

RURAL northwest HEALTH
centred on you

Strategic Plan 2026-2028

Introduction

Rural Northwest Health (RNH) is proud to serve the communities of Northwest Victoria, delivering essential health services across urgent care, aged care, and community-based care. The 2026–2028 Strategic Plan provides a clear direction for the organisation, guiding how we will respond to the evolving health needs of our community, strengthen our services, and ensure sustainable, high-quality care into the future.

This plan is shaped by the local context of Yarriambiack Shire, national and Victorian health priorities, and regional collaboration across the Grampians network. It reflects our commitment to person-centred care, strong partnerships, workforce development, and continuous improvement, ensuring that RNH remains a trusted, innovative, and responsive leader in rural health.

Grounded in our mission - to deliver high-quality, accessible, and equitable rural healthcare in partnership with our communities - and guided by our values of excellence, connection, learning, collaboration, and enjoyment in our work, this Strategic Plan sets out the goals, initiatives, and measures that will drive our work over the next three years.

It provides a framework for decision-making, resource allocation, and service development, ensuring we continue to meet the needs of our community now, and into the future.



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About us



Rural Northwest Health is a public health service located in the Wimmera Mallee Region of Victoria established in 1999 under the Health Services Act 1994 and responsible to the Minister for Health.

Rural Northwest Health is funded by State and Commonwealth Government and supported by local community members delivering residential care, acute care, urgent care, community health and, most recently, in-home community care including home care, personal care, respite care, and Meals on Wheels.

Rural Northwest Health provides responsive, quality care and community services by empowering a vibrant and committed group of community members.

The key focus of Rural Northwest Health is caring for, and supporting, people to be healthy and to live a full life.

Rural Northwest Health works in partnership with regional and sub-regional service providers to support community members to access high quality and safe care as close to home as possible.

Key partners include the Grampians Health Service Partnerships and Grampians Public Health Unit, West Vic Primary Health Network, Grampians Health, Woodbine, Yarriambiack Shire, Ambulance Victoria, local General Practitioners, Royal Flying Doctotor Service, and the Department of Health.

Our vision, mission and values

Vision	**To be a trusted, innovative and responsive leader in rural health for our local community**
Mission	**To deliver high quality, accessible, and equitable rural healthcare in partnership with our communities**

Values

1



We are committed to excellence
Everyone at Rural Northwest Health makes a valuable contribution. Quality is at the heart of everything we do. We don't rest on our laurels. Instead, we seek to be the best possible. Always.

2



We are caring and connected
We are one team that supports one another and are closely connected with our communities. This means we genuinely care for and help our colleagues and our communities. Trust matters to us.

3



We are lifelong learners
We are always considering how to improve what we do. We excel at responding as opportunities, challenges, and uncertainty arises. We are lifelong learners who aim to innovate, challenge our thinking, and try new things.

4



We listen and collaborate
We value the voice of our team members, community, and partners. We openly and willingly share our own knowledge, experiences, and views within and outside Rural Northwest Health. We commit to being open and transparent.

5



We are friendly and enjoy our work
We welcome, accept, and include all people and treat everyone with respect. We encourage diversity and inclusion within our organisation, in our communities, and through our partnerships. Our work is important and serious, and we approach it with mindfulness and engagement, alongside positivity and playfulness. This is why we come back to work every day.

Great Care Framework

'A Framework to Create Great Care at RNH with Every Person, Every Time'

- A key component to the strategic plan is the implementation of the RNH Great Care Framework
- The Great Care Framework aims to provide guidance for RNH to create a **consistently high-quality care experience**
- The framework is organised around three pillars (**purpose, people, governance**) and was developed through broad consultation with consumers and staff
- The Implementation Plan lays out the strategy to achieve Great Care by **31 December 2027**

RNH Great Care: A model for providing consistently high-quality care with Consumers

1. What

1. **A Great Care Experience with every customer, every time, that is…**
   - Individual
   - Safe
   - Connected
   - Effective

2. Who

2. **Created by People with clear, supported roles and accountabilities to achieve Great Care for every customer, every time…**
   - Point of Care Staff
   - Managers and Leaders
   - Executive Team
   - Board Directors

