

# Loddon Mallee Mental Health Carers Network

LMMHCN

## ANNUAL REPORT

Year 2023 / 2024

[www.lmmhcn.org.au](http://www.lmmhcn.org.au)



**loddon mallee**  
**mental health**  
**carers network**





# Contents

**Who LMMHCN are**

History.....	1
Today .....	1
LMMHCN Committee of Managemnet.....	2
Vision, Mission and Values .....	2
Chair’s Report .....	3

**Our Strategic Business**

Our Strategic Plan .....	4
Connection with Carers and Sector Organizations.....	6
Mental Health Housing Research Project.....	9
Carer Consultation Project.....	11
Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System .....	11

**Governance and Administration**

Committee of Management.....	12
Honorary Advisers .....	13
Financial Report .....	14
Communication .....	16

LMMHCN Annual Report 2023 / 2024 was adopted at the  
LMMHCN AGM, August 2024.

Cover Image: Seven Creeks-Strathbogie  
On this page: Mt Buangor State Park







Howqua River - Photo Ern Green

## 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 organisation 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.

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 Services 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.



In 2023 the CoM reviewed its Vision, Mission and Values statement. And we continue to use the Vision, Mission, and Values statement as our guiding principles to achieve our goals. This year has in particular been difficult. The change in government and the two reviews involving housing and mental health has meant that the project with Wellways has encountered some roadblocks and a reviewing of our involvement with the project. Meeting with Wellways earlier in the year it was suggested by them that we use philanthropic resources to fund our project. We have at this time not been able to progress this.

Our experience within the Mallee continues to reinforce the need for long term sustainable housing in the region and we need to continue to advocate for and fund the Wellways project.

## LMMHCN Committee of Management

**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 Report

The Annual Report for 2023/2024 outlines the constructive work that has been conducted during the year.

This year we have kept in communications with Wellways and are still establishing new plans with them to move forward with the Doorways program within our Loddon Mallee region. Housing has always been our priority project but due to changes in funding directions, we have had to rethink our plan.

Over the last few years, the State and Federal Government have become more active in the Mental Health landscape, with the set-up of the Carer Led Hubs and the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health Services. Slowly and gradually a lot of these have been introduced. We shall continue to monitor these improvements.

Once again Carers Corner has continued every month giving our carers a comprehensive insight into what is changing and where to go for help and assistance if needed. We thank our Deputy Chair Liz for continued dedication and hard work to this very valuable monthly read.

LMMHCN relationship with PHN, Tandem Carers and Bendigo Health continues in a strong position. Many of the members of these organisations have been guests at our meetings during the past year, gaining a better insight into the difficulties experienced by our regional and rural carers.

We have welcomed new members to our Committee this year but still have a few vacancies to fill, with advertising on our website we hope to fill these in the near future. The committee is hardworking and the holder of a seat comes with a responsibility to commit to our purpose and objectives.

This has been a most interesting year, and yet our members were able to meet the demands, (with the proficient use of Zoom,) we have been able to hold our meetings, and progress our activities. The future for the LMMHCN to progress with our advocacy work is looking positive.

I am very proud to have been in the chair for this last twelve months and witness the good work that has been accomplished. Without the dedication and commitment of our committee shown by all members, so much could not have been achieved.

I thank you all for your wonderful efforts and look forward to another year of 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.
  - ✗ With the change in Government and the adoption of the Mental Health Review and the Housing Review, Government is now focusing its attention on adopting the review recommendations and our ability to obtain funding for this project is being hampered. And in conjunction with Wellways there is now a plan being developed to look at other funding methods.
- 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.



Historic Bridge, Campaspe River, Resedale

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

- Maintain current documentation for good governance.
    - ✓ This year we reviewed our strategic plan and made changes that more reflect our 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.
- Historic Bridge, Campaspe River, Resedale.



