get back into work because they're not committed to having to go to the pharmacy every day."

Previously there was very strict criteria about distribution of the oral medication. "It meant that if you were going on holidays, you would have to organise a pharmacy at your holiday destination," Mark said. "Now you can do a lot in a month between having the injections."

The feedback from people on the program is very positive. "They say they are getting their lives back and have more capacity to work and do things with family," Mark said. "There's also less stigma because they don't have to turn up at the pharmacy the same time every day."

Injectable Buprenorphine is available at WRAD Health and also at pharmacotherapy clinics in Portland and Hamilton.



# A CAREER OF MERGING INTERESTS

Drug and alcohol clinician Kevin Fitzgerald has had a long journey in the mental health and AOD fields, equally divided between the two areas.

But what he's most enjoyed along that journey has been the merger of the two fields and the more holistic care that is available to people as a result.

When Kevin started his career 48 years ago, mental health and AOD were treated in different silos. Today, dual diagnosis is an essential part of care and Kevin says that has been of tremendous benefit.

"When I started there was drug and alcohol and there was mental health and there was a huge gap between the two," he said.

"I've enjoyed seeing the relationship coming closer together so people can receive more holistic care. I knew when I was working in mental health that a lot of clients referred to our service had a drug or alcohol condition as well, but they didn't relate the two together.

"It was one of Geoff Soma's visions from when he started at WRAD Health to recognise dual diagnosis. It was part of the vision for how WRAD Health has evolved."

Kevin spent 24 years working in mental health services and he is coming up to 24 years in November with WRAD Health.

He was just 18 when he started in mental health services at the former Brierley Hospital.

After performing many roles in the mental health system, including work in the community, Kevin developed an interest in dual diagnosis.

"Dual diagnosis was very new and that opened my interest to the drug and alcohol field. I had been working as a senior clinician in Camperdown and wanted to avoid the driving, plus the mental health service environment was a bit unhealthy at the time so I took the jump across to the AOD sector and it was a really refreshing change."



KEVIN FITZGERALD

At WRAD Health, Kevin started as coordinator-assessor for the Drink-Drive program as well as coordinating the Drug Screening Program in addition to his counselling work.

Over the journey, Kevin has worn many different hats based around his mental health background and experience as a registered nurse in both general and psychiatric fields.

His work at WRAD Health has included a dual diagnosis role, supported accommodation, ABI-AOD clinician but most prominently in AOD counselling.

"I loved seeing the growth of the clinicians and the organisation as a whole over this time," he said. "Professional development has certainly improved over the journey. I've been impressed by the dedication of the staff. I've worked with some really special people over the years and that's why WRAD Health has grown so much and become so much more respected in the region.

"It all comes back to delivering optimal care to look after our clients."

Kevin often thinks of a client who was very unwell physically and mentally with significant AOD problems but after a couple of years of intensive holistic treatment had settled down with a family. "That's the rewarding part – seeing people nurture and grow within themselves and start to understand their condition and the early warning signs of a relapse," he said.

Kevin is confident WRAD Health has a bright future.

"It is in a healthy place for its journey and I look forward to being a bystander watching that progress. After 48 years in health and 24 years with WRAD Health, I'll be watching to see how it continues to develop."

Turning 66 in July, Kevin plans to spend more time with his grandchildren, including some living in Perth, and helping his son Liam in his local media business.

"I also plan on seeing more of Australia as I have many friends and family who live across the country and doing this at my leisure will be very enjoyable and relaxing."

**Kevin will start his final annual leave from June 30.**

Geoff Soma's career and retirement was recorded in our autumn newsletter.



## A HEALTHIER FUTURE FOR LGBTIQ+ COMMUNITIES

WRAD Health has shone the spotlight on the health needs of LGBTIQ+ communities by hosting a major regional conference designed to uplift, educate and advocate for a healthier future.

The Pride in Your Health: LGBTIQ+ Diversity and Inclusion Conference on June 21 at the Deakin Warrnambool Campus celebrated diversity and addressed the unique health challenges faced by the rainbow communities.

WRAD Health, in partnership with local organisations, delivered the conference to highlight issues of access to healthcare for members of the LGBTIQ+ communities, present current research around the physical, psychological and substance use issues that impact the LGBTIQ+ communities, to increase practitioner knowledge of and connect LGBTIQ+ inclusive groups/services in the area and encourage action to reduce barriers for LGBTIQ+ communities.

Sessions covered lived and living experiences in navigating the health system, specific issues for the youth of south-west Victoria, mental health impacts, becoming Rainbow Tick accredited and facing the issues of discrimination in healthcare and much more.

WRAD Health Acting CEO manager Mark Powell said the range of presenters offered a wealth of information and opportunities for questions and guidance to improve the health system.

"Hopefully everyone has walked away with increased knowledge but more importantly connections with like-minded people and services," Mark said. "We wanted this to be a transformative event that will impact lives and drive positive change and that together we can pave the way to a healthier and more inclusive future for all."

**We stand in solidarity with the LGBTIQ+ community, reaffirming our commitment to creating a world where everyone can access equitable, compassionate and culturally competent healthcare."**

The event was organised partnership with Leadership Great South Coast, Deakin University, Brophy Youth & Family Services, Wellways, Meli, South West Healthcare, Western Victoria Primary Health Network, South West TAFE, and Warrnambool, Moyne, Glenelg, Southern Grampians and Corangamite local government.



# REACHING OUT

WRAD Health continues to provide services across the Great South Coast.

With support from the Western Victoria Primary Health Network and the Department of Health, new pharmacotherapy clinics have been implemented in Portland and Hamilton. These clinics are operated by a WRAD Health GP and a nurse and supported by Portland District Health and Hamilton Base Hospital.

Outreach clinics have also been extended across Moyne and Corangamite shires. Outreach clinical staff work with a number of health services to provide assistance to clients living in outlying areas.



## PHARMACOTHERAPY EXPANSION

The introduction of pharmacotherapy clinics in Portland and Hamilton is proving to be very beneficial for local communities.

These clinics are operated by a WRAD Health GP and a nurse and supported by Portland District Health and Hamilton Base Hospital.

It provides the full range of pharmacotherapy services, including screening for blood-borne viruses, health checks. The purpose is for pharmacotherapy so the GP is not prescribing medication for any other health issues.

This new service has been introduced with support from the Western Victoria Primary Health Network and the Department of Health.



## PERSONAL SUPPORT

The needle syringe program now has a more personal touch.

While this important program has been offered for many years from the WRAD Health centre, a staff member has now been dedicated to support people using the service.

Clinicians and peer workers are now available to help people to access the program and to help them through the process.

It's an opportunity to connect and offer help or just have a conversation if they so desire, although there's no pressure on participants to interact.

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