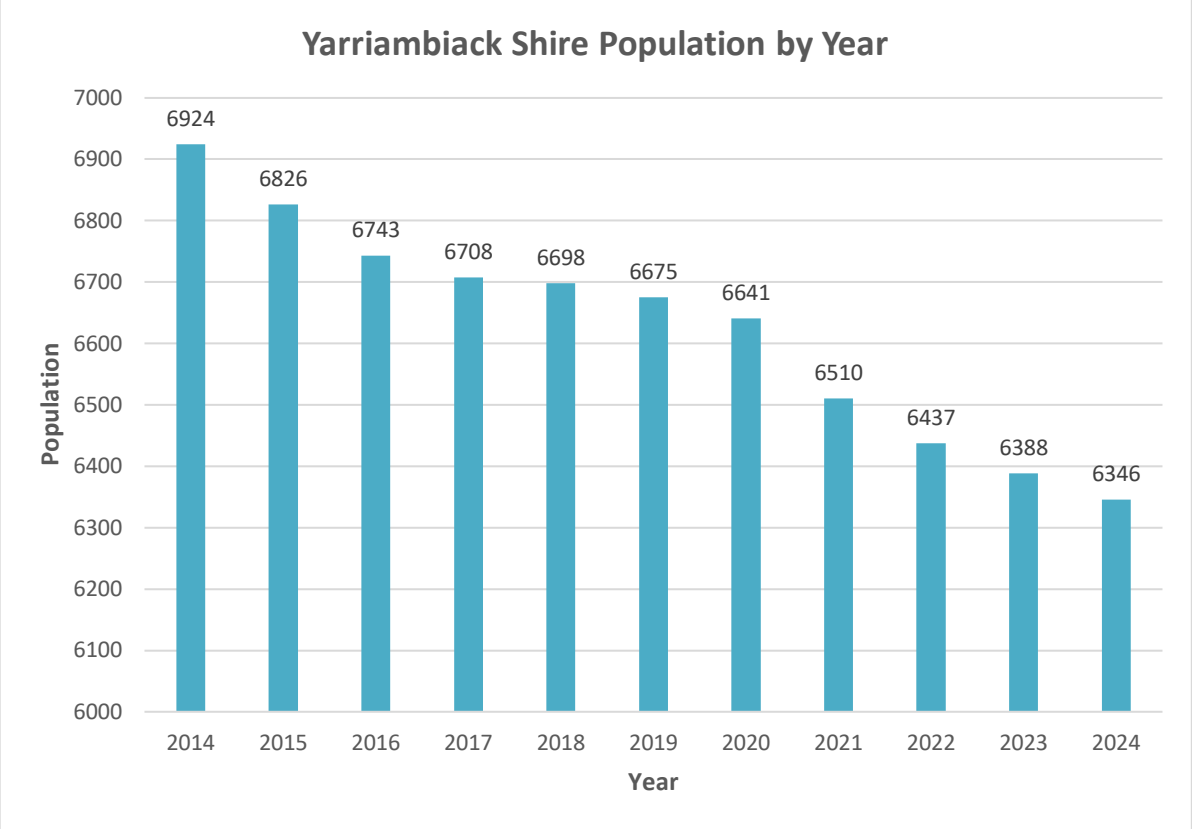
3. How

3. **Supported by Clinical Governance systems to help staff to deliver, monitor and maintain consistent Great Care:**
   - Governance, Leadership and Culture
   - Consumer Partnerships
   - Clinical Practice
   - Workforce
   - Risk Management
   - Improvement