## Connection with Carers and Sector Organisations

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

### 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

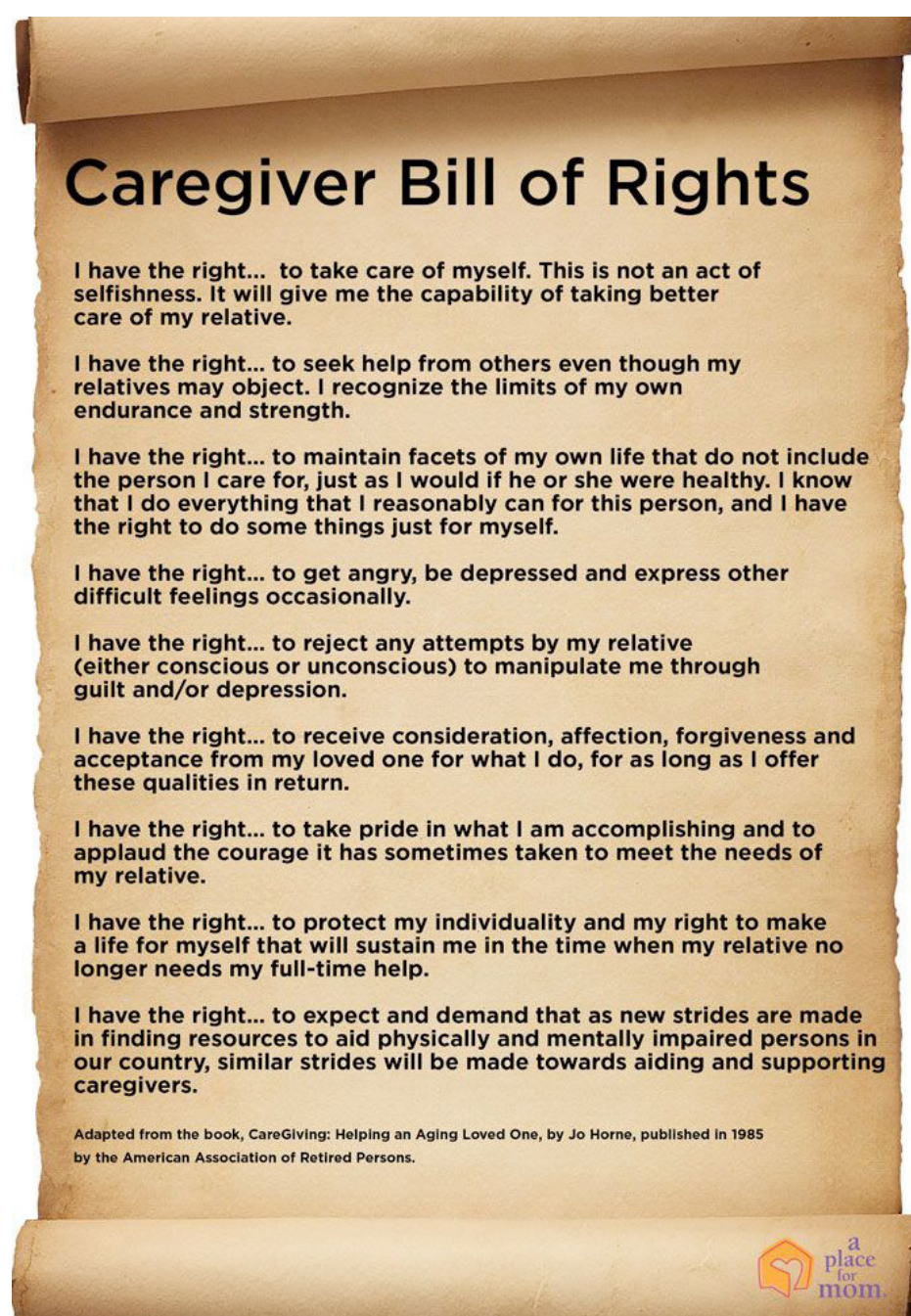


1. Don't stress  
2. CSG Mosaic Workshop 2023  
3. Carers Week luncheon 2024



## 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



## 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 of 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.

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.



*Abandoned house in Beechworth*

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. With the change in government and it's focus on the review of housing in the state and the mental health review has meant the project has come across difficulties with trying to gain support for this through government agencies.

