

KOOOWEE CONNECT Newsletter

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November/ December 2025



Kooweeup
REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICE



Bayside Health is Ready for 2026

From 1 January 2026, Bayside Health will begin caring for more than 1.2 million people, bringing together five respected health services — including Kooweeup Regional Health Service — to deliver seamless, high-quality care across our region, from Koo Wee Rup and surrounding communities to metropolitan Melbourne, Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula, and through to Phillip Island, Bass Coast, and South Gippsland. Local Care Groups will ensure strong community connections and continuity of care.

Please see Page 18 for full story.

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A Word from Leadership

Aileen Thoms

Interim Chief Executive Officer



As we close off 2025 and a historic moment in time for Kooweeup Regional Health Service, I want to take the opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to all our staff, Managers, Executive team, and our Board of Directors. I have been most appreciative of the unwavering support, trust, and shared commitment that have been pivotal for me over this year as Interim CEO.

This year has been transformative, marked by the work towards achieving a successful Bayside Health merger on 1st January 2026. This is an important milestone that strengthens our ability to deliver exceptional, compassionate care and innovation for the Koo Wee Rup and district community.

I have enjoyed the CEO leadership role, and have listened carefully to the questions, suggestions, and advice that have been instrumental in bringing us together into a new unified identity. I know there will be more questions in the future that we will endeavour to tackle.

At our AGM, we welcomed the Hon Martin Foley, new Board Chair of Bayside Health, and he shared the vision of greater continuity of care for our communities, closer to home, in a more connected health system. Kushal Shah, KRHS Board Chair, thanked the outgoing Board members, Exec, and the staff at Kooweeup Regional Health Service for their achievements and commitment to the health care of this community.



L-R: Hon Martin Foley (Board Chair - Bayside Health) Aileen Thoms (Interim CEO - KRHS) and Kushal Shah (Board Chair - KRHS) after the AGM

A Word from Leadership

Our dedicated teams will continue delivering the same outstanding service, while patients benefit from improved access to the right care, at the right time, in the right place.

Before Christmas, we were delighted to welcome Adam Horsburgh, the new CEO of Bayside Health, to KRHS. Adam met with our Executive team, managers, and staff, toured our facilities, and even joined in the festive celebrations.

We are also delighted to extend congratulations to Louise Sparkes, CEO of GSHS. Louise will lead the Regional Care Group, which includes Kooweeup, Wonthaggi (BCH), and Leongatha (GSHS). Importantly, local leadership remains a priority—our executive team and I will continue to ensure the retention of local knowledge, expertise, and continuity for both staff and patients.

I understand that change brings a unique mix of benefits and stressors. Positive change can strengthen clinical outcomes, improve patient experience, modernise systems, and introduce new technologies or models of care that make work safer and more efficient. We can also be energised and build capability. This opportunity will enable us to grow, staff learn new skills, and adapt to evolving community needs. However, change can also create stressors such as increased workload during transitions, uncertainty about new roles or processes, and pressure to maintain high-quality care while adapting to unfamiliar systems. These demands can affect your well-being. We want to continue to provide support to you and your teams need to navigate this transition with confidence and kindness. Please reach out to your Managers or our **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**. To access the service, you can either call **1300 687 327** or book an appointment on the website www.convergeinternational.com.au.

Leading up to the festive period, we had some personnel changes as we farewelled DON, Brenda Birch, who is taking up new adventures. Brenda is planning to undertake her coxswain's course and go sailing.

We welcome Barb Nicol into the DON role. Barb has been in the DDON role and brings great skills, knowledge, and experience to the role.

We have been actively recruiting and welcome many new staff to a wide range of roles, of whom will feature in this edition. Please make them feel welcome.

As we move into this new chapter, you will receive the new Bayside newsletter, which will provide you with lots of resources, including the links to the new website and staff portal. If you need help accessing this, please ask.

Wishing you all a wonderful New Year, peace, and happiness to you and your families.



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Our People – Welcome Onboard!



Zachariah Ellins (Physiotherapist)

I recently joined Kooweeup Hospital as a Physiotherapist.

I completed my physiotherapy studies at Federation University in Gippsland, and along the way, I worked as a disability support worker for boys with ASD.

That role gave me some amazing experiences, from helping a client become a surf lifesaver to running a basketball program for neurodivergent children.

I'm most excited about joining Kooweeup Hospital to work with an experienced and passionate team, supporting our community and helping the most vulnerable live to their fullest potential.