Our Community

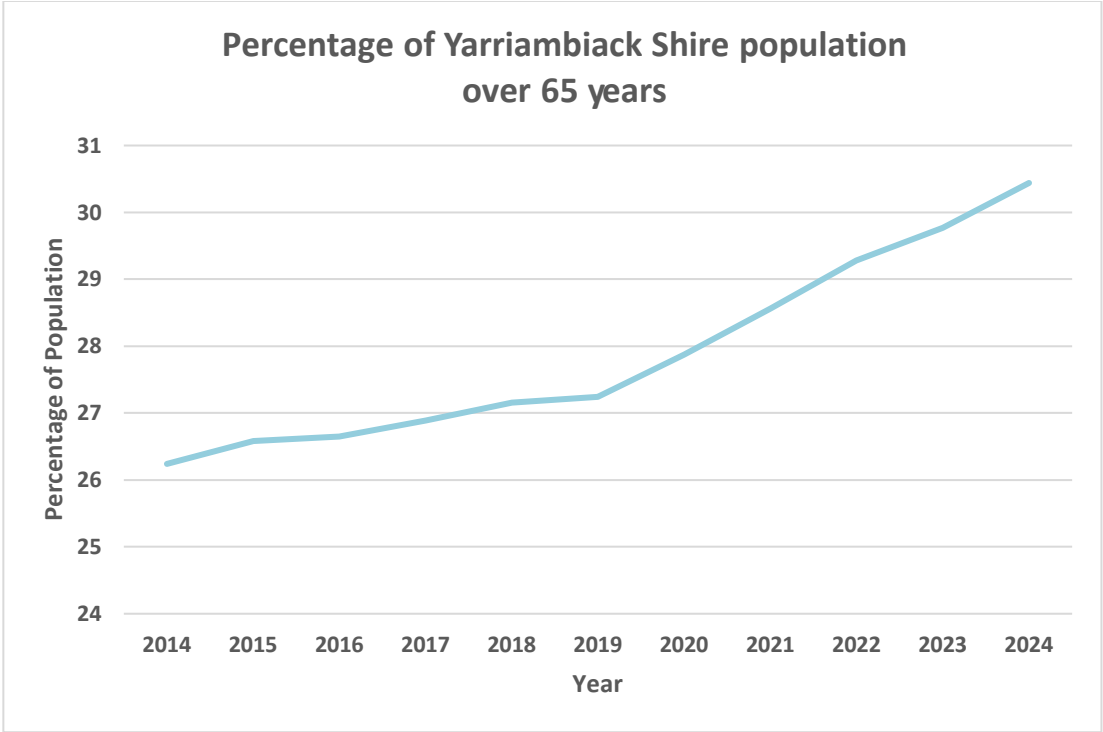
The data presented relates to Yarriambiack Shire and is primarily drawn from the 2021 Australian Census* and Yarriambiack Shire data sources. Rural Northwest Health is located wholly within Yarriambiack Shire; however, the Shire includes a small number of areas that fall outside the Rural Northwest Health service catchment.

KEY POPULATION DATA



Population	*Yarriambiack Shire (2021)	*Victoria (2021)
Male	50.7% (3,327)	49.2%
Female	49.3% (3,232)	50.8%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	1.7% (111)	1.0%
Non-Indigenous	91.3% (5,983)	94.5%
Indigenous status not stated	7% (458)	4.5%

Population Age	*Yarriambiack Shire (2021) %	*Yarriambiack Shire (2021) %	*Victoria (2021) %
Median Age	52		38
0 – 14 years	1019	16%	18%
15 – 24 years	588	9%	12%
25 – 44 years	1167	18%	29%
45 – 64 years	1865	28%	24%
65 – 85 years	1622	25%	15%
85+ years	297	4%	2%

