



# WRAD HEALTH NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2024 EDITION

## NEW CEO CONFIRMED

**WRAD Health has confirmed its new CEO with Mark Powell being formally appointed after seven months acting in the role.**

Mark had been interim CEO since July 1, 2023 after the retirement of Geoff Soma.

Board chair Helen Taylor says he brings a wealth of experience in drug and alcohol treatment and mental health.

“During his period as acting CEO, Mark has displayed an ability to enthusiastically foster a positive team and introduce further network connections for WRAD Health,” Helen said.

“His work in family liaison has been immensely positive and supportive. Mark has a wonderful compassion for humankind and works tirelessly to achieve the best outcomes.”

She added that Mark was continuing to strive for the establishment of the Lookout Rehabilitation facility. “Mark communicates regularly with the Department of Health, Local members, other residential rehabilitation centres, Philanthropic groups, VAADA, and collects data to drive our dream,” she said.

Mark said he is embracing the challenge.

“For many years I have been a clinician delivering services to people, so moving into the role of CEO was a big change of focus but I’ve really embraced leading an agency that does a tremendous job for the community,” he said.

“I’ve enjoyed the opportunity to help influence change and the ability to connect with the community, other agencies, peak bodies and departmental heads which doesn’t happen so much in a clinical role but has been a real benefit.”

Mark said he was enjoying the opportunity to talk to local community groups about the role of

WRAD Health and to build on the organisation’s positive reputation.

“That has been rewarding because we want to get a message to the community that change is possible,” he said. “I get a lot of good questions about what we do and the services we offer and people appreciate the services we offer.”

Mark said he was keen to continue delivering a service that meets the complex health needs of people across the region. “We’re constantly looking at ways we can grow our service offerings,” he said.

“We now offer psychological services, dietitian, dual diagnosis programs as well as expanded bulk billing medical services. One good example is a program connecting with homeless people that removes some of the barriers to them accessing treatment.

“Ultimately, we want to be a service that is responsive to people with all types of complex health needs.”

Mark said he was proudly taking up the mantle to lead the drive for the Lookout Rehabilitation Centre. “The community supports this project and we’re not dropping the baton on it,” he said.

Mr Powell joined WRAD Health in 2019 as Senior Alcohol and Other Drug Clinician before moving into the role of Operations Manager in 2020.

He has worked in mental health and alcohol and other drug fields for more than 30 years.



# SLIDING DOORS REVAMP

## The Sliding Doors program has returned in a new format for 2024.

The day rehabilitation program has been adjusted from five days a week for six weeks to three days a week for five weeks.

The program also has new leaders with peer support worker Cindy Ormiston seconded to coordinate the sessions with support from Mark Gavin.

The program has been condensed to allow Cindy to continue her other duties, but it is hoped it will return to four days a week at a later date, which will be in line with many other programs around the state.

Operations manager Chris Kendall said Sliding Doors had been carefully reviewed to ensure participants didn't miss out on its benefits, with the new format making it easier for people to attend.

"We had found previously that some clients would have trouble attending all five days because of other appointments, and several participants have children so to adjust to these needs, the program will now run from 10am-3.30pm.

"It will be easier for people with school-aged children or other family requirements so we are increasing accessibility."

Sliding Doors continues to work on the same principles of the Catalyst program, an evidence-based day program modelled on harm minimisation and cognitive behaviour therapy. WRAD Health had advertised unsuccessfully for several months for program coordinators and will continue to seek new staff.

"Both Cindy and Mark have lived experience which will be of great benefit to Sliding Doors," Chris said. "There's no decline in the quality of the program. All the subjects covered previously are still being covered and participants will still receive great benefits."



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- CHRIS KENDALL

## NEW TRAINING OPTION

### South-west Victorians will have a chance to train locally for a career in AOD.

WRAD Health has welcomed the introduction of a new Certificate IV in Alcohol and Other Drugs at South West TAFE in 2024.

