

Loddon Mallee Mental Health Carers Network

LMMHCN



ANNUAL REPORT

Year 2022 / 2023

www.lmmhcn.org.au



loddon mallee
mental health
carers network



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Who LMMHCN are

History

In 2010 LMMHCN was formed under the facilitation and considerable support of Bendigo Health. LMMHCN had an objective of providing a connection with, and forum for, those who have mental illness and their carers.

The North West region of Victoria that the LMMHCN covers is large. It is contended that this region of Victoria is the most poorly serviced for mental health. The vast distances, low population densities, and extensive pockets of low socio-economic disadvantaged communities, all combine to form considerable challenges in mental health for this region.

LMMHCN achieved a good deal in the period 2010 to 2015 by participating in local Carers support groups, Carers conferences, and Carers forums. LMMHCN provided input to various mental health legislative reforms. Housing was identified by the group as a priority issue and a significant study was commenced into housing for mental health consumers.

Carer support groups prove difficult to sustain. Those with mental health issues, and their carers, often are enduring a battle to “keep their head above water” let alone actively participate in a support group no matter how beneficial that support may be. This formidable challenge has not deterred the numerous LMMHCN members doing great work across the region.

Today

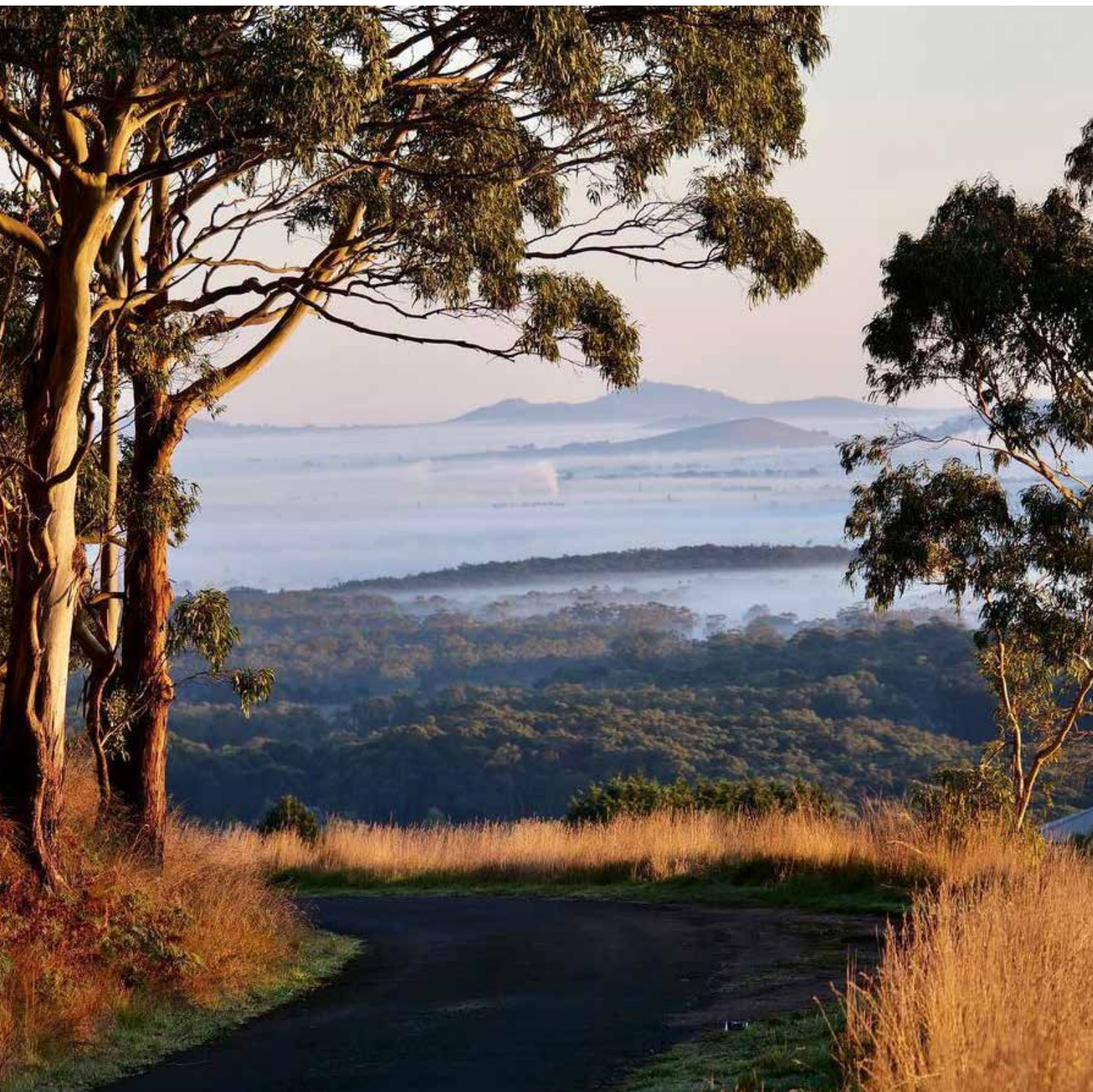
When Bendigo Health started this project, it was always intended that, after a development period, LMMHCN would become a community based independent body.