A little fun fact about me: I'm passionate about fitness, with experience in powerlifting, and I recently ran a half-marathon!



Maddison Lambert (Occupational Therapist)

I started my career as a personal carer, then completed a diploma in nursing and worked as an enrolled nurse in the community.

Inspired by occupational therapists I met along the way, I returned to university to complete a Bachelor of Occupational Therapy.

I love that occupational therapy is such a broad field, helping people regain function in the daily tasks that matter most to them.

I'm most excited about joining Kooweeup Hospital because of the variety the role offers and the many learning opportunities – from aged care to community and acute care.

As my first role as an occupational therapist, I know this experience will be invaluable.

A little fun fact about me: I enjoy baking and trying out new recipes in my free time!

Our People

Farewell and Best Wishes to Brenda

In December, we farewelled Brenda Birch, Director of Nursing, as she concluded her time with Kooweerup Regional Health Service.

Over the past 15 months, Brenda provided strong and steady leadership, representing KRHS across key Bayside Health transition workstreams and building capability within our management team.

Brenda's commitment to high-quality care, along with the collaborative, engaged, and learning-focused culture she fostered, has left a lasting impact and positioned our service well as we move forward with Bayside Health.

As Brenda embarks on her next chapter — including tackling new adventures such as completing a Coxswain course — we extend our warmest thanks and wish her every success in the journey ahead.



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Our People

Bright Beards, Big Impact: Brian's Movember Challenge

Last November, our **Youth & Community Development Officer, Brian Harlow**, brought some extra colour to Kooweeup! Brian coloured his beard a different colour every day during November to raise awareness and funds for men's health.

Thanks to the generous support of our staff and community, Brian raised \$1,115 this year, building on last year's impressive \$1,095.

Since 2003, Movember has funded over 1,250 men's health projects, supporting mental health, suicide prevention, and prostate and testicular cancer research.

Check out Brian's colourful beard journey below and join us in celebrating his incredible effort!



Celebrating World Kindness Day

In November, we celebrated World Kindness Day at Kooweerup Regional Health Service (KRHS), recognising that kindness truly works at KRHS every day.

Our staff show care and compassion not just to each other, but also to our residents and the wider community.

To say thank you, everyone working that day was treated to a free coffee and a delicious slice, proudly served by Tilly's CUP.

A big thank you to our incredible staff. Your kindness and dedication make KRHS a special place for all!



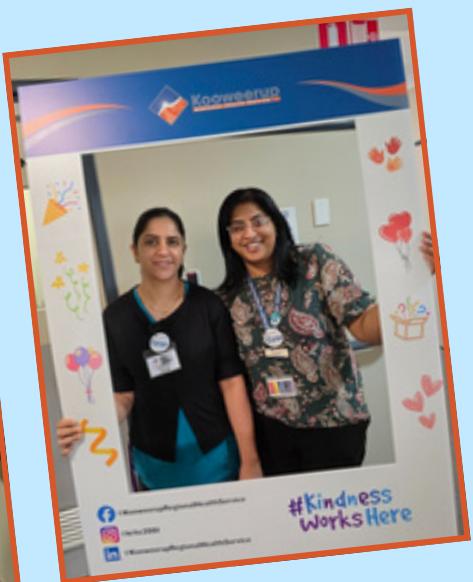
Kindness Works Here

In November, staff and some of our wonderful consumers across all KRHS facilities joined in to celebrate World Kindness Day with our “Kindness Works Here” selfie frame. The photos captured the smiles, teamwork, and compassion that make KRHS feel like one big family.

From our Executive Team to every staff member, kindness is at the heart of everything we do — supporting each other, listening, helping, and caring for our community. At KRHS, kindness isn't just in words, it's in action!



Kindness Works Here



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A Warm Welcome to Bayside Health CEO

In December, we had the pleasure of welcoming Adjunct Prof Adam Horsburgh, CEO of Bayside Health, to Kooweeup Regional Health Service (KRHS).

During his visit, Adam met with our Interim CEO, Executive Team, managers, and staff, toured our facilities, and even joined in some of the Christmas fun.

It was a wonderful opportunity to connect and share our work, and we look forward to 2026 and the new opportunities that being part of Bayside Health will bring for our community.



