

our impact report 2021/22



cohealth acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and waterways on which our offices stand, the Boon Wurrung, Wurundjeri and Wathaurong people, and pays respects to Elders past and present.

We acknowledge the Stolen Generations and the historical and ongoing impact of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We also recognise the resilience, strength and pride of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' living culture is the oldest continuing culture in the world, and we acknowledge that the land and waterways are a place of age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal.

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Content warning

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that the following document **may contain** images of deceased persons.

If you see an image or name in these materials that you believe should no longer be used for reasons such as death, misgendering or deadnaming, please email communications@cohealth.org.au to have it removed.

our mission

improve health and wellbeing for all
and tackle inequality, in partnership
with people and the communities
they live in.

from the Board Chair & Chief Executive

Working in partnership with our communities, and enabled by our dedicated and skilled staff, cohealth continued to deliver **quality, impactful primary healthcare** in a changing environment throughout 2021/22.

We listened and partnered with our communities to identify and develop the solutions that work for them, to deliver health outcomes and goals that are important to our clients.

We developed new and innovative service models and approaches, shaped new ways of working, expanded our service offerings and delivered real impact for the communities we serve.

cohealth continued to play an incredibly vital role in Victoria's COVID response in 2021/22. As a trusted provider, we were called upon to provide health and social support, vaccination and testing, and medical services to the communities who needed them the most. And no matter how big the ask, we always had a team ready to respond.

While the pandemic continued to present challenges, our skilled and dedicated service delivery staff continued to provide high quality care, and we remained committed to achieve and exceed our vision 'for healthy communities and healthy people' by providing care for all.

In August 2021 cohealth achieved accreditation against the Quality Innovation Performance Health and Community Services Standards and Human Service Standards. Assessors commended cohealth’s performance, and in many areas we exceeded standards. This is just one of eight accreditation cycles cohealth participates in to ensure the best service for our clients.

We continued to prioritise and embed consumer co-design, consumer consultation, and amplify the voices of those with lived and living experience across all levels of the organisation and streams of work. Our Culture and Community directorate steers our community engagement and ‘co-design lab’, supported and guided by our highly active network of Community Advisors who contribute their lived and living experiences to inform our work.

cohealth’s Strategic Plan (2019–2023) is the framework for ensuring we are an impactful and financially sustainable organisation. This year we implemented program logics that saw more than half of our services robustly redesigned and collecting evaluation data to ensure we deliver the health outcomes and goals that clients have prioritised. We are committed to measuring our impact and we proudly co-fund a Professorship in Community Health with La Trobe University, Professor Virginia Lewis. Professor Lewis supports cohealth’s research and evaluation agenda to ensure programs are delivered at maximum efficacy and efficiency.

Our impact and ability to reduce inequality and improve health and wellbeing for all is reliant on the incredible efforts of our highly skilled, adaptable and committed workforce. Our Executive team and Board Directors are incredibly proud of the resilience and agility of our staff as they once again responded and mobilised quickly to support government and community needs. Such an impactful response simply would not have been possible without the hard work and commitment of every individual in our team – whether in client facing or non-client facing roles. We thank our people for their commitment, and for coming to work each day dedicated to making a difference for our clients and the communities we serve.

We acknowledge and thank Leanne Dillon, who resigned as a Director on the cohealth Board in November 2021, for her contribution and service since 2014 as a founding Director. We welcomed Mayada Dib as our newest Director in November 2021.

We are incredibly grateful for the partners and communities who collaborated with us throughout the year to champion better health and wellbeing outcomes across Victoria. We continue to be motivated by our common goal to achieve health equity, to ensure everyone has equal access to the resources and opportunities needed for a happy and healthy life.

We acknowledge the life and work of two much-loved and respected leaders we lost in 2022. We were deeply saddened by the passing of Dr Moss Cass on 26 February 2022. Dr Cass was instrumental in the foundational years of cohealth in Melbourne’s

west during the 1960s and a visionary in bringing health services to the people.

cohealth also pays tribute to the life and work of Dr Chris O’Neill, a much-loved GP and Collingwood community member and leader who passed away on 23 April 2022. cohealth is grateful for the leadership, compassion and generosity Dr O’Neill provided to the organisation and will continue to work to honour his memory.

