

Building Healthy & Resilient Communities through Service Equity

Project Summary – July 2023

An innovative program focussed on increasing service equity in small, remote communities in far East Gippsland by delivering a technology-enabled, nurse-led service model.

Delivered by the Deddick Valley Isolated Community Group on behalf of their community, in partnership with Orbost Regional Health.

Made possible by the Gippsland Primary Health Network, Victorian State Government Living Local Regional grant program, ConnectWell, FRRR, East Gippsland Community Foundation, East Gippsland Shire Council and Emergency Recovery Victoria.

Project Summary

“Building Healthy & Resilient Communities through Service Equity” is a project establishing a technology-enabled, nurse-led health service model in the remote Errinundra to Snowy district of far East Gippsland.

Wellbeing Spaces will be established across the district to improve access to technology and high-speed communications to support provision of health, community, educational and professional services. In the pilot localities of Tubbut, Bendoc and Goongerah, existing disused school/neighbourhood house rooms with high-speed internet connections will be renovated and fitted out to create private consulting rooms (Stage 2). This will facilitate community members to meet service providers privately face-to-face or by videoconference. Currently community members and service providers must drive on average 2-3 hours to connect because limited access to internet services makes at-home virtual services untenable.

The multi-purpose Wellbeing Spaces will be staffed in-person by a Community Care Coordinator with nursing qualifications (Stages 3 & 4). The Community Care Coordinator will provide continuity of care and play an important role in building trusting relationships to support health promotion, preventative and primary care activities. They will also act as a vital link between primary and tertiary health care services, specialist services, support chronic disease management plans and navigation of the cross-border health system.

This innovative multi-purpose Wellbeing Space and nurse-led virtual health model will improve the health, wellbeing, safety and livelihoods of the remote communities by delivering on their human right to appropriate & accessible healthcare. To maximise benefit, use of the rooms will be extended to all services funded to cover the district, and local individuals and small businesses, where appropriate. The model is expected to have wider applicability in other communities facing service issues.

The project activities have been arranged into four project stages, each with their own focus area:

- **Stage 1** - *Project design & feasibility (Complete)*
- **Stage 2** - *Wellbeing Spaces (Building works & furnishing at pilot sites) (due for completion late September 2023)*
- **Stage 3** - *Nurse-led virtual health model pilot (Services planned to commence October 2023)*
- **Stage 4** - *Pilot evaluation and Wellbeing Space network expansion (Evaluation planned to commence October 2023)*

Project activity through to establishment of Stage 3 has been overseen by the Errinundra to Snowy Community Recovery Committee (ESCRC) and the Deddick Valley Isolated Community Group (DVICG) in partnership, through a Project Reference Group (PRG). The DVICG will establish a governance group to oversee the service delivery and evaluation from October 2023.

Project Stages, Scope & Current Status

Stage 1 Completed (March 2023)

Project design & feasibility - Undertake further research around needs and expectations and employ a Project Manager to secure project partners & funding for a full operational pilot (Stages 2 and 3).

- Stage 1 was funded through Round 1 of the East Gippsland Community Foundation Bushfire Disaster Relief Grants and the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR).
- A Project Manager (Warm Corners Consulting) was appointed and Federation University's Collaborative Evaluation & Research Group (CERG) undertook research validation, data collection and analysis. The report and recommendations are publicly available.



Stage 2 Commenced (expected completion late September 2023)

Wellbeing Spaces (Minor building works, maintenance & furnishing at pilot sites) - Technology-enabled private consulting rooms at each location.

- Secure funding to undertake maintenance and minor works to the Tubbut, Bendoc and Goongerah facilities and furnish them so they are fit-for-purpose for community and service provider use (furnishing and maintenance/minor works may be undertaken separately pending funding availability). Ancillary service upgrades at Bonang.
- ConnectWell has committed to facilitating re/connection of high-speed internet at all Wellbeing Space locations (see Appendix 3) and \$7,500 towards Stage 2 air conditioning costs at the Tubbut location.
- A \$198,943 grant has been received through the Living Local Regional Grants Program (Department of Jobs, Precincts & Regions).
- Grants of \$12,000-\$25,000 grants have also been received from FRRR, East Gippsland Shire Council and East Gippsland Community Foundation, and Emergency Recovery Victoria from stage 2.