KRHS Annual General Meeting 2025

In December 2025, Kooweeup Regional Health Service (KRHS) held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the Eco House Community Room. The meeting began with a Welcome to Country delivered by proud Bunurong and Palawa woman, Jillian West.

The AGM provided an opportunity to reflect on the year and hear updates from Board Chair Kushal Shah, Interim CEO Aileen Thoms, and CFO Ragul Karun, while celebrating the achievements of our service and people. We were also pleased to hear from The Hon Martin Foley, Board Chair of Bayside Health, who shared insights into the future opportunities and benefits of being part of Bayside Health.



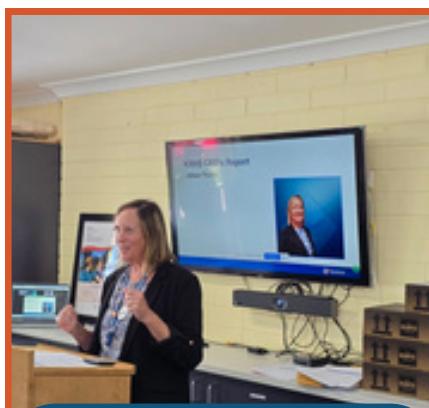
Jillian West delivering the Welcome to Country



Kushal Shah, KRHS Board Chair, addressing the AGM



The Hon Martin Foley,
Bayside Health Board Chair



Aileen Thoms, KRHS Interim CEO,
addressing the AGM



Ragul Karun, KRHS CFO,
presenting the financial report

The meeting included a guest address from Jacinta Allen, State Manager at Dementia Australia, who joined via Zoom and highlighted the important work underway to support a Dementia Friendly KRHS.

Jenny Bayliss (Manager – Volunteers and Leisure and Lifestyle) and Bianca Bow (Nurse Unit Manager – Killara) presented KRHS Dementia Care, sharing how KRHS is becoming a more dementia-friendly service, supported by practical examples of inclusive care, environments, and everyday practices.



Jenny and Bianca presenting how KRHS became a dementia-friendly service



KRHS Annual General Meeting 2025

A special congratulations to the staff recognised through our Service Awards — your dedication and commitment to our community are truly appreciated. Awards were presented to staff in recognition of their service spanning 10 to 40 years. We thank our community, partners, staff, and volunteers for their ongoing support and look forward to the year ahead.



A Magical Christmas Visit at KRHS

In December, Kooweerup Regional Health Service was filled with festive cheer when Santa Claus, Mrs Claus, and their team paid a special visit ahead of Christmas.

They spent time with our staff, volunteers, and residents, sharing smiles, laughter, and plenty of Christmas joy.

The visit created many wonderful moments, and our cameras captured some of the festive fun to enjoy and remember.



Celebrating Together: KRHS End of Year Celebration

In December, the KRHS family came together to celebrate at our End of Year Party, marking a wonderful way to close out the year.

It was great to see our Board Chair, Executive Team, staff, volunteers, and Community Advisory Committee (CAC) members all come together to connect and enjoy a well-earned break.

The event was filled with smiles, laughter, festive cheer, delicious food, fun games, and great company.

Moments like these remind us of the strong connections and supportive culture that make KRHS such a special place.

Thank you to everyone who joined us and helped make the celebration so memorable.

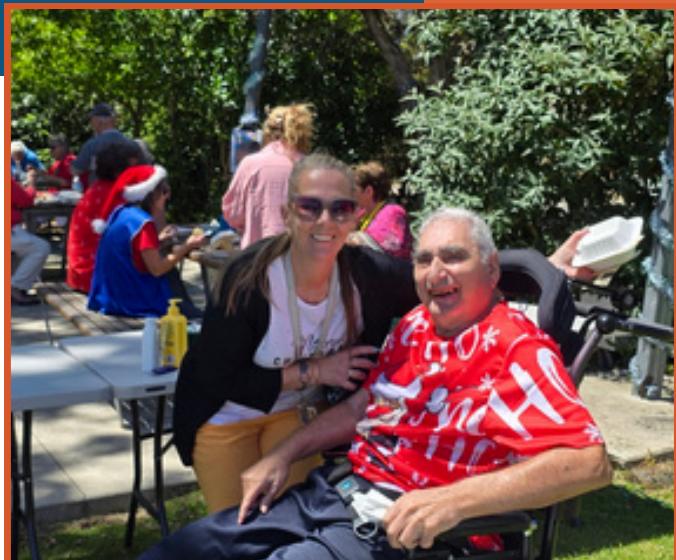


Celebrating Together: KRHS End of Year Celebration



Around KRHS

Celebrating Together: KRHS End of Year Celebration



Celebrating Together: KRHS End of Year Celebration



Big Picture Updates

Bayside Health is ready for 2026

As 2025 draws to a close, we are excited to share that Bayside Health will begin caring for more than 1.2 million people across Melbourne and Victoria's south from 1 January 2026.