Our successes and learnings from the past year will support and guide cohealth into the future – as we continue to grow and innovate and strive to deliver impact and outcomes through the social model of health. Working in partnership with our communities, and guided by the lived and living experiences of our clients, we will courageously and persistently advocate for investment in community health to ensure the sustainability of our services and support our efforts to achieve health equity. This is what our communities and clients deserve.



Signed,

Kerry Thompson

Chair
30 November 2022
Melbourne



Signed,

Nicole Bartholomeusz

Chief Executive
30 November 2022
Melbourne

cohealth on a page

cohealth is one of Australia's largest not-for-profit community health organisations. We strive to **improve health and wellbeing for all**.

cohealth provides care for all, with targeted and innovative services to address the health disparities experienced by priority population groups. We offer a broad range of high quality, integrated health and support services, including integrated medical (general practice and medical specialists), nursing, dental, allied health, counselling, alcohol and other drug, mental health and community support services.

We prioritise working directly with people who face the greatest barriers to good health and wellbeing – such as people experiencing homelessness, people with a disability or mental illness, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, members of the LGBTIQ+ community, refugees and asylum seekers, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people who use alcohol and other drugs. We recognise that within these groups, people often face multiple, intersecting and unfair societal barriers when it comes to improving their health and wellbeing.



a snapshot of our year

805,000+

service occasions to our clients which includes **423,000+** to support Victoria's COVID response.

 **45**
service offerings

our workforce supported clients across more than 45 different service offerings, with an additional **10+ service offerings to support our COVID-19 response.**

 **1,200+**
staff members

The introduction of new services required cohealth to significantly increase the size of our workforce to **over 1,200.**

 **32**
sites

cohealth delivered high quality care to our communities across **32 sites** and in a number of pop-up locations and clinics.

 **15+**
Local Government Areas

cohealth's traditional services supported clients from over **15 different LGAs.**

 **110+**
different languages

Our clients speak **more than 110 different languages.**

 **160+**
different cultural backgrounds

Our clients came from **culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds** and represent over 160 different cultural backgrounds.

our year in review

cohealth creates value and impact at an individual, community and society level by delivering high quality health, wellbeing and support services, improving health equity and delivering outcomes through the social model of health. We prioritise our support to people and communities who face unequal access to the conditions and opportunities needed for a happy and healthy life. We invest in creating a safe environment for our clients and staff.

Strong partnerships with clients, health providers, non-health sectors and government underpin our work, enabling us to respond holistically to complex client needs and remove barriers to good health and wellbeing. Our aim is to be the preferred partner to deliver outcomes for our priority communities – not only through our direct service delivery but by working and advocating for whole-of-system improvements and investment in community health to achieve change and lasting impact.

Here's a snapshot of some of our work and achievements in 2021/22.



growing our lived experience workforce

For over 20 years, cohealth has employed staff in lived/living experience roles, and we recognise the significant positive impact these coworkers have on client and community experience and health and wellbeing outcomes.

We understand that having a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community that we're serving makes us a stronger and better performing organisation. In January 2022 we launched cohealth's first Lived/Living Experience Strategy 2021-2026 articulating our commitment to growing, supporting and integrating our lived experience workforce.



elevating community voices through our Bicultural program

cohealth's **22 bicultural workers** played a vital role in 2021/22 as cultural bridges, creating and promoting important health promotion messages to people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Our bicultural workers worked directly with communities, responding to their self-identified needs. Each bicultural worker takes an approach that works best for their community such as communicating via community Facebook groups, running online forums and workshops or creating music videos.

cohealth's bicultural workers delivered 6,000 conversations and 80 community health workshops in language in 2021/22 on diverse issues including reproductive health, COVID-19, mental health, bowel and cervical cancer, family violence, healthy eating, elder abuse, and heart and liver health.



enabling positive experiences for the LGBTIQ+ community

As a mainstream service, **we understand the importance of creating a culturally safe environment** where people feel able to bring their whole selves, including recognition of their gender identity and sexuality.