Over the 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. The Haven model is linked to people who have a funding level of support is unclear. Homelessness and housing are recognised as important but needs to have support services in place. 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 2024/2025 year ahead.**

## Carer Consultation Project

In 2016 LMMHCN undertook a survey of mental health cares from across our region. It highlighted that Loddon Mallee Region had a higher number of registered mental health clients compared to state figures and it highlighted a number of opportunities for improving supports for both carers and those being cared for.

In 2017 a task force was established to work on the report recommendations and advance developing solutions including the goals of LMMHCN. The LMMHCN continues to work towards these goals so that the provision of support and care in the Region is developed and enhanced for both carers and those being cared for.

## Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health Services

LMMHCN CoM are encouraged by the report handed down by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health Services and contributed to with a substantial report by LMMHCN. The final report was released in 2021, 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 unfortunately the Wellways project is not considered a priority at this time.



# 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 (Buloke)

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/ Communications (Central Goldfields)

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.

### Pam Lingenberg (Gannawarra)

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

### Kate Roberts (Mildura)

### Jo Pallant (Bendigo)

### Lisa Hennessy (Central Goldfields)

### Gail Allen (Bendigo)

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.

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 or via zoom have been difficult this year. There have been 5 meetings this year and one meeting didn't have a quorum and one meeting had to be postponed and rescheduled. Zoom continues to prove useful. It allows people to attend meetings and without the difficulty of travel.

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%
2023 / 2024	50%

## 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
- Jason Minter
- Mike Bruty
- Sandra Goode



# Financial Report

## BALANCE SHEET 2023/2024

Asset	\$0
Current Assets	\$0
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$4211
Accounts Receivable and Other Debtors	\$0
<b>Non Current Assets</b>	
Property Plant and Equipment	\$ 0
Accounts Receivable and other Debtors	\$0
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$ 4211</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>	
Current Liabilities	\$0
Trade Creditors and other payables	\$0
<b>Equity</b>	
<b>Nett Worth</b>	<b>\$4211</b>

## INCOME STATEMENT FOR YEAR END 30 JUNE 2024

<b>Income</b>	
Grants	\$ 0
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	
<b>Administration</b>	
Meeting expenses - meals/accommodation	\$ 0
Travel/Fuel Cards	\$ 300
Business Cards / Postage	\$ 230.68
Insurance	\$3154.79
Website	\$ 2728
Annual Report Printing	\$ 504
Stationery / Postage	\$ 221.50
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$ 7138.97</b>
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>\$ 7138.97</b>
<b>BALANCE</b>	<b>\$4210.97</b>
<b>Cash balance 30/06/23</b>	<b>\$11349.94</b>
<b>Income deficit</b>	<b>- \$ 7138.97</b>
<b>Cash Balance 30/06/24</b>	<b>\$ 4210.97</b>

Photo: Kyneton Botanical Gardens





## Communication

*In 2023/24 CoM has continued to use Zoom for meetings as well as face to face, however, there is a far greater up take for using Zoom.*

### Website

A member of the CoM maintains the website, Facebook page and editor of the monthly E-newsletter- Carers Corner all of which are important points of contact for information sharing.

Maintaining the LMMHCN 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 therefore been important to be clear with the objectives of our website, social media and newsletter to 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 showcase events for carers in the LM Region
- To provide up-to-date information on what is happening for/with mental health carers.

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

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

### Members E Newsletter – Carers Corner

Carers Corner is designed and edited by a member of the CoM 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 shared by carer organisations, government policy updates and media alerts, 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. During the year of 2022 – 2023, the newsletter was reaching an average of 10,500 people per month in the current year it is now reaching an average of 15,000; this favourably promotes LMMHCN widely.
- Regular feedback indicates readers find Carers Corner very informative.
- Relationships with other mental health and carer organisations are also strengthened by sharing their news and the services they provide.

### 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 by a CoM member which allows us the communication platform to reach many vulnerable and hidden carers. Followers are able to private message via messenger or make contact through a direct link to the website to send an email; this is relayed immediately to the administrator who will reply within 8 hours.



*Cheviot Tunnel-Dindi*





*This Page: Cavehill Creek misty morning  
Back Cover: Cave Hill Creek - Raglan*





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**mental health**  
**carers network**