The creation of Bayside Health is one of the most significant developments in Victoria's public health sector in the past decade.

It brings together five respected health services — Alfred Health, Bass Coast Health, Gippsland Southern Health Service, Kooweeup Regional Health Service, and Peninsula Health — to deliver seamless, high-quality care across our region, from Koo Wee Rup and surrounding communities to metropolitan Melbourne, Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula, and through to Phillip Island, Bass Coast, and South Gippsland.

Strong governance and local care groups

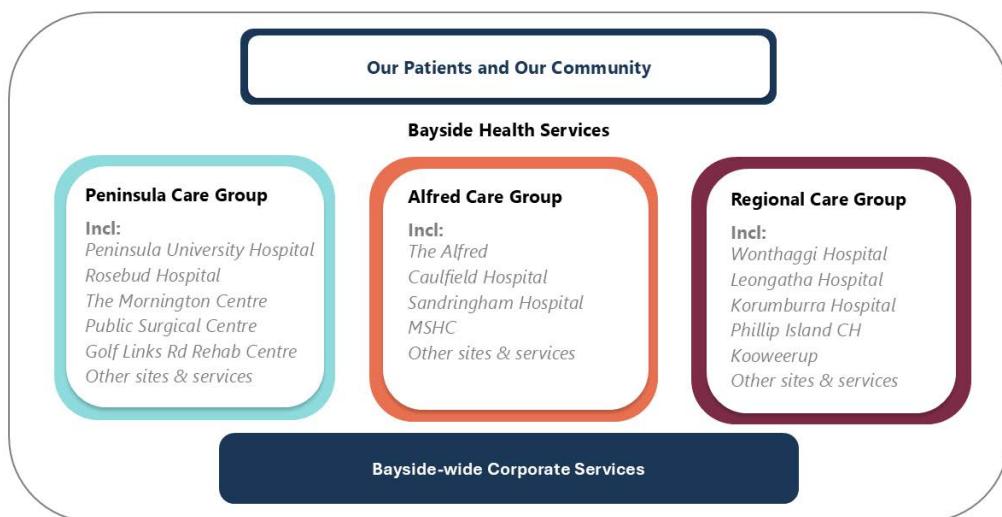
The new Bayside Health Board, announced by the Minister for Health in October, includes strong regional and First Nations representation.

In November, we welcomed Adjunct Professor Adam Horsburgh as Chief Executive to lead Bayside Health through its formative years.

Healthcare is local and personal. To maintain strong community connections, three local Care Groups — Alfred, Peninsula, and Regional — have been established, each led by a Care Group CEO. This structure supports local leadership, clinical expertise, and continuity of care for staff and patients.

The Care Group CEOs are:

- Louise Sparkes, current CEO of Gippsland Southern Health Service, is leading the Regional Care Group
- Adj Prof Simone Alexander, leading the Alfred Care Group
- Adj Prof Helen Cooper, leading the Peninsula Care Group



Supporting Health & Wellbeing

Celebrating a Year of Health Promotion at KRHS

This has been a strong year for Health Promotion at KRHS, marked by meaningful progress in prevention, partnerships, and community connection.

Throughout the year, we focused on:

Putting Mental Wellbeing First

We championed mental wellbeing through initiatives that strengthen connection, resilience, and help-seeking—supporting our staff and community to feel connected and supported.



Making healthy eating and Active Living Easy

From children to older adults, we promoted simple, practical ways to move more every day—reinforcing those small actions add up to better health.



Advancing Equity and Inclusion

We made strong progress on the KRHS Diversity Action Plan, embedding inclusive, culturally safe approaches across our health promotion work.



Powering Up Partnerships

Collaboration was key. Working with our local council, schools, and community organisations helped us align efforts and maximise impact.



Growing Well Together

Collaboration was key. Working with our local council, schools, and community organisations helped us align efforts and maximise impact.