In early 2016, LMMHCN members moved to incorporation of the organization and a shift to a strictly strategic focus. Its aim is:

“To provide a strong, independent and collective mental health carer voice for Loddon Mallee region”.

The LMMHCN seeks to connect with those with mental illness and their carers, help identify their critical needs, and then work toward policy, system and process improvements. LMMHCN proposes to achieve this by working with existing government agencies and organisations within the mental health sector.

LMMHCN is governed by a Committee of Management which was formed in 2016 consisting of persons collectively with the diverse range of skills, experiences and qualities needed overall to be an effective body. These included marketing, financial, mental health qualifications and experience, political and leadership. In particular a majority needed to be carers themselves. Members come from a geographic spread across the region and a gender balance is also considered important.



Mt. Buninyong.

LMMHCN has undertaken two substantial pieces of research work for our region – one into mental health housing and the other a general survey of issues mental health carers experience. Since 2017 LMMHCN has been active and continues to pursue the recommendations from that research. It also has been active in participating in both the Victorian Government’s Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System and the Commonwealth Government’s Productivity Commission into Mental Health. The NDIS is another important matter LMMHCN has been monitoring closely.

The LMMHCN has developed a partnership with Wellways to assist in implementing the Doorways program in the Loddon Mallee area. The CoM has been advocating with Government and other agencies to establish the program in Mildura.

And this year 2023 the CoM reviewed its Vision, Mission and Values statement.

LMMHCN

Its aim is:

To provide a strong, independent and collective mental health carer voice for Loddon Mallee Region

Vision, Mission & Values

Vision Statement

- 1. To create a vibrant, sustainable organisation that will achieve the mission and vision of LMMHCN.**
- 2. For people with a mental illness to have access across the region to affordable, reliable, secure, appropriate housing options which have supports and provide upskilling in life skills.**
- 3. Strengthen relationships with networks to increase knowledge, voice, credibility, funding opportunities and influence of LMMHCN.**

Mission Statement

- Establish strong and sustainable connections to carers in the region.
- Advocate for better health and wellbeing for carers.
- Advocate that carers of people with a mental health issue are considered in the design and delivery of mental health services.
- Develop sound effective governance of the LMMHCN organisation, and one that operates efficiently.
- Source funding grants for the operation and sustainability of the organisation

Values

- Consultation
- Advocacy
- Respect
- Empathy

Chair’s Report

The annual Report for 2022/2023 outlines the constructive work that has been conducted during this year.

We have spent a good part of the year working with Wellways and the proposed doorways project. Unfortunately, with a change in government, the process that had been put into place by Ali Cupper, Mildura MP had to be reviewed when she lost her seat to Jade Benham Mildura MP. This meant we now had to reintroduce ourselves and rethink the proposal presentation. We have now been working towards another avenue to present this proposal to Government along with and supporting Wellways in their quest to establish a housing avenue in Mildura for persons who are suffering from Mental Health challenges and psychological distress. This is ongoing work.

There is no doubt that there is an ever-increasing awareness and understanding of mental health in our communities. Both Federal and State Governments are looking at better ways to house the homeless and also how to build better safe havens for people to visit. These are under discussion and constantly being built on. Some very promising announcements have been made by the government; however, we will continue to monitor and push for better Mental Health reforms.

