



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

# Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health — CERSH

## Strategic Plan 2020-2025







# Introduction

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I am pleased to present the CERSH Strategic Plan 2020-2025, which sets out our direction for the next five years.



Our goal with this plan is to continue our current work, build on our engagement, meet expected growth in service demand and take up new opportunities – all with the aim of improving sexual and reproductive health in the regions that we serve.

To ensure that we are on the right track with this strategy, we employed an independent consultant to seek feedback from our key stakeholders across the Hume and Loddon Mallee regions and statewide. We were very pleased to find that this survey received a very high level of response from diverse perspectives and showed that CERSH and its work continues to be held in high regard. We also sought the input of our experienced staff team.

The outcome of stakeholder and staff consultation provided a clear direction for this strategy. Our stakeholders are very supportive of the work we currently do and strongly support continuation of these efforts. At the same time, they made suggestions that they thought would improve our work and enhance the services we provide.

As a Centre for Excellence, we seek to uncover, develop and support best practice in our area of interest. Over the next five years, CERSH will work with rural health services and other entities aligned with our goals to engage and provide leadership for an improved response to the sexual and reproductive health needs of rural Victorians.

Our work will be underpinned by the support of the Department of Health and Human Services, which places us in a strong position to continue our success and potentially expand our reach at some time in the future.

**Jane Tomnay**

Associate Professor Jane Tomnay PhD

Director

## Who we are

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We are the Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health (CERSH).

Funded by the Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services through a service agreement with The University of Melbourne, our program sits within the Department of Rural Health in the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences at Shepparton, Parkville and Wangaratta campuses. We also have a partnership with La Trobe University Bendigo campus, where our Loddon Mallee staff are located.

## What we do

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Improving rural sexual health is at the core of our activities. We design, implement and evaluate programs that provide practical solutions to local sexual and reproductive health issues in two Department of Health and Human Services regions – Hume and Loddon Mallee.

Using community development principles, we build capacity by concentrating our activities locally – finding local solutions to local issues. The resulting evidence can be translated to other settings and areas to generate positive change in practice and service system development.

While our activities are primarily place-based, we also deliver an online platform comprising information and resources that are free and accessible statewide.

Central to our work is collaboration. We develop and maintain strong partnerships and collaborations with key agencies, networks and individuals within our regions to avoid duplication and maximise positive outcomes.

## Our vision

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All rural Victorians have access to quality sexual and reproductive health care, information and support tailored to their individual needs.

## Our mission

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We develop sustainable strategies by building collaborations and partnerships between agencies, services and individuals.

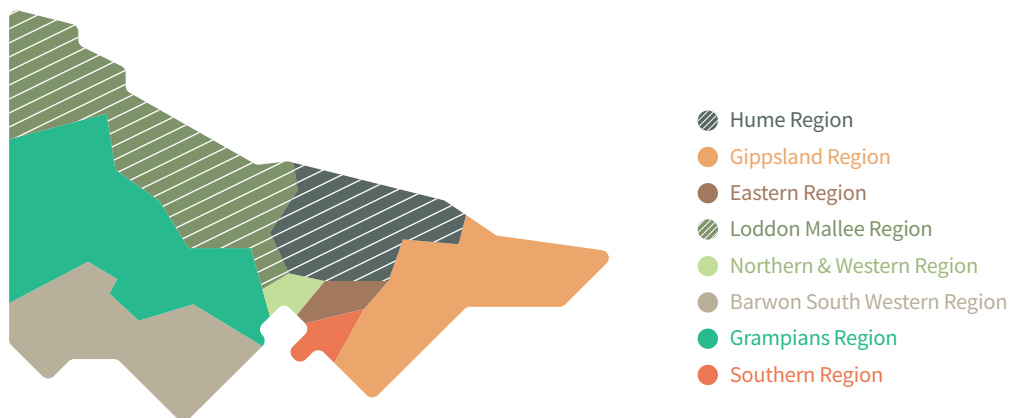
## Our reach

CERSH primarily operates across two Victorian regions – Hume and Loddon Mallee.

Hume sits in the north east of Victoria, and Loddon Mallee is in the central and north west of the state. Together, in 2018, they had an estimated population of almost 670,000 people and cover almost 100,000 square kilometres.