Stage 3 Target commencement from mid-2023 - **Nurse-led virtual health model pilot**

- Identification of project partner from the health industry to fundraise for and hire a qualified staff member to provide nurse-led healthcare across the two facilities, connecting with existing technology-enabled services available.
- Identify funding for healthcare model.



Delivered in partnership with



Stage 4 Target 2024 onwards - **Pilot Evaluation (and Wellbeing Space Network Expansion)**

- Evaluate pilot program operations across the pilot sites. Possible expansion to Bonang.

Background

The Errinundra to Snowy district is a group of 9 remote community localities in Far East Gippsland between Orbost and the NSW border, totalling a population of 338 residents. It is one of the most remote parts of Victoria. Long periods of drought paired with bushfires and changing socio-economic conditions have seen the population enter a period of decline over the past 50 years. Households are becoming smaller, fewer and older (refer ABS, 2016).

Major bushfires threatened and impacted the area in 2003, 2014 (Red Sunday) and 2019/20 (Black Summer). In 2018, the dual-campus Tubbut-Goongerah school closed, removing a key government service presence in the district. Neighbourhood Houses in Tubbut and Bendoc operate part-time and are crucial community connectors. In the other locations, hall committees play important advocacy and connection roles.

Access to services has been reducing over time and paired with long road closures and power outages during emergency events, has become the core issue affecting the district. Orbost Regional Health (ORH) is the closest Victorian health service and has a role providing services to the area. Accessing the NSW health services across the border has been a stop-gap in the past, however these services are declining and at risk. More recently, an outreach service to the district from Orbost has been funded, mostly through short-term (12 month) mental health funding allocations. Due to staff and funding changes, provision of that service was discontinued on 1 July 2022.



Figure 1 - Map of Southeast Australia showing East Gippsland and the location of the Errinundra to Snowy district and proposed Wellbeing Spaces.



Figure 2 - Photos showing the existing facilities at Tubbut (Left), Goongerah (Middle) and Bendoc (Right) – pending final renovations and furnishing.

Project Details

Building Healthy & Resilient Communities through Service Equity will deliver a network of technology-enabled Wellbeing Spaces in the Errinundra to Snowy District. Designed flexibly, wellbeing space network will facilitate wide-ranging benefits to the community and other funded services including but not limited to:

- Provide private, secure, well-managed spaces to cater to visiting allied health and professional services funded to cover the district to attend and meet with clients.
- Provide facilitated access to tele-health appointments and checkups with GPs, specialists, counsellors, psychologists and allied health providers.
- Support access to online services.
- Allow school aged children to access distance education (via high-speed internet). There is currently a particular need in Goongerah.
- Support small business development and individuals as appropriate.

The project will also improve the accessibility of healthcare within the district through provision of an in-community nurse-led virtual healthcare model.