We were thrilled to be awarded Rainbow Tick accreditation in October 2021 demonstrating our processes, policies, practices and spaces enable positive experiences for LGBTIQ+ coworkers, clients and community members. In March 2022 cohealth was honoured to accept the Service Provider of the Year award at the inaugural Australian Pride in Health + Wellbeing awards.

closing the gap in health outcomes

As a large community health service, we understand **our responsibility to improve the health and wellbeing inequality** that exists between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people.

We continued to implement our Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) this year, deepening our commitment to and collaboration with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

In respecting the importance of truth telling and reflecting cohealth's commitments to reconciliation and health equity, in January 2022 we introduced a 'change it ourself' initiative, offering coworkers the opportunity to substitute the 26 January public holiday – which for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is a day of mourning – for another day.

cohealth will continue to advocate for an inclusive celebration of our national identity, and until the date is officially changed, we will continue offering coworkers the power to change it themselves.



enhancing cultural knowledge

To ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience culturally safe practices within cohealth and all programs and partnerships that work with cohealth, **we developed new cultural guidelines**, which were launched in October 2021.

Yakeen Tharn (Dreaming Path), Working with First Nations Peoples: A Cross Cultural Safety Guidebook for cohealth will enhance cultural knowledge and help lead accessible paths for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in getting more care within the health system.





listening, innovation and outreach in action

Many in **our community feel disempowered** about their own healthcare and prioritising their needs.

Dental care, GPs, physiotherapy, counselling, managing chronic illness, and drug and alcohol support are among many important healthcare services that our clients say they need most.

For those who haven't had check-ups in a long time, don't think they can afford health services, can't get to a clinic, don't speak English very well or are not aware they are eligible for free or low-cost services, cohealth continued to make sure they got the advice and care they needed.

We've responded by reaching out to our clients to talk them through costs and what to expect, in their own language wherever possible. We provide taxi vouchers and help with transportation routes. And we provide flexible options via pop-up services.

Most importantly, we provide care and support that is culturally safe, trauma informed and client-led - ensuring wrap around and tailored support to meet the individual needs of our clients.

tackling dental wait times

Public dental wait times have long been an issue in Victoria, and the long periods of service disruption during COVID only compounded the issue.

With additional funding from Dental Health Service Victoria, and intensive effort from our oral health team, we were able to fastrack access to dental care for people on our wait lists and reduce wait times. The funding allowed us to:

- improve the access of eligible Victorians to oral health care, and
- provide immediate access to public dental services for those Victorians whose access to care has been affected over the past 18 months during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In partnership with DHSV we contacted the clients on our wait lists to provide and process vouchers and our combined efforts helped reduce dental wait times and improve the oral health of people who too often miss out.





helping people who are drug dependent

cohealth's City Street Health team began operating in December 2021 in the Melbourne CBD, **helping people who are drug dependent and facing other complex disadvantages** including homelessness and mental ill-health to access the health and social support they need, and to reduce drug harms.

The City Street Health team comprises community nurses, peer support and harm reduction workers, a recreation and inclusion worker, a case manager, and a dual diagnosis clinician. In June an addiction medicine registrar joined the team as part of a partnership with the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

The street-based team traverse the city seven days a week from 11am to 9pm (10am to 6pm weekends) actively engaging with people who need immediate help, using a holistic and trauma-informed approach.

A service snapshot shows that opioid dependence was the number one issue to which the team responded, though support and referrals were provided for a wide range of other health and social support needs including mental health, care planning, accommodation referrals and dental health.

In neighbouring City of Yarra, preliminary work began in developing the new Sobering Up Service (SUS), a joint partnership between cohealth, The Salvation Army, Dardi Munwurro and the Aboriginal Community Justice Panels program. The service will provide a health-led response to public drunkenness, and aims to reduce police interventions and ambulance call-outs.

supporting people experiencing homelessness

The importance of a secure, stable home was never more apparent than during COVID. Throughout the pandemic, cohealth's Homelessness Team was focused on **supporting people experiencing homelessness** to stay safe from the virus, access health information and services, and improve access to testing and vaccines.