The geography covered by these regions combined accounts for more than 40 per cent of the Victorian state.

Our online platform delivers information and resources statewide (and nationally) where possible.



## Our community

We work primarily across the rural and regional areas of Hume and Loddon Mallee. Our specific focus is on four priority populations:







Improving rural sexual health is at the core of our activities.

## Our strategic priorities

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## Our focus will be on partnerships / networks and communications to maximise our impact

Effective sexual and reproductive health networks continue to be central to our work. These networks facilitate opportunities for professional development, discussion and sharing of effective practices, and encourage cross-service linkages. Access to information for practitioners and for the general public is integral to achieving positive health outcomes.


- We will work to broker partnerships and collaborations – within, across and beyond our regions – that ensure maximum outcomes for the resources available.
- We will regularly consult with our rural communities to identify their requirements and issues of concern relating to sexual and reproductive health.
- Our forums, conferences and events will provide local service providers with access to expert speakers on a range of topics relevant to rural sexual and reproductive health.
- We will continue to support provision of current information and discussion through online Rural Clinical Networks led by senior specialist clinicians.
- Our website will provide an avenue for promotion of upcoming events and training, project work and resources, and published research and reports.
- We will continue to improve our communications, including email, newsletters, social media and other channels as appropriate.
- We will work with key training partners to drive best practice capability development.

## Actions

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- Develop and maintain local, statewide, national and international networks of influence that directly impact the sexual and reproductive health of the rural population
- Provide forums, a biennial conference and other avenues for dissemination of information
- Continue to maintain the CERSH website and improve information provided, including an online sexual and reproductive health resources hub
- Increase community knowledge of the importance of sexual and reproductive health, and service availability, through engagement with all types of media



A close-up photograph of a couple holding hands. The person on the left is wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans. The person on the right is wearing a blue and white polka-dot shirt and blue jeans. They are standing outdoors with a blurred green background, possibly a park or garden. The lighting is warm, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

Effective sexual and  
reproductive health  
networks continue to  
be central to our work.

## We will deliver best practice rural workforce development

Proactively addressing the sexual and reproductive health needs of people in rural areas is critical for better health outcomes. Effective systems are required that meet population needs and service demands for sexual and reproductive health services. To achieve this, the rural and regional workforce requires further capacity building, through face-to-face initiatives locally and online learning modules available statewide.

- We will design and implement rural workforce development initiatives that embed best practice training for rural practitioners, extend the reach of training, ensure resources are user-friendly and accessible online, and improve support systems.
- We will continue to deliver targeted workforce development services to health practitioners on an as-needed basis. These will include focusing on workforce service systems that change culture and provide core skills required by rural practitioners, both clinical and non-clinical.
- Innovation is key to strengthening community engagement and collaborative partnerships. We will explore fresh ways of getting our message across through interventions that support primary care, workforce development and health promotion, particularly targeting disadvantaged groups.
- Provision of Online Learning Modules is integral to our workforce development strategy and will continue to be expanded. Content will be free, available statewide, rurally-appropriate and addressing the issue of access to education for rural practitioners. Our modules will be accredited by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and suitable to be logged as continuing professional development for other health professionals. Modules will be regularly evaluated by learners, with feedback contributing to continuous improvement.
- We will support the integration of primary care providers by promoting clear pathways to secondary and specialist services.

Innovation is key to strengthening community engagement and collaborative partnerships.





## Actions

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- Support the rural workforce and interagency capacity to deliver quality sexual and reproductive health services
- Deliver specific training directly to clinical and non-clinical staff as appropriate
- Support strategies that ensure the rural sexual and reproductive health workforce is skilled and adaptable, including retention, better pathways and succession planning
- Focus training activities on assistance for priority groups including young people, LGBTIQ+ people, ATSI people and culturally diverse communities
- Build knowledge dissemination strategies and provide systems that support efforts to collect and share data, knowledge and resources statewide
- Support a stronger role for primary care with formal linkages to specialist sexual and reproductive health services, when clinically necessary, within a hub and spoke network



## **Our sexual and reproductive health initiatives will be practical, flexible and responsive to local needs**

Localised responses and initiatives (which may include but are not limited to health promotion, education and service capacity building) are required to proactively address the sexual health needs of individuals, particularly those from populations identified as disadvantaged. Actions that are new or those that build on effective practices already in operation must be acceptable to local populations.