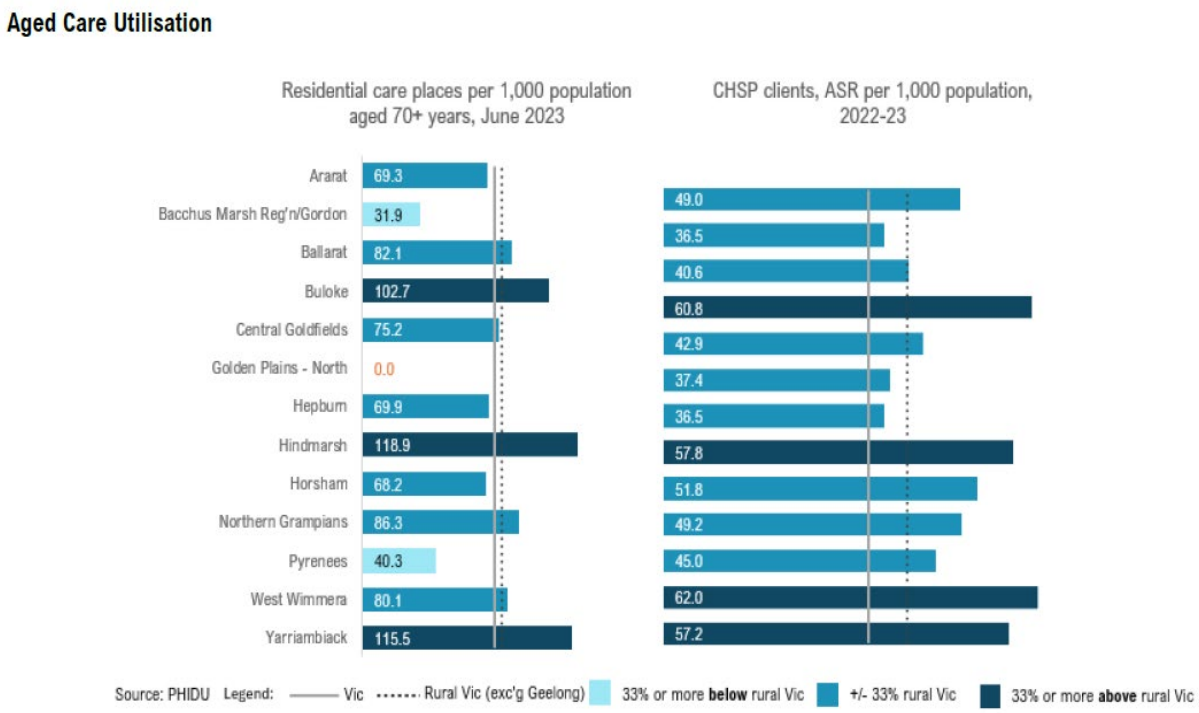


Note: Population projections used in this strategic plan are based on currently available demographic data and may change over time. The Yarriambiack Shire Council area is expected to experience potential population growth during the life of the plan due to several forecast and proposed projects within the region. While the timing, scale, and delivery of these projects remain subject to external factors, they may contribute to increased economic activity, employment opportunities, and associated population inflows.

Health Specific Data

Long Term Condition	*Yarriambiack Shire (2021)	*Victoria (2021)
Arthritis	15.80%	8.00%
Asthma	11.90%	8.40%
Mental Health Condition (incl depression or anxiety)	11.90%	8.80%
Diabetes (excl gestational diabetes)	7.10%	4.70%
Heart Disease (incl heart attack or angina)	6.40%	3.70%
Cancer (incl remission)	4.10%	2.80%
Lung conditions (incl COPD & emphysema)	3.30%	1.50%
Stroke	1.60%	0.90%
Kidney disease	1.20%	0.90%
Dementia (incl Alzheimer's)	0.90%	0.75%
Any other Long Term Condition (LTC)	9.20%	8.00%
No LTC	46.60%	61.00%
Not stated	10.40%	7.60%

Aged Care Utilisation across the Grampians Network LGAs



Cancer Screening Participation Yarriambiack Shire Population

Screening Program	Yarriambiack Shire (2022)	Victoria (2022)
Bowel cancer	44.9%	44.2%
Breast cancer	52.84%	51.9%
Cervical cancer	62.68	73.5%

Social Determinants Data

Percentage of Population Participation in the Workforce (people aged 15 years & over)

Population	*Yarriambiack Shire (2021)	*Victoria (2021)
In the labour force	49.6%	62.4%
Not in the labour force	41.8%	32.2%
Not stated	8.6%	5.3%

Median Weekly Incomes (people aged 15 years & over)

Income	*Yarriambiack Shire (2021)	*Victoria (2021)
Personal	$625	$803
Family	$1,491	$2,136
Household	$1,102	$1,759

Highest level of educational attainment (people aged 15 years & over)

Level of education	*Yarriambiack Shire (2021)	*Victoria (2021)
Bachelor Degree or higher	9.9%	29.2%
Advanced Diploma or Diploma level	8.2%	9.8%
Year 12	10.7%	14.9%

Yarriambiack Shire – Key Population, Health and Social Insights (Summary)

Population trends

- The total population of Yarriambiack Shire has steadily declined over the past decade.
- At the same time, the proportion of residents aged 65 years and over has continued to increase, with more than 30% of the population now in this age group.
- The Shire has a significantly older population profile than the Victorian average, with a median age of 52 compared to 38 statewide.