Over 12 months, cohealth's Homelessness Team delivered 90 pop-up vaccination clinics at 27 different locations, from hotels to homeless drop-in spaces, and introduced a voucher incentive scheme for people experiencing homelessness to increase vaccine uptake.

The team at cohealth's Central City Health Service at 53 Victoria St supported the delivery of the vaccination clinic on-site which saw over 200 people receive their first dose and 160 people returned for their second dose.

The Homelessness Team continued working onsite throughout 2021-22 and kept services operating at cohealth's key drop-in sites in the CBD, Footscray and Collingwood during lockdown periods so that vulnerable communities could get the help they needed.

The Homelessness Team established and delivered the COVID Rooming House Engagement project, which used outreach to ensure people in rooming houses received vital public health information, testing and vaccines.

cohealth was the lead agency providing lockdown support to rough sleepers being accommodated in hotels and motels, ensuring they had access to medication, health and social supports, material aid and essential items.





transforming mental health support

cohealth is at the forefront of a **once-in-a-generation change** in how mental health support is delivered in Victoria.

In mid-2022, the Victorian Government announced that cohealth, in partnership with Clarity Health Care and the University of Melbourne, would deliver the Brimbank Local – a free mental health and wellbeing service.

We are honoured to be paving the way to a truly collaborative approach to delivering mental health services that clients want and need. As we co-design and establish the Brimbank Local in 2022/23, our innovations and learnings will be applied in all other areas across the organisation. This will provide an opportunity for individuals and communities to have a greater voice in the type of care they want, and when and how it is delivered.

improving health service safety and quality

cohealth's Best Care Quality Framework focuses on improving clinical governance structures and gives staff guidance on how **to provide the best care, for every person, every time**. The three pillars of the Framework acknowledge that the best care is: created by great people; supported by great systems; and driven by a culture of continuous improvement.

Four committees provide assurance to the cohealth Board regarding the effectiveness and robustness of cohealth's systems and processes in relation to: quality and service governance; risk management; compliance, consumer and community partnerships; and continuous quality improvement, evaluation and research.

cohealth's medication safety committee leads and coordinates improvements in the safety and quality of medication management on the best available evidence. In June 2021 the committee oversaw a comprehensive plan to enhance cohealth's medication management systems and practices, with medication safety incidents reduced to zero during 2021/22.

cohealth's Infection Control Committee provided rapid guidance on the application of infection control protocols within a community-based setting. In November 2021, Infection Control Australia audited cohealth and commended us for demonstrating excellent compliance regarding infection control practice and COVID Safety protocols.



spotlight on our COVID-19 response

cohealth played an incredibly vital role in Victoria's COVID-19 response in 2021/22. We partnered with communities and employed public housing residents to share health information, leading to high vaccination rates in the community.

As well as supporting our local communities to access COVID-19 services, cohealth expanded its care to support communities across Victoria and were the health service partner for the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation's (VACCHO) statewide vaccination campaign. The benefit of integrating clinical and social care was evident during the pandemic and we hope to see this important lesson carried forward into 2023 and beyond.



our COVID-19 Testing Team

From the very beginning of the pandemic, cohealth's COVID-19 Testing Team was **breaking down barriers to ensure all Victorians had equitable access to testing.**

During outbreaks, when Victoria's testing capacity was stretched to its limits, the responsive and flexible testing teams worked tirelessly seven days a week to meet the increased demand.

The teams include nurses, paramedics, allied health care workers, dentists, community service officers and GPs. Whether they were doing PCRs or RATs, at fixed clinics, pop-ups or in-home, the team members consistently delivered testing in a culturally safe way, with a smile on their faces, throughout 2021/22.



“I wholeheartedly thank the Drill Hall testing team for their excellent, efficient and humanising service. They truly exemplify Australia’s healthcare system.”