Our relationship with key sector organisations, importantly Tandem Carers and Bendigo Health, is ongoing and we are actively seeking to align with other key sector member organisations. We must be proactive in the future to ensure our communications and treatment of issues is current with these bodies.

The composition of the LMMHCN Committee of Management (COM) is constantly changing with the loss of valuable members needing to move on; to the incoming members, who recognise the importance of the responsibility to commit to our purpose and objectives. Whilst improved recognition and understanding of mental health over the past decade is welcomed, the role of the LMMHCN is still very relevant. We must give attention to recruitment of Com Members to ensure our strength is maintained.

Our members are very adequately informed by the production of the Carers Corner produced by Liz who has once again kept up with publishing the latest information, which our communities can rely on for a source of mental health news. Thank you Liz.

It has been my privilege to Chair the LMMHCN Committee of Management during this past year being part of this team and see how dedication and commitment shown by all the members can achieve so much. I thank you all for your wonderful support and effort and look forward to continued success as we move forward.



Andrea Smith
Chair

Our Strategic Business

Strategic Plan Performance

GOAL A: For people with a mental illness to have access across the region to affordable, reliable, secure, appropriate housing options which have supports and provide upskilling in managing life skills.

- Wellways develop their housing model in our region
 - ✓ LMMHCN /Wellways worked constructively together to formulate the project of rolling out a Doorways program in the Mildura area. Submission was taken up by local MP for Mildura who presented the project in Parliament. Awaiting formal adoption of project by State Government including required funding.
- To develop and facilitate a forum in Mildura supporting Wellways Housing.
 - ✗ This has been put on hold while we reassess the best way to obtain funding for the project at Mildura. There will be a meeting with Wellways in the near future to discuss and plan a way forward.

GOAL B: Strengthen relationships with networks to increase knowledge, voice, credibility, funding opportunities and influence of LMMHCN.

- Develop strong relationship with PHN.
 - ✓ Meeting with current CEO to continue to develop relationship.
- Develop a solid relationship with relevant government members at Local, State and Federal levels.
 - ✓ As the DOORWAYS project is advanced LMMHCN has been meeting and communicating with State and Federal Members of Parliament. Closely working with MP for Mildura Ali Cupper. With the change in Government, we have had to develop new relationships with new ministers.
- Strengthen relationship with Bendigo Health Psychiatric Services
 - ✓ LMMHCN has re-established participation with Bendigo Psychiatric Services community consultation following interruption of COVID. One of our CoM members attends the bimonthly meeting with FaCES.
- Strengthen relationship with Tandem Carers
 - ✓ Some efforts made to work close with Tandem Carers and more work to be done. This year we were able to write a letter of support for Tandem in their application co-design the Family and Carer-led Centre's.

Goal C: To create a vibrant, sustainable organisation that will achieve the mission and vision of LMMHCN.

- Maintain current documentation for good governance.
 - ✓ strategic plan.
- To develop realistic goals and expectations of the committee and committee members to minimise burnout.
 - ✓ We are using Zoom far more effectively this year. This means that we minimise people having to travel huge distances to meetings.
- Secure ongoing operational funding
 - ✓ The CoM members continue to apply for funding.
- Increase CoM to 10 members in accordance with skills and diversity requirements laid out in administration guidelines.
 - ✓ Two new members on the CoM. Membership on the CoM continues to be an issue.



Sheep in the pen

Connection with Carers and Sector Organizations

A critical need for LMMHCN is to, in an ongoing manner, understand the issues that carers and those that they care for are experiencing and the policies and systems used to deliver services to them. To achieve this, LMMHCN have established formal and informal relationships with a wide range of organisations in the sector.

LMMHCN Committee of Management members are active in their local areas facilitating carer support groups. They also attend seminars and conferences, give presentations to groups in some cases, and generally keep informed with what is happening in the sector. In addition, some members work in the sector gaining first-hand knowledge of developments in the sector. All this active involvement ensures the CoM members collectively have a wealth of and up-to-date knowledge of carer issues and what is happening in the sector.