"This is an exciting initiative that we hope will help to encourage more people to work in the field," CEO Mark Powell said.

WRAD Health has an agreement with South West TAFE to host student placements during their course. "This will give people an opportunity to train locally to fill local jobs," Mark added.

The course is free as part of the State Government's Free TAFE program and is suited to

people to work in entry level roles which provide services and interventions to clients with alcohol and other drugs issues. It's also ideal for those who implement health promotion and community interventions.

The course will be delivered one day a week on campus, one evening a week in a virtual classroom plus self-directed learning.

Job opportunities include case worker, community support worker, detoxification worker, drug and alcohol worker, family support worker, outreach worker and support worker.

Mark said that other courses have not been specifically targeted at WRAD Health's needs. "This is a course that involves specific AOD training so people can hit the ground running when they start their career."

# SUPPORT FOR PILL TESTING

**WRAD Health has joined 77 community agencies calling for the introduction of a drug checking system to save lives in Victoria.**

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) in collaboration with RMIT University launched the campaign late last year to highlight the dire need for a drug checking and enhanced public alert system to be implemented in Victoria. VAADA wants the Victorian Government to adopt the unequivocal recommendation of the Coroners Court of Victoria to create a drug checking service for the state, believing this will save lives and provide information on emerging harmful substances prior to consumption.

The campaign is in response to a surge in fatal overdoses from novel psychoactive substances (NPS) which mimic established substances but are often more harmful.

CEO Mark Powell says the proposed testing service aligns with WRAD Health's focus on harm reduction.

The need has become even more obvious since the launch of the campaign after nine young

people were hospitalised after a festival early this year.

"Unfortunately, people can purchase substances online or from dealers but not really know what they're getting," Mark said.

"Obviously safest use is no use but we live in a world where people have access to these substances and are going to experiment, so we want to make that as safe as possible."

WRAD Health is aware of anecdotal reports about local people having bad reactions to a new psychoactive substance (NPS) because they weren't aware of the ingredients.

Drug testing services at events or as a standalone service would allow people to find out what is in their drugs while helping them make more informed decisions.

"NPS contributed to the deaths of 47 people in 2021-22 which is a shocking statistic," he said. "The worst part of it is that many of these deaths could have been prevented."

Testing also creates opportunities for drug education. "We know that every time someone tests a substance, services have an opportunity to talk to that person about their substance use," Mark said.

A testing process can also lead to broader public warnings. "If dangerous drugs are detected, we can be proactive and send out harm reduction messages to the community. The recent overdoses at a Melbourne festival reinforce the need for this harm reduction strategy," Mark added.

One substance popular locally at the moment is GHB which is notorious for having a fine line between having an effect and an overdose.

## RECEPTION EXPANDS

**WRAD Health has expanded its reception area, reflecting the growing numbers of people accessing the health centre's services.**

"We needed the space," CEO Mark Powell said. "It's a reflection of a busier clinic. It had become

difficult for staff taking phone calls with another staff member dealing directly with a client right beside them.

"This new reception area allows more privacy for clients attending the centre."

Mark said the changes were made following staff feedback and were designed to improve the consumer experience.





# DERRY BOY JOINS THE TEAM



**Growing up in Derry in north-west Ireland during 'The Troubles' gave WRAD Health's new AOD trainee Chris Campbell a sense that he should help people in need.**

Derry's struggles have been documented in the hit comedy TV series 'Derry Girls' and Chris says it's a good reflection of life at the time.

"Derry Girls is like a documentary of my teenage life – from a female perspective. It's very well written. The writer went to the all-girls Catholic school, I went to the all-boys Catholic school. She was taught by nuns; I was taught by priests.

"Growing up in Derry in the 80s was interesting. It was the time of 'The Troubles' and if you couldn't laugh at them, it would get you down."

Chris remembers the area was economically depressed and a lot of people needed support to navigate the social security system. He has always kept that in mind and looked after people in need. "I've talked about social issues enough, now I'm doing something about it," he said.