“Shout out to the health professionals at cohealth Collingwood who stayed on well past closing time to test a big line. **It was freezing and their lights stopped working, but they stayed friendly and helpful.**”

“I attended the testing site in Carlton. **Everyone I encountered was friendly and professional** in conditions I imagine are not always easy to work in.”





our COVID-19 Vaccination Team

The development of a COVID-19 vaccine **represented hope for communities all around the world**. It was clear that widespread vaccination would be the key to returning to a COVID-normal way of living. cohealth's Vaccination Team stepped up to the challenge and worked tirelessly to get the vaccine to as many people as swiftly as possible.

In recognising inequitable access to both the vaccine and related information, the team responded with innovation and compassion. They introduced new models of working and developed strong partnerships, including as the health partner for VACCHO's statewide vaccination campaign, bringing the vaccine to the individuals and communities who needed it the most.

cohealth's Laverton centre was the site chosen by the Federal government to trial general practice provision of Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccinations (one of three clinics nationally). Clinical guidelines developed at the Laverton trial site provided key learnings for scaling up other community-based clinics across Australia.

In September 2021 we established a vaccination clinic at the Melbourne Town Hall to prioritise rough sleepers, refugees and international students. Sixty-one per cent of the nearly 10,000 people vaccinated did not have a Medicare card. The service was culturally safe and removed the barriers that culturally and linguistically diverse communities experience accessing health care. People as far as Dandenong visited the vaccination clinic as a result of cohealth's reputation as a culturally safe and welcoming health care provider.

Vaccination provided the opportunity to engage with individuals who seldomly access health care. People openly disclosed other health and social needs, homelessness, domestic violence, alcohol and drug related issues, and mental health. Our teams supported people to access services to meet their broader health needs.

Through wet and cold Melbourne winter mornings and heat waves in summer, our team showed unwavering commitment.

“I took my (very) needle phobic 7-year-old for his first dose and it was hands down **the smoothest and least painful vaccination process he has experienced.** Everyone was friendly, kind and caring, which made him feel safe and secure.”

“Mum is 100 years old so leaving the house to get vaccinated was not an option. The cohealth staff were very friendly. **My mum felt very happy. She was feeling safe.**”

Client quotes

108,370

vaccination doses were administered across **204 different sites** as well as **256 in-home vaccinations.**



87

fixed vaccination sites

at public housing high rise estates and our own GP clinics, **assisting with the demand for vaccines** and protecting residents at risk.



117

pop-up vaccination sites

Our pop-up vaccination sites included schools, libraries, community centres, arts precincts and rural towns.



17

different languages

We delivered complex and rapidly changing COVID-19 information in 17 languages to ensure our **clients felt safe and informed.**



6,122

children vaccinated

In the final phase of vaccine eligibility we vaccinated 6,122 children **between the ages of 5 and 15.**



256

in-home vaccinations

We took the vaccine to **individuals who needed it the most**, when leaving home wasn't an option for them, from a 100 year old great grandmother to small vulnerable children in care.



102

information sessions

Our Health Guides partnered with our vaccination team to connect with local faith groups and community organisations to deliver **in-language information** sessions and **engagement activities** before and during vaccine pop up clinics.



our Community Response Team

Our Community Response Team played a critical role in **supporting the health of residents exposed to COVID-19** within high-risk accommodation settings.

The team of nurses and paramedics worked seven days a week from 8am to 10pm to ensure residents could access the health and social support they needed. Conducting physical assessments, doing in-home testing, organising food and medication, and sharing isolation information, this team offered consistently compassionate support. Their warm approach emphasised trust and collaboration. All up, the team went to a total of 2,597 addresses, including high-rise towers, low-rise public housing and hotels where people experiencing homelessness were staying.

our High-Risk Accommodation Response Team

The High-Risk Accommodation Response (HRAR) Team was formed in 2021 to **combat the soaring rates of COVID-19 in high-risk accommodation** settings across Victoria – including close to 50 high-rise public housing towers scattered across inner Melbourne.

In 2021/22 our HRAR team worked together to successfully manage and prevent outbreaks and provide accessible and individualised support for thousands of residents.