COVID has previously limited activities meetings, seminars and conferences that normally occur with LMMHCN involvement in some way. The CoM has become proficient at using Zoom as a resource to maintain relationship and connection with its members so the business of LMMHCN can continue.

Details of instances of these involvements are listed below.

Connection with Carers

- ✓ Maryborough and Districts Mental Health Carers Support Group
- ✓ Kerang Mental Health Carers Support Group
- ✓ Cohuna Mental Health Carers Support Group
- ✓ Wycheproof Drop in Centre
- ✓ Gannawarra Support Group
- ✓ Echuca Carer Support Group
- ✓ Birchip Carer Support Group

Connection with Sector Organisations

- ✓ Tandem Carers
- ✓ Bendigo Health Carer Support Services
- ✓ Murray Primary Health Network
- ✓ Bendigo Health Psychiatric Services Advisory Committee
- ✓ Family and Carer Engagement and Support Committee (FaCES)
- ✓ Carers Victoria
- ✓ Murray PHN Community Advisory Team
- ✓ Murray PHN Carer Research Project Focus Group
- ✓ Mallee Family Care Support Group
- ✓ Community Living and Respite Services, Echuca
- ✓ Southern Mallee PCP Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee meetings Southern Mallee Primary Care Partnership
- ✓ Campaspe Primary Care Partnership
- ✓ Mental Health Network, Bendigo
- ✓ East Wimmera Health
- ✓ Working to connect GP Doctors with local psychiatric nursing services.
- ✓ Cohuna Hospital Community Consultation Committee
- ✓ Responding to customer survey requests from Tandem Carers, Carers Victoria / Mental Health Victoria
- ✓ St Marys Echuca Tight Rope Walkers Mental Health Group
- ✓ Headspace Swan Hill
- ✓ Buloke Disability Support Network
- ✓ Member of the Community of Practice for Carer Support Group Facilitators



CSG Xmas 2022 .

Maryborough & District Mental Health
Carers Support Group outing.

Understanding and Learning of Mental Health Issues

- ✓ Attendance at Bendigo Health Psychiatric Department FaCES meetings
- ✓ Consumer Representation, East Wimmera Health Wycheproof Drop-in Centre, Facilitator Participation in Local Drug and Alcohol Team, Wycheproof
- ✓ Participation in consultation session at Maryborough with Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health
- ✓ Provide practical advice to local carers
- ✓ Participation questionnaire / surveys including Carers Victoria, Tandem Carers and Mental Health Victoria
- ✓ Bendigo Health Consumer Representative Forum
- ✓ Participated in video meetings with other facilitators of carer groups hosted by Carers Victoria
- ✓ Attended a video conference provided by Mental Health Australia
- ✓ Active grass roots participation in Carer Support groups e.g. organising educational and wellness workshops, special events (Carers Week, Carers Group Birthday & Xmas luncheons) and applying for funding

Sunset Contemplating



Mental Health Housing Research Project

Background

LMMHCN has continued a focus on achieving housing for those with mental health issues, particularly where the issues are chronic. This focus was formed after LMMHCN identified housing as a high priority need, then undertook research (*The Perspectives of Carers on Housing Needs and Mental Illness 2016*) which verified that need and confirmed it as the highest priority above all other needs.

Investigations

The project has proven to be most difficult. Mental health housing needs are swamped by a general housing need across our communities throughout Australia.

Further, there are plenty of examples of housing projects where housing is provided for physical and intellectual disabilities but very few where long term appropriate housing has been provided for mental health.

After identification and verification of that need and its number one priority, LMMHCN has worked hard to gain knowledge and understanding what is happening with mental health housing, particularly in our region. This in turn has led to many discussions, meetings, organising of a small seminar, attendance at other seminars, talking with service providers, builders and government departments.

It has subsequently become clear LMMHCN does not have the capacity to achieve this project on its own. The key to the process was to convince an existing agency that has the capacity to take up the challenge of undertaking a mental health housing project. LMMHCN would support the agency with assistance wherever it could with canvassing community and government support a promised role. The workshop also undertook an exercise to identify the agencies in our region best equipped with the capacity to embrace the project and drive it to the required outcome.

Seeking an Agency

The securing of the agency has been central to LMMHCN furthering the project. The project has considerable challenges not the least of which is a means of funding, distances and types of housing models and the will of an agency to take on a project that will expend resources upfront with an uncertain outcome.