Population characteristics

- The population is evenly split by gender.
- A slightly higher proportion of residents identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander compared to the Victorian average.
- A higher proportion of residents have not stated Indigenous status, which may indicate under-identification.

Age profile

- Yarriambiack Shire has fewer young people and working-age adults compared to Victoria.
- A substantially higher proportion of residents are aged 45 years and over, particularly those aged 65–85 and 85+.
- This age structure is a key driver of increased health and aged care demand.

Health status

- Residents experience a higher burden of long-term health conditions than the Victorian average.
- Rates of arthritis, asthma, mental health conditions, diabetes, heart disease, cancer and lung disease are all significantly higher than state averages.
- Fewer residents report having no long-term health condition, indicating greater clinical complexity and multimorbidity.

Aged care and service demand

- The ageing population and higher prevalence of chronic disease translate to increased demand for aged care, chronic disease management, urgent care and community health services.
- Dementia prevalence, while relatively low, is higher than the Victorian average and is expected to increase over time.

Preventative health and screening

- Participation in bowel and breast cancer screening is comparable to the Victorian average.
- Cervical cancer screening participation is substantially lower, highlighting an opportunity for targeted preventative health initiatives.

Social determinants of health

- Workforce participation is significantly lower than the Victorian average, reflecting population ageing and reduced local employment opportunities.
- Median personal, family and household incomes are well below Victorian averages.
- Educational attainment is considerably lower, with far fewer residents holding a bachelor degree or higher.

Overall implications

- Yarriambiack Shire faces compounding challenges associated with population decline, ageing, higher chronic disease burden and socioeconomic disadvantage.
- These factors reinforce the importance of accessible, locally delivered, preventative and integrated healthcare.

- For Rural Northwest Health, this context highlights the critical role of urgent care, aged care and community health services, strong partnerships, workforce sustainability and community-focused models of care to support equitable health outcomes.

Strategic Context

The Rural Northwest Health (RNH) Strategic Plan 2026–2028 is developed within a rapidly evolving health system environment shaped by national reform agendas, Victorian Government priorities, and regional Grampians health planning. Across all levels of the system, there is a strong and consistent focus on improving equity of access to care, strengthening integration across service settings, embedding quality and safety, and ensuring long-term workforce and financial sustainability—particularly for rural and regional health services.

Nationally, health policy recognises the essential role of rural health services in providing urgent care, supporting ageing populations, and delivering community-based and preventative health services close to home. Ongoing aged care reform increased regulatory and quality expectations, and growing demand for mental health and chronic disease management services are reshaping how care is delivered. At the same time, workforce shortages and increasing cost pressures require services to adopt efficient, innovative and flexible models of care, supported by digital health and strong partnerships.

At the Victorian state level, health system reform continues to emphasise local access to services, integrated and coordinated care, prevention and population health, and improved outcomes for priority populations. There is a strong focus on delivering safe, high-quality urgent care and aged care services, expanding community-based care, embedding culturally safe practice, and strengthening accountability and performance. These priorities acknowledge the distinct challenges faced by rural health services and the need for place-based, community-responsive solutions.

Within the Grampians region, health services operate across dispersed rural communities with ageing populations, higher prevalence of chronic disease, and ongoing workforce constraints. Regional priorities emphasise collaboration across the Grampians health network to sustain rural services, strengthen integrated care pathways, and maximise shared capability and resources. Partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and deeper community engagement are also central to improving health equity and outcomes across the region.

This strategic context presents both challenges and opportunities for Rural Northwest Health. Increasing demand, workforce pressures and reform expectations require a clear focus on sustainability, capability and quality. At the same time, strong community connections, regional collaboration and innovation provide opportunities to deliver great care, improve preventative health outcomes, and ensure equitable access to services close to home. The RNH Strategic Plan 2026–2028 responds to this context by setting a clear direction for the organisation over the next three years.