Chris has lived in Australia for 11 years after meeting his partner Carrie, who was originally from Warrnambool.

The couple moved to Melbourne but when the kids came along decided to raise them in Warrnambool.

Chris had worked in trades as a machine tool maker but after their second child was born, Carrie took on more work and Chris turned to study to look at a new career option, studying a Diploma of Community Services at South West TAFE.

"When the traineeship came up, I spoke to people who have worked in the industry and they say WRAD is a good place to work and you get a lot of experience with the different clinicians," he said.

"I had been in trades since I was 20 and thought it was time for a change of career."

Now 44, Chris will be studying a Certificate IV in Alcohol and Other Drugs this year with genU.

"Other staff members will also be doing the course so we will be able to support one another through that," he said.

Previous trainee Stephanie Baxter has moved into a clinical role.



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- CHRIS CAMPBELL

# RUBY IN ART



A special painting of Patron Ruby Hunter, kindly donated Ruby's friend artist Bindii Cody Nappangartii Smith and with consent of Ruby's brother Eric Richards, is now proudly on display at the WRAD Health centre.

Ruby was posthumously made a Patron of WRAD Health last year, joining her late partner and fellow musician Archie Roach.

This painting serves as a living tribute, to the spirit of Ruby Hunter. Ruby was a trailblazer in the world of music and a beacon of strength, resilience and creativity and a source of inspiration for generations to come.

Ruby's brother Eric Richards endorsed the artwork, saying it reflected a deep appreciation for what his sister represents in her journey and a desire to share her legacy with the world.

Bindii is a truly gifted artist whose brushstrokes bring stories to life and WRAD Health appreciates the generosity of this donation to celebrate Ruby's enduring impact.

## AWARD FOR HAYLEY

**AOD clinician Hayley Elliott has won WRAD Health's first Dawn Bermingham award.**



The new award is a team recognition award decided by the staff of WRAD Health to recognise a fellow staff member who excels in their commitment and dedication and upholds the WRAD Health values of compassion, respect, accountability, collaboration and integrity.

Hayley is an AOD Counsellor, Rough Sleeper MDT Clinician, SAP Coordinator and Project Connect Program Clinician.

Her nominees praised her constant dedication to AOD and outreach work, describing Hayley as an outstanding ambassador for WRAD Health.

"Hayley encompasses WRAD Health's values on a daily basis, constantly carrying a full case load but always willing to support any other task," one nominee said.

"Hayley is a go-to member of the team and has forged new ground in working with homeless and vulnerable people," another added.

Hayley thanked the committee of management and the WRAD Health management and team for their support

"The whole WRAD team is like a family and we all work really well together," she said.

Dawn was WRAD Health's longest serving employee and was with the organisation since 1986 before retiring earlier this year. She stepped down from her full-time work as officer manager in 2020 but later returned and continued to work one day per week, as a part-time personal assistant supporting former CEO Geoff Soma and helping new staff.



# PEER CONNECT

Peer Connect is the new name of the former Warrnambool Addiction Recovery Program (WARP).

The name was changed in response to feedback from participants who didn't like the WARP acronym.

After a group discussion, the name Peer Connect was adopted, recognising the importance of being engaged and connected with the community and how peer support plays a role in the ongoing recovery process.

There's a great saying that the opposite of addiction is connection so that fits well with the new name.

## RECOGNISING 25 YEARS

WRAD Health's chairperson Helen Taylor has been recognised for her 25-year commitment to the organisation.

At the AGM in December, committee secretary Robert Coffey presented Helen with a framed certificate to recognise her milestone.

"Helen has given 25 years of outstanding service and dedication," Robert said. "Helen was hand-picked by John McGrath to join the Board and, along with Glenys Phillpot, has provided an important bridge between the first 13 years of then organisation and the newer committee members.