Dr. Osman Ali (Health Promotion Coordinator)



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Supporting Health & Wellbeing

Final Forget Me Not Café for 2025

In November, the final Forget Me Not Café for 2025 was held at the Hewitt Eco House community room, ending the year with a joyful Christmas celebration. The event brought together familiar faces from Killara, Western Port Unit, and the wider community, along with guests from Mecwacare and Care Connect.

The room was filled with festive cheer, with Jane Coupe leading Christmas carols, Lachie McKay performing on the piano accordion, and participants joining in by playing bells and singing along. Guests also enjoyed a delicious spread of cakes, sandwiches, fruit, and Christmas favourites, including mince pies, shortbread, and Christmas cake.

Thank you to everyone who joined the Forget Me Not Café throughout the year. We look forward to seeing you again at the next Café on 27 January 2026.



Forget Me
Not Café

Life with Our Residents

Lighting Up KRHS: Diwali Celebrations

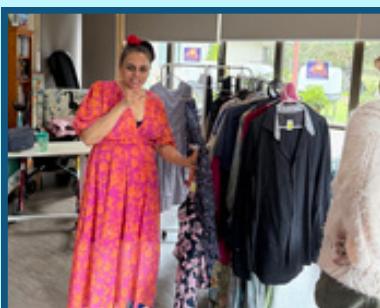
Residents Eve and Joyce, along with staff across the facility, took part in the Diwali celebrations.



Celebrating Style and Community at KRHS

In November, KRHS hosted the Koo Wee Rup Lions Op Show, who ran a fabulous fashion show for our residents. It was a fantastic success, thanks to our amazing resident models!

On behalf of the Leisure & Lifestyle team, we extend a big thank you to Mary and the Lions Club for donating the proceeds from the sales to support much-needed resources at KRHS.



Life with Our Residents

Honouring Remembrance Day at KRHS

Residents at KRHS participated in the Remembrance Day service, contributing by reading poems and laying the wreath, paying tribute to those who served and remembering their sacrifices.



U Bute Ukulele Brings Music to KRHS

In the first week of December, the U Bute Ukulele group performed for residents during Happy Hour, filling the room with music, laughter, and festive cheer.



Life with Our Residents

KRHS Residents Enjoy Christmas Lights Tour

A few residents joined a night-time Christmas light tour around Pakenham, enjoying the festive decorations and holiday spirit. The evening was filled with smiles and cheer for all who attended.



Spreading Christmas Cheer at KRHS

A special December visit from St John the Baptist Primary School, Koo Wee Rup saw students fill KRHS with music, singing Christmas carols and bringing smiles to our residents.



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Many Hands, One Heart: Celebrating Our Incredible Volunteers

As I write this, there are just two days left of 2025 – a fitting moment to reflect on what has been a meaningful year for our volunteer community. Throughout the year, we welcomed many new volunteers while farewelling others who moved on for different reasons. To every volunteer, past and present, thank you for the generous gift of your time, and I wish you all the very best.

Our volunteers support Kooweerup Regional Health Service in countless ways. From those working directly with our residents – including entertainers, volunteer transport drivers, and driver mentors in our L2P program – to the Men’s Shed, community gardeners, youth students mentoring local young people, Community Advisory Committee members, our Persons Advocate Liaison, and the ongoing support of our local church and pastor.

A very special highlight this year was celebrating 70 years of service by our Ladies Auxiliary, an extraordinary contribution to KRHS.

Volunteering at KRHS means many different things to many different people, including the volunteers themselves. At its heart, it is a dedicated team working together under an umbrella of kindness, supporting our staff and residents for several hours each week.

Our volunteers bring energy, creativity, care, and commitment, and their contribution makes a genuine difference every day.

The friendships formed at KRHS mean we are more than simply staff and volunteers – we are one team, working together to create an environment of kindness and care.

In true Aussie spirit, we look after one another and receive back from others as much as we give.

Thank you to all our volunteers for your incredible support during the year.

I look forward to continuing our friendships in 2026. Wishing you a very happy and safe New Year, whatever you do and wherever it takes you.

This poem, shared with me by a dear Ladies Auxiliary member, feels like a fitting way to close my final newsletter of the year...

THE MIRACLE OF *friendship*

There is a Miracle called Friendship
That dwells within the heart

And you don't know how it happens
Or when it even starts.

But the happiness it brings you,
Always gives a special lift

And you realize that Friendship
is life's most precious gift.

-Jenny Bayliss (Manager - Volunteers and Leisure and Lifestyle)