Strategic Context and Alignment to RNH Strategic Objectives (2026–2028)

The Rural Northwest Health (RNH) Strategic Plan 2026–2028 is shaped by national, Victorian and Grampians regional health priorities that emphasise equitable access, integrated care, prevention, workforce sustainability and high-quality services delivered close to home. These system drivers directly align with RNH's mission to deliver high-quality, accessible and equitable rural healthcare in partnership with our communities, and its vision to be a trusted, innovative and responsive leader in rural health.

RNH operates as a provider of urgent care, sub-acute, aged care and community health services across rural communities with ageing populations, higher chronic disease burden and increased vulnerability to workforce and access constraints. The Strategic Plan responds to this context through a clear strategy: by 2028, RNH will sustainably deliver great care with a focus on preventative healthcare and equitable access, supported by a stronger, more capable and responsive workforce that connects people to the right care close to home.

Goal 1: Sustainably embed consistent, systematic and evidence-based delivery of safe and person-centred care

National and Victorian health reforms place strong emphasis on quality, safety, accountability and person-centred care, particularly in urgent care and residential aged care settings. Aged care reform and increasing regulatory expectations reinforce the need for consistent, evidence-based care models, while urgent care policy directions highlight timely access, clinical safety and reduced avoidable hospital transfers.

In response, RNH's focus on embedding the Great Care Framework, continuous improvement, service efficiency and financial sustainability supports safe and reliable care across urgent care, sub-acute, aged care and community health services. Investment in infrastructure, assets and sustainable funding models ensures RNH can continue to deliver high-quality care close to home while responding to increasing demand and system reform.

Goal 2: Strengthen partnerships through coordinated action, collaboration and engagement

Integration and collaboration are central to national, Victorian and Grampians regional health priorities. Policy directions increasingly recognise that improved health outcomes—particularly prevention, chronic disease management and mental wellbeing—require coordinated action across health services, primary care, community services and local communities.

RNH's commitment to renewing its partnership strategy, deepening collaboration with the Grampians Local Health Service Network, and strengthening community engagement directly supports these priorities. Through partnerships, RNH enhances integrated care pathways between urgent care, aged care and community health, improves care transitions, and works with communities to better understand needs, values and opportunities for preventative health initiatives. This approach reflects RNH's values of listening, collaboration, caring and connection.

Goal 3: Foster a capable and responsive workforce through a learning culture
Workforce sustainability is a critical challenge at all levels of the health system, particularly for rural services. National and Victorian priorities focus on attraction, retention, wellbeing, scope of practice and leadership development to ensure services remain viable and responsive.

RNH's workforce strategy, learning culture and focus on organisational pride directly respond to this context. By supporting lifelong learning, leadership development and positive workplace culture, RNH strengthens its ability to deliver safe, high-quality care across all service streams. This approach aligns with RNH's values of excellence, learning, enjoyment of work and community connection, and underpins the organisation's long-term sustainability.
Strategic Positioning

Through this Strategic Plan, RNH aligns national, state and regional priorities with local community needs and organisational values. By focusing on great care, strong partnerships and a capable workforce, RNH is well positioned to continue delivering trusted, innovative and responsive urgent care, aged care and community health services that improve health and wellbeing outcomes for rural northwest Victoria.



Our strategy summary

MISSION: To deliver high quality, accessible, and equitable rural healthcare in partnership with our communities