"It speaks volumes for WRAD to have her continuity of compassion and leadership. WRAD works very hard at doing the best it can and by and large it succeeds, and a lot of that is due to the guidance of Helen."

Helen has been a member of the Committee of Management while WRAD has been based at Timor Street, Fairy Street and now Merri Street.

She has been chairperson since 2006.

"We are lucky to be on a committee when she does so much work and provides such excellent leadership," Robert said.

Helen describes her time with WRAD Health as a great honour. "From humble beginnings in Timor Street, we have grown into a health centre in Merri Street which provides a large range of health services to our community. I hope that we will be able to establish the Lookout Residential Rehabilitation Centre in Warrnambool in the near future to provide the missing piece in addiction treatment in south west Victoria."



We are lucky to be on a committee when she does so much work and provides such excellent leadership"

- ROBERT COFFEY



# STUDENT AWARD

Fourth year Deakin University medical student Giancarlo Festa has been named as the winner of the 2023 Dr Sue Richardson Scholarship.

The award recognises Dr Richardson's dedicated service over the past 16 years and is presented to a fourth-year medical student on placement at the Hanbury Medical Suites.

It was presented at the annual general meeting on December 7.

In a recorded message, Giancarlo thanked Dr Richardson and the entire team at WRAD for providing a wonderful learning experience in general practice and beyond.

"I am very grateful for your guidance and support," he said. "It is clear to me the enormous positive impact the team at WRAD has on the Warrnambool community. I will carry many of your teachings, especially around mental health and substance dependence, throughout my career."

## TIME TO EXPAND?

The growth of WRAD Health as a multi-faceted health service is putting pressure on the Merri Street centre.

CEO Mark Powell has confirmed that WRAD Health is looking at expansion options to better accommodate the growth in services.

"We're expanding our comprehensive healthcare services and now offer a suite of services for a diverse range of needs," Mark said.

"That has meant our workforce has grown and we therefore need to look at how best we can accommodate that influx of people."

WRAD Health owns a parcel of land at the rear of the centre that is currently used for carparking but will look for potential infrastructure grants and create an architectural design for a new building on the site.

WRAD Health will also look at other options for expansion.

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## HAMILTON EXPANSION

WRAD Health will be providing new services in Hamilton.

While WRAD Health has previously provided pharmacotherapy services, it will now add counselling services to the regional offering.

WRAD Health is currently advertising for an AOD clinician for Hamilton.

# RUNNING FOR THE COMMUNITY

Keeping fit can be a great way to improve your outlook on life, so WRAD Health has registered for Warrnambool parkrun and is encouraging staff, clients and the community to get involved.

The connection was promoted by WRAD Health doctor Yunfei Han and is part of the centre's ongoing campaign to join with the community to promote healthy lifestyle choices.

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) has partnered with parkrun Australia to promote the health and wellbeing of staff and patients. Under this initiative, GP practices across Australia are encouraged to develop close links with their local parkrun to become parkrun practices.

Becoming a parkrun practice improves the health and wellbeing of patients through increased physical activity, skill development, friendships and socialising, mutual support and personal empowerment.

## HOMELESS CONNECTION

WRAD Health is reaching out to local people doing it tough.

Project Connect provides services to people who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness in the community, creating a much-needed link to health care.

The outreach program is funded Western Victoria PHN and aims to build a rapport with potential clients and try to help them to access medical or AOD support as required.

The service is staffed by practice nurse Emily Curran and alcohol and other drug clinician Hayley Elliott who visit places where people who are homeless or vulnerable may attend.

The program aims to engage people into comprehensive medical care through provision of a holistic approach providing the opportunity for assessment of a person's physical health needs and if required further assessment and management of drug and alcohol and/or mental health related conditions.

It is estimated that 50 people in every 10,000 are experiencing homelessness in Australia.

WRAD Health's Handbury Medical Suites offers a full range of general bulk billing medical services that are available to everyone.

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