This dynamic team truly demonstrated the value of place-based care, building trust with residents, and creating a strong sense of safety, connection and community.

Through our HRAR Health Guide and Concierge program we employed more than 100 lived experience residents from Melbourne's high-rise public housing towers who provided culturally appropriate public health messages in rooming houses, caravan parks and at the towers. This innovative model has been recognised for its impact in ensuring vaccination levels were high in high-risk communities.



“It’s really good. We are of the same community, **we can understand each other** – same backgrounds, similar cultures.”

“People know that we understand what they are going through, so we can connect on that level. **To have that familiar face, people feel bolder to come and say hi** and share the situation they’re going through.”

“**We understand the gap between the community organisations and the people they are supporting.** We know the specific needs and requirements of the community, and most importantly we speak their language.”



our Maribyrnong Local Partnership program

Our HRAR Health Guide and Concierge program was recognised by local and state partners as the way forward in community engagement. This led to Maribyrnong City Council approaching cohealth in 2021 asking us to **partner in delivering a bicultural worker program that would support vaccine hesitancy among culturally diverse communities** in their LGA.

Through this program we saw a greater uptake in vaccinations and developed ongoing relationships with cultural groups to support further health promotion and referrals. The program was so successful that funding has been extended until 2023 and has been utilised across a range of cohealth programs including dental engagement and Merri-bek City Council's new Glenroy Community Hub.



our COVID-19 Positive Pathways program

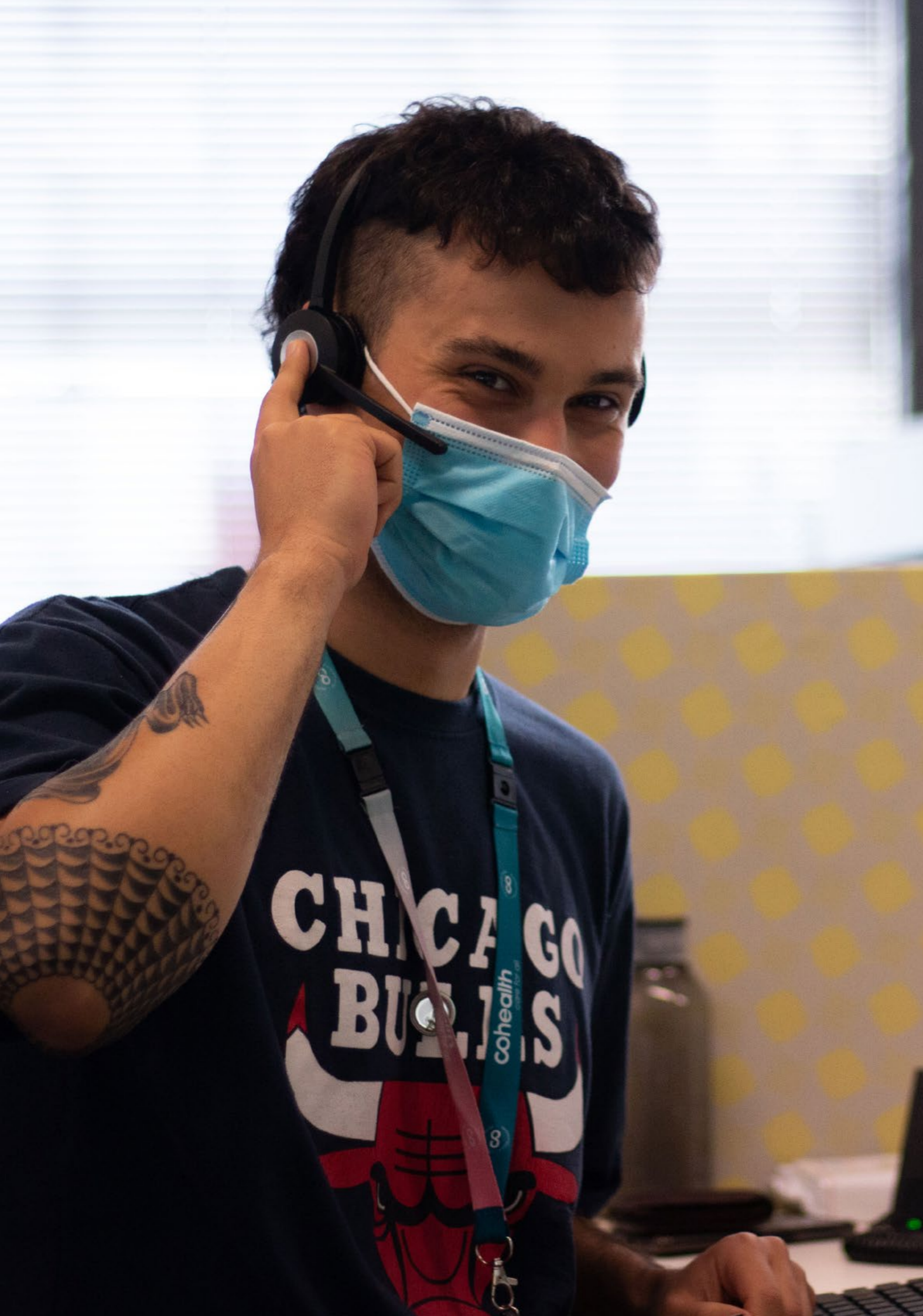
We designed the COVID-19 Positive Pathways program with North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network and the Royal Melbourne Hospital, supported by the Department of Health. Between August 2020 and June 2022, the COVID-19 Positive Pathways Team **connected with almost 200,000 people who were COVID positive to ensure they had the clinical and social support they needed** to safely isolate at home.