The Wellways Program - A different approach

LMMHCN had previously become aware of a housing project undertaken successfully in Gippsland by Wellways which consisted of a differing approach to the proposals LMMHCN had canvassed to date.

Wellways indicated that they were prepared to adopt our region for a second stage of their program roll out. This was after LMMHCN convinced them that it was their best option as LMMHCN had excellent community connections and could greatly assist in creating a positive community environment.

The key component is to create through education, a change in community attitudes particularly by the likes of property owners, landlords and real estate agents to housing being made available for mental health tenants. Instead with the assistance of some support, those with mental health disability can be valuable tenants and in fact preferred tenants.



Sunset Echuca

A meeting to initiate the program (after delays caused by COVID restrictions) in our region was held in May 2021. The planning for the project was to be undertaken in the second part of 2021. Wellways have maintained their commitment to the project and has been working closely with LMMHCN to gain funding for it and implement it.

The DOORWAYS model is suitable for any area, but it will not remove the need for more "bricks and mortar" i.e., housing of various types that those clients with chronic mental health may avail.

The DOORWAYS Mildura project has won support of local MP Ali Cupper who read out the submission in Parliament. Currently awaiting a formal response to the submission however there is a good deal of confidence that this project will be approved, funded and immediately rolled out. The first stage is the Mildura area, but LMMHCN propose that once the program is established in this area the roll out should continue right across the region and eventually statewide.

Unfortunately, there has been a change in government and therefore M.P.'s in our area and there is a need to connect with the new M.P.'s to develop a relationship to continue to promote and advocate for the project.

Over Last 4 years with parliamentary inquiry into homelessness and mental health there is an aim to increase social housing. Funding for 5000-6000 homes with 2,000 for mental health specifically. Haven and Common Ground have developed models that are purpose built with apartment build with support. High density living is the model that the Department is focusing on. Haven model linked only to people who have funding. Not sure about types of support is unclear. Homelessness and housing are recognised as important but needs to have support. The Department is more interested in developing social public housing, and not so much other programs. Wellways supports more single men and are not considered priorities by the government at the moment and there is a need to develop a different funding model in conjunction with Wellways.

LMMHCN proposes to remain steadfast with its goal to achieve mental health housing and will continue its efforts toward that goal in the 2023/2024 year ahead.

Carer Consultation Project

Research

In 2016 LMMHCN undertook a survey of mental health carers from across our region. An impressive number of 220 carers participated making it one of the most significant surveys in mental health ever carried out in our region, resulting in the report ("**LMMHCN Carer Consultation 2016**")

The needs of mental health carers is of particular local significance, with data showing that the Loddon Mallee Region has a higher number of registered mental health clients (16.5 per 1000) compared to state figures (11.3 per 1000) (DHHS, 2016).

The Consultation report highlighted a number of opportunities for improving supports for both carers and those being cared for.

Taskforce

In 2017 LMMHCN established a taskforce to work on the report recommendations and advance to developing solutions and then actioning them. The methodology was to bring together representatives from each of the critical organisations in the sector to form a relatively small but knowledgeable and skilled taskforce team. Participants were from Bendigo Health Psychiatric Services, Bendigo Health Carer Support Services, Murray Primary Health Networks, Carers Victoria, Golden City Support Services, State Department of Health and Human Services and a consumer representative. Organisations were prompt in agreeing to participate when invited.

The project had two objectives:

- To activate the opportunities the Carer Consultation Report highlighted for improving supports for the carer and those being cared for.

To establish a model of methodology for future similar projects. This objective was achieved with the final report detailing the methodology. COVID has greatly restricted further progress being made on actions arising from the Taskforce; however, some items were achieved.

1. Support for Mental Health Carers.

This has been achieved in several ways as members are represented at Primary Care Partnerships throughout the region giving feed back to the committees on issues relating to carers.

LMMHCN is a representative on the Bendigo Health Psychiatric Services FaCES consultative committee and has input into the services that are provided by Bendigo Health for Mental Health and Support Services for Carers in Bendigo and our region. LMMHCN has also been part of the education program for the professional staff at Bendigo Health talking about the issues relating to carers and identifying how the systems can be improved.

