



Department of  
Rural Health



# Health in Seymour

## Crossroads II

### A population health study 2016-2018

#### The Study

Crossroads II is a study of health, use of health services and undiagnosed disease in rural and regional communities in northern Victoria. It was conducted in 2016 – 2018 as a follow up to Crossroads I in 2001 – 2003. The aim of this report is to provide residents of Seymour with information about local health needs.

Households in Seymour township were randomly selected from council lists and visited by university researchers who asked a range of questions. Following, an adult was randomly selected and invited to a health screening clinic where key health tests were conducted. This study reports on 431 residents of Seymour who completed the extensive health questionnaire and 125 adults who attended a screening clinic in 2017 and 2018. While a small sample and more likely female and older, the respondents were selected randomly and visited repeatedly to achieve a response rate of 60% for the household questionnaire and 62% for the clinic. Respondents aged 65 and over comprised 23% of the participants in this study.

## Key Health Conditions

### Chronic disease

Chronic health conditions were reported to have increased in the time between Crossroads I and II. The rates of many screening tests and health checks were also identified to have increased.

When asked to identify health conditions, the following responses were identified:

- ▶ 37% with arthritis
- ▶ 34% having high blood pressure
- ▶ 25% experiencing chronic pain
- ▶ 20% with asthma
- ▶ 17% having a heart condition
- ▶ 16% experienced cancer
- ▶ 14% with diabetes
- ▶ 14% having circulatory problems
- ▶ 6% with digestive issue
- ▶ 6% with kidney disease
- ▶ 3% having liver disease
- ▶ 4% experienced a stroke

### Recommendation: Promote healthy living and quality of life

The increase in chronic health conditions that impact on quality of life, particularly for older people, calls for a whole-of-community approach to promotion of healthy lifestyles and prevention of chronic disease.

# Health behaviours

Health behaviours are key to people's long-term health and wellbeing.



**22%** smoke



**12%** consume the recommended **5 serves** of vegetables daily



**49%** undertake the recommended **150** minutes of exercise



**46%** consume the recommended **2** serves of fruit daily



Body Mass Index (as measured at the clinic) showed **18%** normal or under weight, **42%** overweight & **40%** obese



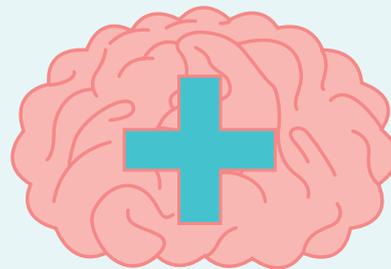
**87%** had a waist circumference above the recommended waist measure

## Mental Health:

Depression was reported to have been experienced (either current or past diagnosis) by 29% of participants.

Of participants reporting depression, 33% had seen a psychologist, psychiatrist or other mental health professional in the past 12 months.

At the clinic, 12% were found to be at risk of psychological distress, which is slightly higher than the state average.<sup>1</sup>



Participants raised concerns regarding mental health care, including:

- a need for greater numbers of local **mental health professionals**
- increased **access to local counselling**

## Recommendation: Address factors limiting local residents' ability to manage their health well

Known as the social determinants of health, addressing key issues in people's lives enables healthier living and improved access to health care for those who need it. This includes income, employment, education, housing, transport, social connection and social inclusion. Addressing these issues for residents with disability, chronic pain, mental ill-health and/or who are socially isolated as well as for residents who are marginalised due to low income, low English proficiency and other cultural barriers is important for overall health, wellbeing and inclusion. Like recommendation one, a whole of-community approach is required that will (i) integrate current initiatives, (ii) develop improved environments for access, inclusion and participation, and (iii) engage new sectors of the community so that Seymour can improve the quality of life and conditions of daily living for all local residents.

# Use of health services

Since the original study utilisation of health services was described as increasing.

## GP services:

94% of participants stated they had visited a GP in the past 12 months. Utilisation of health services was found to have increased between 2001-3 and 2017-18. Half of the participants reported being able to see a GP on the same or next day.

Participants raised a number of concerns regarding GP services, including (1) high turnover of local GPs, (2) language barriers and (3) delays in diagnosis or treatment.

## Have you had your health checks?

In the past 2 years:

- ✓ 86% said they had a blood pressure check
- ✓ 49% indicated having a cholesterol check
- ✓ 54% said they had a diabetes check
- ✓ 15% reported a bowel examination
- ✓ 30% said they had undergone a skin examination



**91%** reported **utilising GP services**, predominantly in Seymour.



**20%** reported **utilising a hospital**, mostly in Melbourne, some in Seymour and smaller numbers in Shepparton.



**47%** reported **visiting a medical specialist**, mostly in Melbourne and some in Seymour and Shepparton.



**9%** said they had **accessed a psychologist**, mostly in Seymour

## Recommendation: Increase access to GPs and local mental health services

Findings call for increased access to mental health and primary care services in Seymour. Results suggest that there may be challenges facing GP service provision in Seymour due to high staff turnover. These challenges can impact the health outcomes of patients and have further effects for other local healthcare providers. Poor mental health is of concern and there appears to be a demand for more mental health professionals in the region.

## Thank you

Thank you to all participants who generously gave their time and shared their experiences. This research study was funded by the NHMRC and local health and community partners. We thank the partners for their support, cooperation and direction of this project. The data will be used for service planning and improvement in the region.

# Health and happiness

44% of participants rated their health as very good or excellent. This is similar to the 2001-3 study (43%) but below the Victorian average (56%).<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1: Health status (self-reported, percentage)**



**72% rated their health as good or better**

**69% rated their level of happiness as:**

Very happy (2%)  
Happy (26%) or  
Somewhat happy (41%)



**Happiness**



**References**

1. Andrews G, Slade T. Interpreting scores on the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10). Australian and New Zealand journal of public health. 2001;25(6):494-7.
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Australian Health Survey: First Results, 2014-2015. Canberra.: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

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