Our work will emphasise the need for empathetic, confidential and discreet support to individuals seeking sexual and reproductive health services.

- We will support the department's decentralised model of sexual and reproductive health by leveraging our expertise to build capacity and systems development through our regions. This will be achieved through sharing our expertise, skills and knowledge, and by connecting specialist providers to our local stakeholder groups.
- Our work will emphasise the need for empathetic, confidential and discreet support to individuals seeking sexual and reproductive health services.
- We will grow our knowledge and awareness of local populations and their specific vulnerability to local challenges and sexually transmissible infections (STI) and blood borne virus (BBV) outbreaks, to ensure that responses are rapid and effective and that inequities in sexual and reproductive health status decrease.
- We will focus on preventative measures, while taking a comprehensive interventionist approach to deal with identified issues in each community sector.
- We will work toward avoiding duplication and replication of services. Instead, we will develop a defined, transparent approach that shows where identified gaps can be addressed and opportunities built on, specific to local needs.
- Our focus will also be on promoting respectful, safe sexual relationships and reproductive choices.

## Actions

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- Work with organisations and practitioners (local, statewide and nationally) to improve localised access to sexual and reproductive health services
- Work with organisations and practitioners to improve access to empathetic, confidential and discreet support for people accessing sexual and reproductive health services
- Strengthen and maintain capacity to respond to local STI/BBV outbreaks
- Decrease inequities in sexual and reproductive health status between the resident population and other groups
- Promote that sexual health is integrated into local primary health care provision

## We will provide leadership and support for rural communities that will include research capacity building within the rural workforce

As a Centre for Excellence, we strive to provide quality leadership and support to our partners and the communities we serve, to address any disadvantage experienced in rural areas relating to sexual and reproductive health status and outcomes.

- Our face-to-face teaching sessions for rural and metropolitan medical students and clinicians working in Hume and Loddon Mallee will continue, as will supervision of higher degree candidates.
- We will ensure our knowledge base is continually improved and current with the latest available evidence and research initiatives statewide, nationally and globally.
- We will provide a Victorian rural voice on international, national, statewide and local advisory groups and committees, and deliver presentations at rural, statewide, national and international conferences and forums.
- We will continue to advocate for equitable access to sexual and reproductive health services for rural and regional Victorians, particularly those in Hume and Loddon Mallee.
- Our systems will be developed to ensure best practice in data, knowledge and resources collection. We will monitor emerging research and evidence, and disseminate across regional Victoria as appropriate.
- We will develop submissions to government and parliamentary inquiries relevant to our activities.
- We will work actively with stakeholders to build their capacity to undertake quality research and evaluation, continue to build on the current evidence base and bring a rural voice to national research pertinent to our goals.
- We will ensure that we actively assess all CERSH programs and seek appropriate feedback to inform continuous improvement.
- Our advocacy activities to the department will focus on the financial resourcing required to allow us to extend our activities statewide.

## Actions

- Provide rural and regional sexual health leadership through participation in statewide, national and international collaborations and activities
- Contribute to local, national and international sexual and reproductive health research projects, committees and forums
- Provide consultation and support to other rural regions wanting to replicate CERSH initiatives
- Support partner organisations to build their own research and evaluation capacity, and ensure all CERSH programs are assessed
- Explore opportunities to expand the CERSH program statewide in alignment with departmental direction





## Strategic alignment

The CERSH Strategic Plan 2020-2025 aligns with the following strategic documents:

- Victorian Sexual Health and Service Needs Review
- Victorian Rural and Regional Health Plan
- National Blood Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategies 2018-2022
- Fourth National Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategy 2018-2022
- Victorian Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health: Key priorities 2017-2020
- Victorian STI Action Plan 2018-2020
- Victorian HIV Strategy 2017-2020
- Victorian Hepatitis B Strategy 2016-2020
- Victorian Hepatitis C Strategy 2016-2020

## Measuring achievement

Our annual work plan will outline how our actions will be implemented and achievement will be measured against these deliverables.

Reporting on progress of actions in the CERSH Strategic Plan 2020-2025 will be via the CERSH annual report.



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