This work is to continue.

2. Advocacy.

Members will support other carers and problem solve systemic issues as they arise. There are several support groups supported by members of LMMHCN.

PHN has been very supportive and promoted the Taskforce. They have been active in supporting the GPs and developing a pathway to identify patients'/ carers not withstanding during COVID-19; it has been difficult to meet and communicate.

This work is to continue.

3. Information sharing.

The LMMHCN has been active in updating the website and producing a monthly electronic newsletter. New developments/policies and information is shared in trying to keep carers updated. A poster developed for Doctors Medical Clinics and surgeries will be reissued.

Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health

LMMHCN had previously been greatly encouraged by the potential of the Royal Commission initiated by the Victorian Government and contributed to with a substantial report by LMMHCN. The final report was released last year, and it did not disappoint. Housing is a key issue identified for Mental Health and funding has been made available by the State Government to tackle this issue.

During the year Mental Health was front and centre in announcements by Governments and a task for LMMHCN in the coming year is to refresh and get a good understanding of the post pandemic Mental Health landscape in Victoria, in particular the Royal Commission outcomes. The State Government has commenced action on the Royal Commission recommendations, and one is to establish Regional Boards to assist in the structuring of Mental Health Services in the regions. LMMHCN expect to feed into that process.

Governance and Administration

Committee of Management

The CoM consists of persons collectively with the diverse range of skills, experiences and qualities needed overall to be an effective body. These included business, financial, mental health qualifications and experience, political and leadership. In particular a majority needed to be carers themselves. Members come from a geographic spread across the region and a gender balance is also considered important.

The Committee of Management are:

Andrea Smith - Chair (Nullawil)

Mental Health Carer for many years
Professional qualifications in community health
Professional worker in hospitals and aged care organisations
Extensive community involvement record

Liz Howard – Deputy Chair (Maryborough)

Mental Health Carer for many years
Successfully established and leader of Carer Support Group
Experience small business management
Extensive community involvement record

Anne Graham - Treasurer (Cohuna)

Mental Health Carer for many years
Nursing career / hospital Director of Nursing many years
Hospital Board Member
Extensive community involvement record

Mark Boyce – Secretary (Kerang)

Work in Mental Health for over 40 years as Nurse and Chaplain.
Extensive involvement in the community.

John Forrest - (Swan Hill)

Past experience as Mental Health Carer
Engineering career based in rural areas 20 yrs.
Federal Member of Parliament 20 yrs.

Pam Lingenberg (Kerang)

Mental Health Carer for many years
Nursing career 40 yrs.
Successfully established and leader of Carer Support Group
Qualifications community health, mental health support worker.,
Extensive community involvement record

Helen Chaston (Swan Hill)

Kate Roberts (Mildura)

Carers have busy and often stressful lives. When they attend to their families, their employment, their own wellbeing and their caring role, there is little time left to contribute to the work of LMMHCN. The CoM therefore respects the load that most carers carry and allow the flexibility for members to withdraw (have leave of absence) for periods to attend to their personal responsibilities.

Other new members for 2023 include Sandra Goode, Helen Chaston and Kate Roberts. Sandra Goode had to resign due to health concerns.

The role LMMHCN plays in this current environment has never been so important. LMMHCN has won respect in the sector and needs to maintain its standing. The calibre of members of the Committee of Management is imperative to ensure LMMHCN is a vigorous fixture in the sector.

Meetings in person of the CoM were restricted due to COVID however three were held, one at Cohuna and the other two by Zoom video conferencing. A number of other Zoom discussions were held on various topics in particular the DOORWAYS project. Meetings being held at different locations across our region allow Committee Members to understand and appreciate the regional perspective of LMMHCN and the regional diversity. All scheduled meetings obtained a quorum with the average attendance of members at meetings being satisfactory although down on other years. The higher numbers of apologies could be attributed to Members getting the flu (see below)

Year	Average Attendance at CoM Meetings
2016 / 2017	74%
2017 / 2018	78%
2018 / 2019	74%
2019 / 2020	86%
2020 / 2021	85%
2021 / 2022	73%
2022 / 2023	75%

Honorary Advisers

Honorary Advisers are LMMHCN members that have particular skills and the interest to directly contribute to the CoM work but not be CoM Members They could be called on from time to time and asked for their advice, opinion or input to a particular matter where they may have relevant skills or experience. (E.g., marketing, legal, administration, political, industry knowledge, I.T., and leadership.