Because of the program, hospitals were able to focus on delivering care to those who were seriously ill. The team tirelessly advocated for the individualised needs of people with COVID, going above and beyond to provide compassionate wraparound support during a distressing time.

During 2021, when Victoria had a disproportionate amount of cases compared to other states, cohealth supported one-third of all COVID patients in Australia, quickly mobilising and scaling to oversee the response.

The model was adapted by other health services and became the standard model for pandemic management across Victoria.





“I received a call from a cohealth nurse about my son’s positive COVID-19 test. **She was warm, empathetic, knowledgeable and understanding** and helped to reassure me in this really confusing time.”

“I was called by a lovely lady from cohealth who did an amazing job. She was the first person I spoke to, and **she made me feel safe**. She connected us with experts and **made sure that we were being checked up** as COVID is quite scary.”

our General Practice Respiratory Clinics

During 2020 and 2021, **many people who were COVID positive were turned away by their General Practice.** Instead they went to the local emergency department for help, which caused unnecessary additional pressure on hospitals.

In response, the Federal and State governments established GP respiratory clinics across the country, including three cohealth-run clinics in West Melbourne, West Footscray and Laverton. These clinics were open to anyone, even those with COVID-19 who had respiratory symptoms and were unable to see their regular GP, for timely, face-to-face assessment and treatment. Clinic staffing included GPs, registered nurses and administration staff, with clinics offering testing and vaccination. Together the clinics helped reduce stress for clients and alleviated the pressure on hospitals.

 **33,283**
clients

cohealth's GP respiratory clinics delivered **18,371 tests** and **13,528 vaccinations** to 33,283 clients across Melbourne.



COVID-19 response - a snapshot

423,000+

service occasions to **Victorians with COVID-19** during 2021/22.

 **25,000+**
COVID-19 vaccinations

 **100,000+**
COVID-19 tests

 **237,571**
PCR tests

This includes **1,162 tests conducted on a single day** at Melbourne University.

 **79,236**
Rapid Antigen Tests

We provided 79,236 Rapid Antigen Tests **for free.**

 **6,890**
doors knocked

 **4,364**
high risk properties supported

 **2,597**
locations visited

 **280**
staff within the Pathways team

 **4,484**
in-home tests

 **44,241**
PCR tests for high-rise residents

 **29**
high-rise towers supported

 **100+**
high-rise residents employed

working together in communities for social and health equity

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