VISION: To be a trusted, innovative and responsive leader in rural health

Our core values	Committed to excellence	Caring and connected	Lifelong learners	Listen and collaborate	Friendly and enjoy our work
Strategy statement	**By 2028, we will sustainably deliver great care with a focus on preventative healthcare and equitable access, through a stronger, more capable and responsive workforce that connects our community to the right care close to home**				
Goals	**1. Sustainably embed consistent, systematic and evidence-based delivery of safe and person-centred care**		**2. Strengthen partnerships through coordinated action, collaboration and engagement that reflects our communities' needs and values**		**3. Foster a capable and responsive workforce through a learning culture and opportunities for development**
Key initiatives	1.1 Implement the Great Care Framework by 2027 1.2 Explore and implement opportunities to improve service efficiency and optimise care delivery 1.3 Refresh financial sustainability plan, including contingency planning for introduction of activity-based funding 1.4 Review and continue delivery of infrastructure/assets plan to support sustainable delivery of care		2.1 Renew the partnership strategy to guide effort in cultivating and leveraging partnerships over the next 3 years 2.2 Deepen collaboration with the Grampians LHSN and other partners to enhance integrated and coordinated care 2.3 Enhance community engagement and education to understand community needs and explore opportunities for improving health outcomes through preventative care		3.1 Refresh and deliver the workforce strategy to build long term sustainability and capability 3.2 Embed a culture of proactive learning and development to support staff growth, leadership and retention 3.3 Build organisational pride and a positive culture through staff and community engagement, recognition and meaningfully embedding shared values
Measures	• Great Care Framework key performance indicators • >95% overall patient satisfaction • >25% engagement in Victorian Health Experience Survey • >80% safety score in staff People Matter Survey (PMS) • 0-0 - 0.5% net operating profit per annum		• # new partnerships with written agreements • # initiatives delivered collaboratively with Grampians networks • >1 public health initiative per annum delivered		• >80% workforce retention • <10% absenteeism rate in workforce • <10% shifts with no cover for 24/7 clinical services • 80% engagement score in staff PMS • >90% compliance with mandatory training

Goal 1: Great care

Goal	**Sustainably embed consistent, systematic and evidence-based delivery of safe and person-centred care**
Description	Rural Northwest Health will deliver safe, high-quality, and person-centred care through consistent, evidence-based practice across all services. This includes embedding the Great Care Framework, optimising service delivery, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement supported by sustainable financial and infrastructure planning. The focus is on improving patient experience, outcomes, and long-term service sustainability.
Key initiatives	1.1 Implement the Great Care Framework by 2027 1.2 Explore and implement opportunities to improve service efficiency and optimise care delivery 1.3 Establish a continuous improvement strategy to explore novel ways to improve care 1.4 Refresh financial sustainability plan, including contingency planning for introduction of activity-based funding 1.5 Review and continue delivery of infrastructure/assets plan to support sustainable delivery of care
Measures	• Great Care Framework key performance indicators • >95% overall patient satisfaction • >25% engagement in Victorian Health Experience Survey • >80% safety score in staff PMS • 0-0.5% net operating profit per annum



Goal 2: Our community and partnerships

Goal	**Strengthen partnerships through coordinated action, collaboration and engagement that reflects our communities' needs and values**
Description	RNH will work closely with communities, regional partners, and the Grampians health network to improve integrated care, respond to local needs, and strengthen preventative health initiatives. By building strong partnerships and engaging stakeholders, RNH aims to enhance service coordination, collaboration, and community wellbeing.
Key initiatives	2.1 Renew the partnership strategy to guide effort in cultivating and leveraging partnerships over the next 3 years 2.2 Deepen collaboration with the Grampians LHSN and other partners to enhance integrated and coordinated care 2.3 Enhance community engagement and education to understand community needs and explore opportunities for improving health outcomes through preventative care
Measures	• # new partnerships with written agreements • # initiatives delivered collaboratively with Grampians networks • >1 public health initiative per annum delivered



Goal 3: Our people

Goal

Foster a capable and responsive workforce through a learning culture and opportunities for development

Description

RNH will support a skilled, resilient, and adaptable workforce through learning, development, and leadership opportunities. By embedding a positive, engaged, and values-driven culture, the organisation will ensure workforce sustainability and the ongoing capacity to deliver high-quality care.

Key initiatives

3.1 Refresh and deliver the workforce strategy to build long term sustainability and capability

3.2 Embed a culture of proactive learning and development to support staff growth, leadership and retention

3.3 Build organisational pride and a positive culture through staff and community engagement, recognition and meaningfully embedding shared values

Measures

- >80% workforce retention
- <10% absenteeism rate in workforce
- <10% shifts with no cover for 24/7 clinical services
- 80% engagement score in staff People Matter Survey (PMS)
- >90% compliance with mandatory training





RURAL northwest HEALTH

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Rural Northwest Health acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands of the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk people.

We also welcome all people to work, volunteer and access services from us, regardless of their age, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexuality, ability, or religion.