In the future LMMHCN need to be more active in drawing on their valuable skills and knowledge.

The Honorary Advisers are:

- Kerry Meiers
- Leah Taaffe
- Jason Minter
- Mike Bruty
- Sandra Goode

'A morning stroll' by Sarah Byrne.
Morning Glory.
Marigolds. Flowering Gum.



Financial Report

BALANCE SHEET 2022/2023

Asset

Current Assets

Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$11,350
Accounts Receivable and Other Debtors	\$0
Inventory	\$0

Non Current Assets

Property Plant and Equipment - office equipment	\$ 0
Accounts Receivable and other Debtors	\$0

Total Assets	\$ 11,350
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Liabilities

Current Liabilities

Trade Creditors and other payables	\$0
Short Term Borrowings	\$0

Non-Current Liabilities

Long Term Borrowings	\$0
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Equity

Nett Worth	\$ 11,350
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INCOME STATEMENT FOR YEAR END 30 JUNE 2023

Income

Grant	\$ 0
Other	\$ 0

Total Income	\$0
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Expenses

Administration

Meeting expenses - meals/accommodation	\$ 1021
Meeting expenses - travel	\$ 400
Stationery / postage / post office box	\$ 673
Insurance premium (premiums paid in 20/21 for 21/22)	\$1747
Annual Report Printing	\$ 554
Website	\$ 638

Total Expenditure	\$ 5033
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Income Deficit for Year 22/23	\$ 5033
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Cash Balance as at 30/6/22	\$16383
income less expenditure 22/23 year	- \$5350

Cash Balance 30/6/2023	\$ 11350
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Communication

Since the Covid restrictions have ended our CoM has continued to use Zoom and Face to Face meetings to continue to meet together and since Covid there is a far greater up take for using Zoom.

Our Carers Corner E-newsletter continues to be an important point of contact and information sharing in the area.

Website

LMMHCN maintains a website, Facebook page and a monthly E-newsletter- Carers Corner.

Provision and maintenance of a website can be a significant workload, and as an organisation of volunteers, Committee of Management is careful to not overreach our ability to resource our activities. It has therefor been important to be clear with the objectives of our website and limit its use to those objectives which are:

- For carers/ service providers to know what we do
- For carers to find help – access appropriate information
- For carers/service providers to subscribe to LMMHCN membership
- To provide up-to-date information on what is happening for/with mental health carers.

We launched a new website in October 2020. The website is an important source of information for carers to find local support services and ensures that we utilise support across the caring community and keep information current. It also allows us to store documents to be accessible for the Committee of Management.

Carers can also link up with a Carer Support Group in their area or make contact via direct email to the website administrator.

The new look website has been very well received.

Members E Newsletter – Carers Corner

Carers Corner is designed and edited by a committee member and emailed to all subscribing members every month via Mail Chimp. We use this avenue to inform members on current information for local events, news from carer organisations, government policy updates, carer support group activities and any good news story which is relevant to carers in the Loddon Mallee Region.

- Carers Corner E-Newsletter is now showcased monthly on the LMMHCN Facebook page and shared to Community Groups scattered around the Loddon Mallee Region who in turn share it to their followers and is now reaching an average of 10,500 people per months; this promotes LMMHCN widely.
- Regular feedback indicates readers find Carers Corner very informative.
- Relationships with other mental health and carer organisations are strengthened by sharing news and services.



Facebook

It is important that we continue to expand our presence on social media. Digital technology plays a big part in providing access to support and for social connection for carers and families.

LMMHCN Facebook page is monitored daily and allows us the communication platform to reach many vulnerable and hidden carers. We have noticed a shift toward health and carer organisations, workers and consumers liking the posts with many sharing and/or favourably commenting on the page.

- Followers are able to private message on the site or make contact with a direct link to the website and send an email; this is relayed immediately to the administrator who will reply within 8 hours.

This Page: Murray River Charm.

Back Cover: Wildflowers, Charlton.



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carers network