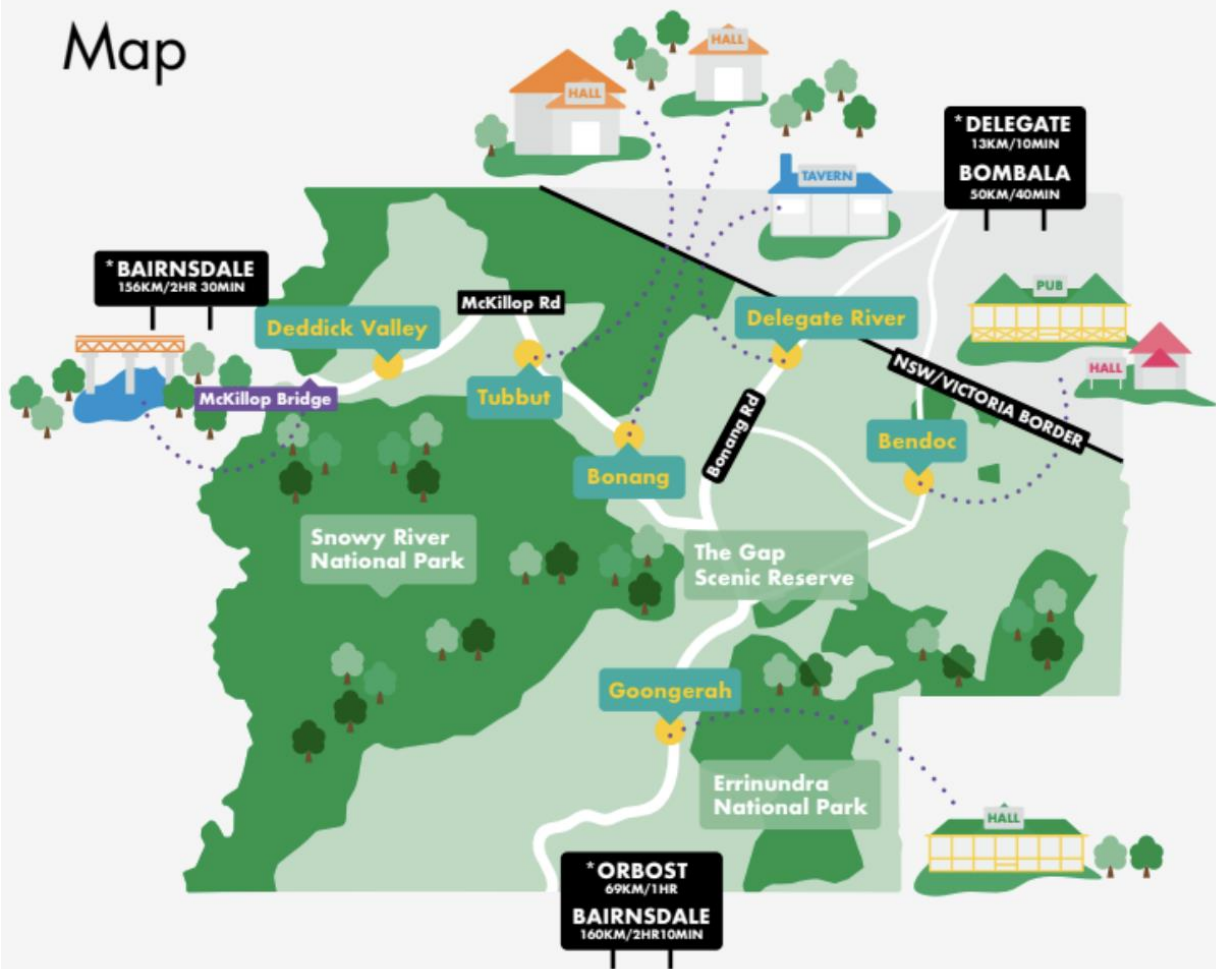
- Identify and design a healthcare model to suit community need, with a view to viability, sustainability and deliverability.
- Deliver the healthcare model through a pilot to fine-tune and evaluate the operational model design.
- Document and enact learnings and expand the Wellbeing Space nurse-led virtual healthcare model to other locations.

Outcomes

1. Improve access to mental and physical health care in the district
2. Create fit-for-purpose multi-use Wellbeing Spaces
3. Create and test a new service model for remote communities
4. Strengthen the remote communities through increased social connectivity
5. Improve resilience of the communities and residents
6. Provide enhanced access to online education and study space
7. Support small-scale economic development and growth through improved internet access and working space. 1.18FTE of jobs created by pilot project across 3-6 positions, including administrative and cleaning support.

A detailed Project Plan elaborating on the project rationale (issues and opportunities), stakeholders, links to agency and services strategic plans, budget and risks is available on request for prospective partners and funders of this project. Contact hello@warmcornersconsulting.com

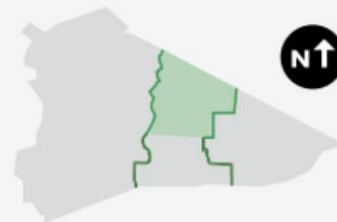
District Map



*Distances from district boundary

Travel within the district (all are unsealed roads)

Bonang to:	KM	TIME
Bendoc	40	55min
Goongerah	33	39min
Deddick Valley	47	1hr 20min
Tubbut	13	18min
Delegate River	25	28min



- East Gippsland Shire
- Errinundra to Snowy Sub-District
- Orbst District

	Errinundra to Snowy District	East Gippsland
Population	338 (ABS 2016)	46,142 (ABS 2017)
Land area TOTAL	207,170 ha	2,093,053 ha (20,931 Km ²)
Council Land Area	1 ha	
Crown Land Area	165,274 ha	
Private Land Area	41,895 ha	

Figure 3 - Excerpt (page 13) of the Errinundra to Snowy 2019 Community Plan, prepared by East Gippsland Shire Council showing the district map and statistics.